

Concerto No. 20 in D Minor for Piano and Orchestra, K.466 (1785)  
Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756 – 1791)

I. *Allegro*

II. *Romance*

III. Rondo: *Allegro assai*

In 1782, Mozart sought permanent employment in the form of patronage from one of the many Viennese aristocrats. His years in Vienna were among the happiest of his life, but he never obtained the desired patronage. His success in Vienna came from his appearances as a concert pianist and his ability to write new, high-quality piano concertos with astonishing agility. Late 18th-century Viennese audiences had an insatiable appetite for new music. Responding with a burst of creative energy, Mozart wrote 15 new piano concertos in four years; 1784 was especially fruitful with the composition of six new ones. This D-minor Concerto, completed on February 10, 1785 was followed by completion of his 21st in C major, the so-called “Elvira Madigan” concerto, on March 9th. The latter’s mood is almost totally opposite to that of this D-minor work. Mozart’s father arrived in Vienna on the morning of the Concerto’s première to witness an amazing scene; the parts were still being copied, and Mozart was so busy supervising the copying that he had no time to play through the finale.

This Concerto became a turning point in Mozart’s career. Perhaps bored with writing music that was charming and pretty in the *galant* style but made few demands upon the listener, he chose the key of D minor for this somber, deeply passionate work that predicted the 19th-century Romantic musical era. The work, full of intense emotions and deep feelings, made too many demands upon fickle Viennese audiences, who showed their displeasure by deserting Mozart in favor of less challenging works from other composers. Refusing to condescend to taste, Mozart continued on his new path; that decision cost him dearly in terms of both lack of public acceptance and income.

The opening movement begins with an ominous syncopated violin figure, beneath which cellos and basses make threatening comments. From this arises the first theme – a nervous, brooding melody. Woodwinds present the second, lighter subject in the major mode, but the exposition ends in the minor key. The soloist enters with material derived from the orchestral introduction and adds new thematic ideas. After the development section, soloist and orchestra share the recapitulation. Following a cadenza, the

movement ends darkly with a coda that projects a feeling of lack of resolution. Mozart's original cadenzas were lost; those heard are usually by Beethoven.

The slow movement suggests a languid pace and music full of expression and feeling. The placid, B-flat-major opening melody is followed by more similar themes from the piano. A stormy, G-minor outburst, as bleak as the mood of the first movement, unexpectedly interrupts the tranquillity. The initial peaceful mood returns, and earlier material is recalled.

In the more extrovert finale, the piano introduces the first main theme, which the orchestra then takes over in a lengthy episode. The orchestra, and then the soloist, present the second subject. A darker mood suggested by some unexpected, threatening orchestral chords through chromatic modulation is brushed aside by the soloist, who dispels the gloom and restores calm. The development section concentrates on the main theme, whereas the recapitulation focuses on transitional material heard between the first and second subjects. Following the cadenza, the two main themes are recalled, and the movement ends in a glorious blaze of color in D major, with prominent trumpets and French horns.

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