

24 January 2016 Royal College of Music Programme Notes by Chris Darwin

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) 'Mládí' Suite for Wind Sextet JW VII/10 (1924)

Allegro

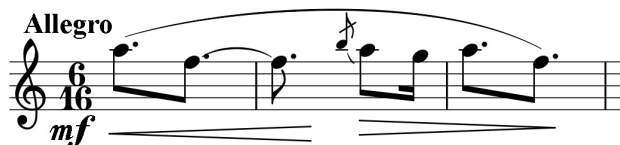
Andante sostenuto

Vivace

Allegro animato

Mládí (Youth) was written in the middle of Janáček's immensely productive last decade. His productivity had both political and personal roots: Czechoslovakia had become independent in 1918 and the previous year Janáček had met and fallen in love with the much younger Kamila Stösslová. Kamila is explicitly associated with the gypsy femme fatale of his song cycle 'The diary of one who disappeared' (1917), as well as with the heroines of his operas 'The Cunning Little Vixen' (1922-3) and 'The Makropoulos Affair' (1923-5).

The wind sextet Mládí (along with his first string quartet) was written around the same time as these operas, and shares with them the technique of shaping individual phrases to the prosody of the speaking voice. The oboe's opening phrase captures the phrase 'Mládí, zlaté mládí!' ('Youth, golden youth!') and recurs throughout the work especially in the first and last movements.



The third movement borrows a theme from a short work Janáček composed earlier in 1924 for piccolo, bells and tambourine 'March of the Blue Boys', recalling his time as a chorister in the Old Brno Monastery.



Mládí's first performance, in Brno, was given by teachers at the Conservatory there and was plagued by mechanical failure: the oboe had to effect an impromptu repair; he was more successful than the clarinetist who, because of a broken spring, could only pretend to play. Janáček's understandable anger abated a month later with a successful and popular performance in Prague by members of the Czech Philharmonic.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Sonata in C min Op 13 'Grande Sonate Pathétique' (1798) (arr Robin O'Neill)

Grave – Allegro di molto e con brio

Adagio cantabile

Rondo: Allegro

1798 was a prolific year for Beethoven: three string trios Op 9, three piano sonatas Op 10, three violin sonatas Op 12 and then the 'Grande Sonate Pathétique' Op 13. Its tragic key of C minor had been used in the third of the Op 9 trios and the first of the Op 10 sonatas, preparation for the unprecedented power of the *Pathétique*. It was a runaway success and was soon transcribed for a variety of different ensembles, spreading Beethoven's distinctive voice to a wide audience of players and listeners. For some, its extreme contrasts and violent energy were too much: six years later the young pianist Ignaz

Moscheles was warned to stay away from such eccentric music.

There are similarities between the C-minor 'Pathétique' Sonata and Mozart's earlier C-minor Sonata K.457. For example, their first movements share the tragic intensity that Beethoven particularly associates with C minor and the beautiful opening theme of Beethoven's *Adagio cantabile* slow movement is clearly related to the theme at bar 24 of Mozart's *Adagio* (illustrated). The association of moods with particular keys may strike us as oddly arbitrary given today's almost universal use of equal temperament. But at the end of the 18th century it was common for keyboards to have a variety of tunings, including Bach's 'well' tempered, that still gave different keys different feels through the slight mistuning of different intervals. Beethoven went on to use C minor in the Erioca Symphony's Funeral March, the Fifth Symphony and his last piano sonata.

The image shows two musical excerpts. The top excerpt is from Beethoven's 'Adagio cantabile' in C minor, Op. 10, No. 1. It features a piano (p) dynamic and a 2/4 time signature. The bottom excerpt is from Mozart's 'Adagio' in C minor, K. 457, starting at bar 24. It is in 2/4 time and also marked piano (p). Both excerpts show the characteristic C minor key signature and the somber, expressive quality of the music.

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) Serenade in E-Flat Major, Op. 7 TrV 106 (1881)

Richard Strauss was a musical prodigy. He was the son of Franz, a superb horn player ('the Joachim of the horn') and tenaciously self-made man. His mother was the daughter of a wealthy local brewer. Richard enjoyed and, thanks to his inherited tenacity, exploited the opportunities of a cultured and affluent family life in Munich. He had his first piano lessons aged 4, first composed at 6, started the violin at 8 and at 11 began five years of composition lessons. The musical tastes of both his influential father and his composition teacher were conservative, so Richard's early works – predominantly for piano and for voice - reflect a solid grounding in classical musical forms. His interest in larger scale instrumental works was stimulated by attending rehearsals and later playing violin in an amateur orchestra, the Wilde Gungl, that his father conducted. Between the ages of 16 and 20 he wrote instrumental works which launched his career: two symphonies, his well-known concertos for violin and for horn and two pieces for 13 wind – today's Serenade and a later Suite which he was encouraged to compose by Hans von Bülow after he had heard the Serenade.

