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CAMBRIDGE MUSIC HANDBOOKS

Mozart: Clarinet Concerto

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## *Preface*

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As appreciation of Mozart's music becomes ever more widespread, it seems natural that his final instrumental work should prove a particular source of fascination and delight; indeed, the popularity of the Clarinet Concerto has undoubtedly never been greater. Not surprisingly, scholars of Mozart's style and language have subjected the Concerto to close analysis with a view to speculating as to the directions Mozart might have taken had he achieved a normal life-span. Even a mere ten years after its composition it was already recognised by at least one reviewer as a masterpiece and 'the foremost clarinet concerto in the world'.<sup>1</sup> Few today would dissent from this judgement, notwithstanding some formidable later competition from Weber, Spohr, Nielsen and Copland, amongst others. Above all, the work represents a triumphant manifestation of the widespread eighteenth-century desire to appeal both to amateurs of music and to connoisseurs.

Mozart's association with the clarinetist Anton Stadler radically advanced the profile of the instrument and its idiomatic potential. The Concerto marks the culmination of a century of quite astonishing activity in the history of the clarinet following its development in the years around 1700. A persistent myth that the clarinet began with Mozart has been finally laid to rest by some illuminating recent research into the early eighteenth-century instrument and its music, which has served to enhance rather than to diminish appreciation of his achievement.<sup>2</sup> There were some idiomatic solo compositions by Vivaldi, Handel, Johann and Carl Stamitz and a number of others, but no one understood the clarinet so well as Mozart. It is indeed good fortune for posterity that he should have encountered a virtuoso such as Stadler, that Vienna was at the forefront of developments in clarinet manufacture and that the instrument itself had recently reached a state of technical development which made it an ideal vehicle for Mozart's musical inspiration.

The autograph score of the Concerto is lost and it survives only in early nineteenth-century editions. This is particularly regrettable because the work was written for a new clarinet specially developed by Stadler, whose range was



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Preface

Ex. 1



extended downwards by four semitones to include the low tonic of its fundamental scale. Now known as the basset clarinet, this is the kind of instrument increasingly used today in concerts and recordings, enabling Mozart's melodic contours to be realised in what approaches their original form. The Concerto was composed for clarinet in A, whose notes sound a minor third lower than written, as in all the musical illustrations from the work which follow. The extra low notes were notated by Mozart an octave below pitch, as shown above (Ex. 1).

At present we cannot be certain of every detail of Mozart's original score, though some useful aids exist for reconstructing the text, such as the autograph sketch K621b of the Concerto's first 199 bars, as well as some musical illustrations contained within a review of an early edition. During the last fifty years some eminent players and scholars have published valuable further suggestions, including George Dazeley (1948), Jiří Kratochvíl (1956), Ernst Hess (1967), Alan Hacker (1969) and Pamela Poulin (1977). The *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe* (1977) published versions of the Concerto for both normal and basset clarinet, together with a useful piano reduction.<sup>3</sup> The current climate of historical performance has encouraged adherence to Mozart's original slurs and other surface detail, recognising that it was largely through these devices that his expressive intent was relayed. The *NMA* allows access to this information from the best available sources, with editorial suggestions clearly differentiated. The myriad of other editions – many by highly distinguished clarinetists – are generally more interventionist, some requiring careful interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

It is a pleasure to thank a large number of friends for their help, advice and inspiration in the preparation of this book. A powerful catalyst was initially supplied by the Cambridge maker Daniel Bangham, who in 1988 produced for me a wonderfully responsive boxwood basset clarinet of his own design. I am especially grateful to Caroline Brown, artistic director of The Hanover Band, for many subsequent opportunities to explore the richness of the Concerto in period performance. Like all students of clarinet history, I owe a special debt to Nicholas Shackleton, who during the gestation of this project was (as usual) generous enough to place at my disposal his unrivalled

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knowledge of surviving instruments worldwide. Eric Hoepfich kindly provided for publication two photographs of instruments from his own collection. Albert Rice also showed characteristic kindness in sharing important information about relevant instruments and repertoire for inclusion within the appendices. In addition, I was delighted to have William McColl's permission to reproduce his translation of the 1802 review of the first Breitkopf and Härtel edition of the Concerto.

My wife Hilary has made many perspicacious comments about details in the text and has given the project a great deal of encouragement, despite the fact that its development has entailed long periods of absence at the word-processor, even throughout normal bouts of concert preparation and the usual frantic searches for a playable clarinet reed. Lastly, I must extend my sincere thanks to Penny Souster and her team at Cambridge University Press for their helpful advice and firm but unobtrusive guidance in bringing the book to fruition.

In the following chapters, pitch registers are indicated in the usual manner: middle C just below the treble staff is indicated as  $c'$ , with each successive octave higher shown as  $c''$ ,  $c'''$ ,  $c''''$  etc. and the octave below as  $c$ , the lowest written pitch of the basset clarinet. Bar numbers within the Concerto are prefaced by an indication of the movement in which they appear, e.g. 1/1, 3/353.