

Each concert includes an interval of 20 minutes

Blackshaw Plays Mozart I–IV

[Christian Blackshaw](#) piano

Tuesday 08 August

Sonata No.1 in C, K.279 (1774) 20'
Allegro – Andante – Allegro

Sonata No.2 in F, K.280 (1774) 20'
Allegro assai – Adagio – Presto

Sonata No.9 in D, K.311 (1778) 16'
*Allegro con spirito – Andantino con
espressione – Rondeau: Allegro*

INTERVAL

Sonata No.17 in B flat, K.570 (1789) 19'
Allegro – Adagio – Allegretto

Sonata No.8 in A minor, K.310 (1778) 19'
*Allegro maestoso – Andante cantabile
con espressione – Presto*

Total duration approx 115 minutes

This concert is dedicated to the memory of
Sir Michael Hopkins

Tuesday 15 August

Sonata No.3 in B flat, K.281 (1774) 19'
*Allegro – Andante amoroso –
Rondeau: Allegro*

Sonata No.4 in E flat, K.282 (1774) 13'
Adagio – Menuetto I & II – Allegro

Sonata No.5 in G, K.283 (1774) 17'
Allegro – Andante – Presto

INTERVAL

Sonata No.10 in C, K.330 (1783) 19'
*Allegro moderato – Andante cantabile –
Allegretto*

Sonata No.13 in B flat, K.333 (1783) 20'
*Allegro – Andante cantabile –
Allegretto grazioso*

Total duration approx 110 minutes

Tuesday 22 August

Sonata No.6 in D, K.284 (1775) 30'
Allegro – Rondeau en polonaise – Andante

Sonata No.12 in F, K.332 (1783) 19'
Allegro – Adagio – Allegro assai

INTERVAL

Sonata No.16 in C, 'Semplice', K.545 (1788) 9'
Allegro – Andante – Rondo: Allegretto

Fantasie in C minor, K.475 (1785) 12'

Sonata No.14 in C minor, K.457 (1784) 18'
Molto allegro – Adagio – Allegro assai

Total duration approx 110 minutes

Tuesday 29 August

Sonata No.7 in C, K.309 (1777) 21'
Allegro con spirito – Andante un poco adagio – Rondo: Allegretto grazioso

Sonata No.11 in A, K.331 (1783) 22'
Andante grazioso – Menuetto – Alla turca: Allegretto

INTERVAL

Sonata No.15 in F, K.533 (1788) 19'
Allegro – Andante – Rondo: Allegretto

Sonata No.18 in D, K.576 (1789) 14'
Allegro – Adagio – Allegretto

Total duration approx 100 minutes

Mozart and the Piano

What do you expect to see when you go to a Classical concert? Aside from the percussion, the instruments on the stage have changed very little over the last century, and not a great deal in the hundred years or so before that. But in Mozart's time, instrument-making was evolving briskly, technical innovations gathering speed. So, were instrument builders striving to keep pace with the new playing styles demanded by the rising generation of composers? Or were the composers responding to the enhanced possibilities offered by these exciting new instruments?

The answer is probably, both. Beethoven, we are told, was so impressed by the gift of a high-tech Broadwood piano in 1817 that it inspired him to create the epochal Hammerklavier Sonata, expanding technique and expression into a new cosmos. But looking at the scores of some of his earlier sonatas you can almost read his frustration at the limitations of the then-smaller keyboard and the piano's still-poor sustaining power.

One never senses such frustration in Mozart's piano works, but then what he was being presented with was revolutionary enough to feed his imagination with a whole palette of new possibilities. During the preceding Baroque era – the age of J.S. Bach and Handel – the two ruling potentates of the keyboard scene were the organ and the harpsichord. The organ had power and an increasingly wide range of colour resources; the harpsichord had less tone weight, but it had brilliance and clarity, and there was no need for a concealed, compliant co-worker to work the bellows, without whose fully-engaged participation the organ simply died a terrible, mooring death.

But when it came to expression – particularly to mimicking the expressive nuance of the human voice (at which the violin excelled) – both Baroque organ and harpsichord were hampered by the fact that, once you'd selected 'loud' or 'soft', you were stuck with it, at least until you changed pipe-selection or keyboard. Expression depended on lavish use of melodic ornamentation – trills, elaborate turns and twists, etc. – and in addition, as soon as you'd struck a note on a harpsichord, the sound died away almost instantly. The organ could hold notes, indefinitely – or least for as long as the hidden bellows operative had strength and the will to cooperate. But then, as Stravinsky put it ruefully, years later, 'the monster never breathes'. For a composer like Mozart, whose instrumental works so often sound like veiled operas, the appeal was likely to be very limited.