Although the Serenade has the same number of instruments as the well-known Mozart Gran Partita (which the RCM wind played for us last season), the structure and the scoring are quite different. The work is a single *Andante* movement in sonata form. Strauss uses two each of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, with four horns and a contrabassoon or bass tuba – a more conventionally orchestral scoring than Mozart's use of bassett horns. Like Mozart however, Strauss relishes the range of timbres that different combinations of the instruments can produce: each phrase in the first 24 bars uses a different set of instruments before they all combine for the first time at bar 24. A particularly distinctive scoring occurs where the oboe's opening theme (illustrated) is presented at the recapitulation by the four horns, with bassoons providing the bass.

The image shows a musical excerpt from Richard Strauss's 'Serenade' in E-flat major, Op. 7, No. 1. It is marked 'Andante' and 'p' (piano). The excerpt shows the opening theme of the oboe, which is later presented by the four horns at the recapitulation. The music is in 2/4 time and features a melodic line with a distinctive phrasing.

W.A. Mozart (1756-1791) Serenade No. 12 in C Minor, K. 388 (1782)

Allegro

Andante

Menuet & Trio

Allegro

This Serenade was written during the boom years of 'Harmoniemusik' – music written for a court (or, less sophisticatedly, a military or street) wind band, generally as background music to dining or other socialising. An operatic example of Harmoniemusik comes during dinner in *Don Giovanni* when a Harmonie plays an arrangement of an aria from *Figaro*. Such aristocratic bands arose in the mid-18th century, and declined in the austerity years of the Napoleonic wars. The Harmonie's instruments came in pairs: at the core a pair of horns, underpinned by bassoons and overlaid by some combination of flutes, oboes, clarinets, basset horns, and cors anglais. There were usually 6 or 8 of these paired players along with an optional deep bass provided by a trombone, double bassoon, shawm or string bass.

Mozart wrote two early (1773) Divertimenti for a 10-piece Harmonie in Milan followed by five more in Salzburg for the more usual sextet (two each of oboe, bassoon, horn) - all light and witty, undemanding of the listener. Today's C minor Serenade was one of three much more substantial Harmonie Serenades, including the Gran Partita, written in 1781-2. It is scored for two each of oboes, clarinets in Bb, horns in Eb, and bassoons. Five years later, Mozart transcribed the work for two-violin string quintet retaining the key of C minor (K. 406). The wind Serenade's dark mood and technical sophistication raise the possibility that it was intended for a more discerning audience than the usual "Night music Serenade".

As befits a work in C minor, this Serenade is full of dramatic contrast, bearing out Alfred Einstein's observation: 'If G minor is the fatalistic key for Mozart, then C minor is the dramatic one, the key of contrasts between aggressive unisons and lyric passages. The lyric quality is always overtaken by gloomy outbursts.' The opening is just such an aggressive unison.



The second movement banishes aggression with 'the moonlit tones of an operatic love scene'. But the Minuet returns to a harsher intensity; it is simple enough, a strict canon with the two voices playing the same music a bar apart. The

milder Trio now plays a musical game of mind-boggling complexity. An oboe starts a theme; the other enters two bars later with the same theme turned upside down. Two bars later a bassoon enters with a slightly altered version of the original

Trio in canone al roverscio

Musical notation for the Trio in canone al roverscio. It shows four staves: Oboe 1, Oboe 2, Bassoon 1, and Bassoon 2. The time signature is 3/4. The notation illustrates the complex interlocking of the four instruments, with Oboe 1 starting the theme, Oboe 2 entering two bars later with the theme turned upside down, Bassoon 1 entering two bars later with a slightly altered version of the original theme, and Bassoon 2 entering two bars later with its upside-down version.

theme, and a further two bars later the other bassoon enters with its upside-down version. All this wizardry is done with the lightest touch – most enjoy it oblivious to its technical brilliance. See if you can hear what happens in the second half of the Trio!

The Serenade ends with a set of variations on a theme announced by the oboe. The variations are notable for the variety of their textures and not least for the athleticism required of the bassoons; at the end the C minor clouds clear for a joyously major ending.