

## Endymion ensemble

**Philip Venables (b.1989) “K, A Prelude to Mozart's Clarinet Quintet K581” (2006 rev 2010).**

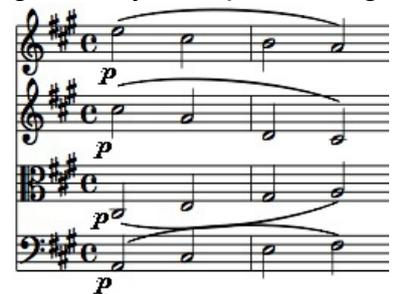
***Slow, still, always quiet – tranquilizing***

Philip Venables is Artistic Director of Endymion. He read Natural Sciences at Jesus College, Cambridge before taking a Masters degree at the Royal Academy of Music, where he won several awards for composition. He has written in a wide range genres, and his chamber music includes a frequently-performed string quartet.

*K* was one of two Preludes written in 2006 for Canterbury's 250th anniversary celebration of Mozart's birth. It was first performed there by a group that included Brighton viola player Rachel Dyker and was revised in 2010. You can hear a recording of Endymion performing *K* at King's Place [here](#).

*K* is just 44 bars long and lasts a little over 7 minutes. Venables comments: “*K* takes the first two bars of [Mozart's] Clarinet Quintet [*illustrated*]... and pulls them apart, exposing, reworking, fragmenting, reflecting and elaborating their harmony and gesture. The resulting short piece is almost catatonically restful, instructed ‘tranquilizing’ at the top of the score. The original two bars of Mozart's are only heard at the very end, almost in echo.”

Most of the piece is scored just for string quartet with the clarinet contributing only to the last seven bars, entering after the two bars of Mozart. The piece starts with different harmonic Es (E is the first violin's opening note in the original Mozart) of different heights on all the instruments, and the texture is varied using different combinations of Es, before other harmonics are added. The instruments gradually revert to normal notes and vibrato warms the texture as the sounds of the Mozart opening bars are adumbrated and explored, culminating in their actual presence before a final rising arpeggio from the clarinet over a harmonic C# on the cello leads into Mozart himself...



**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) Clarinet Quintet in A, K581 (1789)**

*Allegro*

*Larghetto*

*Menuetto – Trio 1 – Trio 2*

*Allegretto con variazioni*

The Clarinet Quintet is one of three pieces that Mozart wrote for his friend Anton Stadler – the other two being the Kegelstadt Trio and the Clarinet Concerto. He was a fellow Freemason of Mozart's, and a close friend. Their nicknames for each other, dreamt up on a long stage-coach journey to Prague, were *Natschibinitschibi* (Stadler) and *Punkitititi* (Mozart). Stadler usually played second clarinet to his younger brother Johann in the Vienna Court Orchestra, perhaps because he preferred the lower registers of the instrument. Around 1788, he collaborated with the clarinet maker Theodor Lotz to extend the range of the clarinet down a major third to the C below middle C. The resulting extended instrument is now known as a Bass Clarinet (not Bass Horn) but we know little about its original appearance. Mozart wrote both his Clarinet Concerto and this

“Stadler's Quintet” for the new Basset Clarinet in A, but both autographs are lost. The quintet was first published by Johann André in 1802 as *Oeuvre 108* with changes to fit the range of the more common clarinet in A, so it is not clear exactly what Mozart wrote. There are various conjectures over what might have been played in early performances: for example in bar 41 of the first movement the Basset Clarinet can descend 3 octaves from written C, concert A to rich depths inaccessible to a conventional modern instrument. Basset clarinets with modern keywork have been made since the 1950s in order to perform Mozart's works closer to the composer's intentions.



\*\*\* **Note added after the performance:** The above example of the 3-octave descending scale turned out to be a bad one. In rehearsal, the Endymion and the clarinetist Tony Pay realised that the descent to a bottom (written) C produced inappropriate chording with the strings – specifically putting the clarinet on (sounding) A a 9<sup>th</sup> below the cello's B. So they played the passage with the last octave rising. \*\*\*

The quintet dates from 1789, two years before Mozart's death, and is contemporary with *Così fan tutte* and the first two of the “Prussian” string quartets (K.575 & 589). In style, it belongs more with earlier works of the 1780s than with the more economic, austere and contrapuntal style of his later works. The quintet is deservedly one of Mozart's best-loved works and shows Mozart's extraordinary ability to exploit the varied sides of the newly-created instrument's character: by turns, lyrical, sombre, jaunty, threatening. The strings have a generous share in the glories of the piece, introducing both main themes in the first movement and having the whole of the first of two Trios to themselves. The viola in particular matches the clarinet for poignant lyricism in the third of the last movement's variations; perhaps *Punkitititi* was showing *Natschibinitschibi* that his viola was a match for the new-fangled Basset Clarinet.

## Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Clarinet Quintet in B minor, Op.115 (1891)

*Allegro*

*Adagio*

*Andantino - Presto non assai, ma con sentimento*

*Con moto*

By March 1891 Brahms' creative impetus appeared to have faded away. He had composed nothing for more than a year and had completed his will. But then, visiting Meiningen, the conductor of the court orchestra drew Brahms' attention to the playing of their erstwhile violinist, now principal clarinetist, Richard Mühlfeld (1856-1907), who performed privately for Brahms. As Anton Stadler had previously inspired Mozart, so now Mühlfeld inspired Brahms. There rapidly followed four wonderful chamber pieces: a Trio for piano, clarinet and cello Op 114, today's Quintet Op 115, and two clarinet and piano Sonatas Op 120.

In the hundred years since Mozart wrote his clarinet quintet, the instrument had evolved into something akin to the modern “Boehm” clarinet. Its larger number of keys, and consequently simpler fingering, made rapid chromatic playing easier than was possible on the much simpler clarinets used, albeit to great effect, by Stadler.

The opening B minor theme on the two violins provides much of the basic material for the work.

The clarinet then enters with a rising arpeggio just as in Mozart's quintet, and leads us to a contrasting staccato motif with

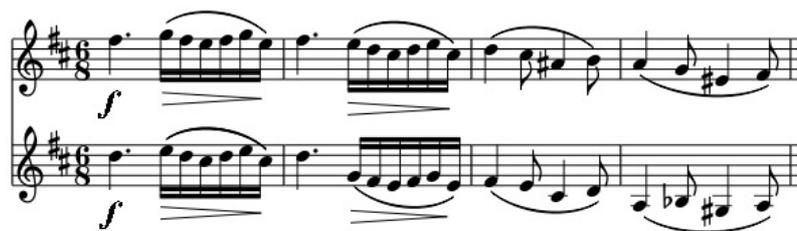
rapid accompanying triplets that are tossed between the instruments. The *Adagio* in B major has a slow melody in the clarinet accompanied by a Brahms trademark complex rhythm superimposing triplets with syncopated duplets in the strings.

The two illustrated themes are then combined in the turbulent B minor central section of the movement with gymnastic flourishes from the clarinet.

The third movement opens with a calm *Andantino* leading to the *Presto* scherzo and a contrasting Trio section with pizzicato strings. The last movement is a theme and five variations, with the theme related to many of those in the previous movements. The cello leads the first variation, the first violin

and clarinet the second, the more embellished third and the fourth, which moves into B major.

The viola then returns us to B minor with a restatement of the theme but in the rhythm of the first movement. In the final coda the first violin returns to the very opening of the first movement, the clarinet adds a major version of the viola's restatement and the work ends in peaceful agreement.



Programme notes by Chris Darwin