The first stirrings of what was to be labelled 'Romanticism', with its emphasis on heightened, directly appealing emotional expression, found echo in music in the so-called *Empfindsamer Stil* ('sensitive style') that began to emerge in the mid-18th century and found expression in the operas of Glöck and the keyboard works of J.S. Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel. A new keyboard instrument, the clavichord, in which the strings were pushed up by small metal blades, was liberating for C.P.E. Bach, and those who heard him play were startled and enthralled by the range of near-human expression he brought to his playing. The problem was, the clavichord was virtually inaudible at more than about ten feet's distance. As a concert instrument it was

a non-starter. Something had to be done. Was it possible to combine the organ's power and the harpsichord's agile clarity with the clavichord's vocal eloquence?

Experimentation intensified. Hitting strings with hammers produced tones that would vary in loudness according to how hard you struck them. But that demanded a system of hinges and levers of some intricacy, especially if you wanted the hammer-strike to reflect the subtle variations in the player's finger-touch – as the clavichord had, up to a very limited point. And then there was the question of duration. You could extend a clavichord note by wobbling the blade on the string, producing a kind of vibrato. The new instruments – soon being called *clavier*, or *forte-piano* ('loud-soft') – needed something else. How do you stop the vibration of the string from dying – or at least dying so quickly? The strings would have to be stretched tauter, but that demanded a stronger instrument; so wooden frames began to yield to iron ones, and simple iron strings to more complex constructions with metal wrapped round something more pliant. All this was developing in Mozart's time, and it continued through Beethoven's, and well into the 19th century.

Would Mozart have appreciated the modern grand piano, with its much-heightened sustaining power? Almost certainly. But how would he have played the works he wrote for the 18th-century pianos he knew? There are longish sustained notes in Mozart's earlier piano sonatas – or that's how they look on the page. But played on pianos like those the teenage Mozart knew they sound feeble. Baroque-style ornamentation is still necessary, and Mozart's teaching copies of these show him adding profuse decoration as a guide for his pupils. But in the opening of a sonata like K.570 in B flat, written in 1789, adding ornaments to the long unison notes would sound weirdly mannered, which suggests that Mozart had already begun to trust the sustaining power of the latest pianos, and to expect them to be widely available.

Elsewhere, as Mozart's feeling for the new pianos develops, we see him intensifying the singing, vocal quality of his melodic writing. If there are 'voices' in his early sonatas, they tend to be *coloraturas* – florid and full of elegant 'twiddly bits'. The *coloratura* style remains as a possibility, but the melodic writing becomes increasingly lyric, and the range of expression expands markedly – as in the almost-Romantic A minor sonata (K.310) of 1778 and the borderline-Beethovenian C minor (K.457) of 1784. At the same time one can see Mozart increasingly revelling in the opportunity to combine harpsichord-like virtuoso brilliance with intense expression and colour modulation – for example in the outer movements of the F major sonata, K.332, whose finale conveys acrobatic dexterity and pure joy so deliciously. If he'd lived long enough to hear the kind of pianos on which – as one contemporary writer put it – Beethoven could 'actually sing', what might he have achieved then? But we'll never know. What he did achieve is remarkable enough.

Mozart's Piano Sonatas

Given that the piano was Mozart's main instrument, and given how important solo performance was during his lucrative tours as a child prodigy, it's surprising to discover that his first solo piano sonatas come from so late (relatively speaking) in his career. The first six solo sonatas (K.279–284) were all composed in early 1774, when Mozart was 19 and in Munich, supervising the premiere of his opera *La finta giardiniera*.

In fact, there's a good reason for this. During the 1760s and 70s, the fashion across Europe was for 'keyboard sonatas with violin accompaniment' – what we now call 'violin sonatas', even though the violin's role does often seem secondary. Mozart composed at least ten of these before he tried his hand solo piano sonatas. The first, **K.279**, was probably written to be playable on piano or harpsichord: echoes of classic harpsichord style survive, especially in the bright staccato writing. But **K.280** is definitely more piano, especially in the minor key slow movement, of which a contemporary critic wrote, 'Has anyone ever heard a more soul-stirring lament from an 18-year-old?'

Joseph Haydn's brilliantly adventurous piano sonatas are clearly a model in the other four 'Munich' sonatas, even though Mozart is more cautious it comes to formal layout and choice of keys. But there is a truly Mozartian playful tenderness in the Andante amoroso of **K.281**, and an equally characteristic touch of melancholy in the opening Adagio of **K.282**. Courtly elegance and cheerful teasing alternate in **K.283**. As to **K.284**, Mozart's pioneering biographer Alfred Einstein wrote that 'Mozart must have had a personal or musical experience that suddenly lifted him to a new and higher level', and it does seem that Mozart now 'owns' both the sonata and the piano itself with more confidence here. There's more drama, and more formal ambition, especially in the unusually substantial finale, and it's striking that this was the earliest of his piano sonatas that he was to publish, nine years later.

