

# Royal Northern Sinfonia: Mozart Symphony No.39

Friday 23 October 2020 | 7:30pm

Jessica Cottis conductor | Philip Nelson double bass  
Royal Northern Sinfonia

## WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART 1756-1791 THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO OVERTURE, K492

Mozart was fully aware of the risk he was taking when he grabbed the chance in 1785 to work on an opera with Lorenzo da Ponte, a theatre poet appointed to the Vienna court and librettist to Mozart's arch-rival Antonio Salieri.

Wolfgang suggested *Le mariage de Figaro*, a comedy by the French dramatist Beaumarchais – and, for Da Ponte, alarm bells began to ring. *Le mariage* had been condemned by European aristocracy – not least by the Austrian emperor Joseph II – as an outrageous assault on their moral values and dangerously subversive of social order.

Amazingly, Mozart and Da Ponte were able to win their noble employer around after some diligent lobbying and by agreeing to cut some of the social commentary while putting more emphasis on the comic elements. Some pieces from the opera were tried out in the emperor's presence and, as Da Ponte records, Joseph 'liked them wonderfully well and was, without exaggeration, amazed by them'.

*The Marriage of Figaro* is in the true Italian light comic opera style in which Mozart had been eager to prove himself, telling of the madcap events leading up to the wedding of Figaro, valet of Count Almaviva, to the countess' maid, Susanna. All manner of romantic assignations, disguises and artful deceptions chart the progress to the big occasion, and Mozart's vibrant overture reflects Beaumarchais' involved, and involving, caper to wonderful effect.

*The Marriage of Figaro* was well received at its Vienna premiere in 1786 – but it was truly a smash-

hit when it arrived in Prague the following year. An overjoyed Mozart wrote from Prague to a friend: 'Nothing is played, sung or whistled here but Figaro!'

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## JEAN FRANÇAIX 1912-1997 CONCERTO FOR DOUBLE BASS AND ORCHESTRA

TEMPO DI MARCIA - SCHERZANDO - ANDANTE, FINALE

Chances for the spotlight to fall on the double bass in classical music are few and far between. Early virtuoso artists – such as the Venetian Domenico Dragonetti, who helped Beethoven write a passage for double bass in his 'Choral' symphony – did their best to promote the unique qualities of their unwieldy instrument but few showcasing works either survived or presented themselves in the years that followed.

Double bassists owe a debt to the 20th century's Jean Françaix, who was plucky enough to create a concerto for the instrument that's as challenging for the performer as it is entertaining for the audience. Françaix was a prolific composer who entered the Paris Conservatoire aged 14 and benefitted massively from his tutor Nadia Boulanger's extensive knowledge and insight into many forms of music, ranging from Baroque to jazz.

Françaix had a refreshing attitude towards composition. He was able to inject life-enhancing sparkle into his creations and, in his later years, declared that, like his predecessor Claude Debussy, his aim was purely 'to give pleasure' through his art.

The *Concerto for Double Bass and Orchestra* was composed in 1974 and dedicated to his friend, the

Romanian-born double-bassist Wolfgang Güttler of the Berlin Philharmonic and, since 1991, professor of the instrument at the Karlsruhe Academy of Music.

The first movement is a mock-heroic march with the soloist supported by a sympathetic group who pick up and elaborate on the instrument's phrases. There's a much more rhythmic role for the soloist in the *Scherzando* movement, but also room for a song-like passage to develop with individual contributions from the orchestra. Finally, the soloist is free to explore the instrument's upper register through a sombre song with harmonic tones, finishing gently on the highest notes.

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## JESSIE MONTGOMERY STRUM

*Strum* is the culminating result of several versions of a string quintet I wrote in 2006. It was originally written for the Providence String Quartet and guests of Community MusicWorks Players, then arranged for string quartet in 2008 with several small revisions. In 2012 the piece underwent its final revisions with a rewrite of both the introduction and the ending for the Catalyst Quartet in a performance celebrating the 15th annual Sphinx Competition.

Originally conceived for the formation of a cello quintet, the voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound. Within *Strum* I utilized texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a texture motive and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece. Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration.

© Jessie Montgomery

### FIRST VIOLIN

Kyra Humphreys  
*The Huntington Chair*  
Katerina Nazarova  
*The Christine Swales Chair*  
Iona Brown  
*The Voigt Chair*

Sarah Roberts  
Alexandra Raikhlina  
Jane Nossek

### SECOND VIOLIN

Gaëlle-Anne Michel  
*The Anonymous Chair*  
Marie Schreer  
Sophie Appleton  
Alanna Tonetti-Tieppo  
Jenny Chang  
*The BA Summers Chair*

### VIOLA

Michael Gerrard  
*The Rossiter Family Chair*  
Malcolm Critten  
*The Merle Rewcastle Chair*  
Tegwen Jones  
James Slater

### CELLO

Steffan Morris  
*The Share Family Chair*  
Daniel Hammersley  
James Craig  
Gabriel Waite  
*The Manning Chair*

### DOUBLE BASS

Siân Hicks  
Roger McCann

## WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART 1756-1791

### SYMPHONY NO.39 IN E FLAT, K543

ADAGIO; ALLEGRO - ANDANTE CON MOTO -  
MENUETTO: ALLEGRETTO - FINALE: ALLEGRO

This symphony was the first of three Mozart composed in the short space of six weeks in the summer of 1788, possibly for a planned subscription concert to help pay off his mounting debts. As it turned out, they were to be his last symphonic works.

*Symphony No.39* is particularly distinguished for the prominence it gives to the clarinets, which Mozart loved. Ten years earlier, writing home from Mannheim to his father Leopold in Salzburg, the young Wolfgang enthused: 'Oh, if only we had clarinets! You can't guess the lordly effect of a symphony with flutes, oboe and clarinets.'

The *Adagio* introduction is underlined by commanding, occasionally strident, chords which alternate with a gentle, reflective melody. This leads into an *Allegro* with a lyrical string passage echoed by the woodwind. But the full orchestra regularly intrudes on this tranquillity, trying to force a more urgent pace – and eventually succeeds. The *Andante* opens with a serene and delicate theme with occasional forceful emphasis from the strings. Expressive horns and woodwinds take up the lullaby-like tune, but again there's a contrast of calm and storm, and the cradle gets rocked by the full orchestra.

A sprightly rhythmic minuet follows with the strings strutting their dance over the rest of the orchestra, and in the central trio section we hear a delightful folk-style tune taken up with relish by the clarinet before being joined by all the players. In the joyful *Allegro* finale another simple folksy phrase is toyed with by the strings before the woodwind, and then the entire ensemble, join in the fun.

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### FLUTE

Silvija Scerbaviciute

### FLUTE/PICCOLO

Hannah Grayson

### OBOE

James Hulme  
*The Richardson Family Chair*  
Michael O'Donnell  
*The Sylvia Fuller Chair*

### CLARINET

Jessica Lee  
*The Bragg Family Chair*  
Jillian Allan

### BASSOON

Stephen Reay  
*The Pyman Family Chair*

### BASSOON/ CONTRABASSOON

Charlotte Cox

### HORN

Peter Francomb  
*The Friends of RNS Chair*  
Jonathan Quaintrell-Evans

### TRUMPET

Richard Martin  
*The Alan Johnson Chair*  
Marion Craig

### TIMPANI

Richard Cartlidge