It was during another important tour – this time taking in Munich, Augsburg, Mannheim and Paris (1777–8) – that Mozart composed his next three piano sonatas. **K.309** was written for Rosa, daughter of Christian Cannabich, director of the virtuoso Mannheim court orchestra, which made such an impression on Mozart. Of the Andante Mozart said that 'it fits closely the character of Mlle Rosa'. This is the first of several sonatas tailored to the abilities of a young player: the finale manages to sound brilliant without taxing Rosa's strength and stamina too far. Also written in Mannheim, **K.311**, is more extrovert, and even concerto-like in its bright, athletic first movement – there's even a short but definitely concerto-like cadenza in the finale. But then comes a big change of tone, and of expressive scope. Was it the sudden death of Mozart's mother, in Paris in July 1778, that caused him to strive for something more serious? When it came to home keys, Mozart turned to the minor rarely, and when he did the results are almost always special. **K.310**, in A minor has an agitated intensity unlike anything in his music before, and its attempts to find consolation, ultimately thwarted, leave a strong aftertaste.

Back in his home city, Salzburg, but no longer in harness to his frustrating former employer Archbishop Colloredo, Mozart composed three sonatas, K.330–332. This was in 1783, after the split with the Archbishop and his marriage to the young soprano Constanza Weber – both, significantly, in defiance of his father's stern mandate. Cheerfulness and folksy tunefulness fill **K.330**, and an upbeat Czech folksong forms the basis of the opening variation movement of **K.331**. After the unusually adventurous Minuet comes the famous 'Rondo alla turca', a parody of a Turkish marching band of the kind popular in Austria after the spectacular last-minute defeat of the invading Turkish army at the Siege of Vienna in 1683. Pianos in Mozart's time were acquiring striking new colouristic tricks, and Mozart may have had novel percussion effects (cymbals, triangle and bass drum) in mind here. **K.332** is especially impressive, almost symphonic in the range and sophisticated drama of its first movement, with a true Mozartian balance of expressive ardour and formal elegance in its central Andante, while the finale is the most brilliant, bravura movement in all the piano sonatas.

While **K.333** is evidently a showcase for Mozart himself, buoyed up by his growing success as a concert soloist in Vienna, **K.457** in C minor (1784) plunges back into the dark personal drama of K.310, expression now heightened by strategic use of silence – partly learned from Haydn, no doubt, but with a more tragic edge. Beethoven, in turn, evidently learned a great deal from this sonata. K.457 was published together with the Fantasia, **K.475**, also in C minor. The Fantasia's use of surprise – harmonically, texturally, dynamically – is more theatrical than that of the Sonata, but that only makes the Sonata's subtlety the more telling.

1788 saw the appearance of two sonatas, **K.533** in F and **K.545** in C, which nevertheless seem to come not only from different worlds, but even different epochs. Alfred Einstein described the first two movements of K.533 as having 'a grandeur of harmonic and polyphonic conception, a depth of feeling and a harmonic daring such as we find only in [Mozart's] last works' – proof of how much Mozart had learned recently from immersion in Bachian counterpoint, with the encouragement of the learned connoisseur Baron van Swieten. It's also quite clear that Mozart has a powerful, up-to-date instrument in mind, with the delicate Rondo finale exploiting the heightened clarity and sustaining power in higher registers. K.545 is the famous Sonata 'For Beginners'. After K.533 it seems like a step back into childhood – both Mozart's and the piano's perhaps – yet the polish and elegance are those of the experienced adult composer.

Finally, **K.570** (in B flat) and **K.576** (in D), both composed in 1789 (when Mozart's fortunes had taken a substantial turn for the worse), show that, even when he seems more conventional on the surface than his friend Haydn, there can still be plenty originality on a deeper level: in the sensuous expressive harmonies of K.570, in the 'Bach with a light touch' counterpoint in the finale of K.576. Mozart rarely matched the drama and gorgeous heightened intensity of the great piano concertos in his solo sonatas. But they offer something else: worlds in miniature, and a sense that, often, less really can be more.

Stephen Johnson © 2023

Sir Michael Hopkins (1935–2023)



Sir Michael Hopkins, who died on 17 June, was widely regarded as ranking among the greatest of contemporary British architectural figures.

He and his wife Patty founded the award-winning architectural practice Hopkins Architects, and some of their celebrated buildings include Portcullis House, Glyndebourne Opera House, the Schlumberger Cambridge Research Centre, the Mound Stand at Lord's Cricket Ground, the Guy's and St Thomas' Evelina Children's Hospital, and The Forum, Norwich.

Michael had been a supporter of Britten Pears Arts since moving to Suffolk in 1997. His proximity to and attendance at Snape Maltings Concert Hall gave him immense pleasure.

His lifelong energy and hard work were enriched by his happy family life and personal projects, especially the restoration of the Blackheath Estate close to Snape. He was often to be seen sailing on the River Alde in one of the boats he built.