

Concerto in A Major for Bass Horn/Clarinet* and Orchestra, K.622 (1791)
Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756 – 1791)

I. *Allegro*

II. *Adagio*

III. *Rondo – Allegro*

Mozart's treatment of the concerto structure may rightly be regarded as a major contribution to the growth of the instrumental form in the eighteenth century. Until around 1750 the structure of the concerto was not clearly distinguished from the forms employed for orchestral or chamber works. Even in the concertos of Handel and J. S. Bach, the solo instruments may be regarded as being only "semi-solo"; the full contrast between soloist and orchestra is not realized. C. P. E. Bach (second son of J. S. Bach) first perceived the real aesthetic value of this contrast, and his clavier concertos are the forerunners of today's modern concerto form. Mozart developed the form further with richer invention, wider melodic range, and a far greater command of the orchestral effect.

Mozart's concertos fall into two main groups, which respectively precede and follow his move to Vienna. Those of the earlier group are relatively of lesser importance; although they show Mozart's delicacy of touch and originality of invention, they are interesting mainly to illustrate stages in his treatment of the form. The Viennese concertos are all masterly and were well studied by Beethoven. This Concerto, one of Mozart's last works, is a careful study of one of his favorite instruments. It is virtually flawless in style, melody, and balance, and often it shows a freedom of structural organization not to be found in any other instrumental works of Mozart.

The orchestral introduction to the opening *Allegro*, in classical sonata form, presents several themes. The soloist enters with the first main theme, a tune that is as beautiful as it is graceful. This is developed with all the expertise that one expects of the mature Mozart and leads to the second subject, a graceful and sinuous melody that extends into elegant figurations. The passage that follows changes into the minor and the most somber depths of the solo instrument are demonstrated. The first subject is recalled and a series of graceful runs from the soloist leads to the development section. The mood darkens for a while with a *tutti* in the minor and brightens abruptly as the major returns. All the themes are recalled and the movement concludes with material drawn from the first orchestral *ritornello*.

The Adagio begins with a quiet and reflective solo melody, which leads to a romantic dialogue between soloist and violins. In the central section the strings accompany the soloist. Lyrical melodies are intermingled with wide leaps in registration and coloratura runs. The two main themes of the movement are restated, and a short coda concludes the movement.

The rondo begins with a sprightly theme that is explored at length. The second theme is introduced and leads to a delightful duet for the violins. A third, deeply expressive, rather somber melody is introduced by the soloist, but the orchestra interrupts discourteously and the gayer mood returns. The earlier themes are recalled with florid solo ornamentation, and a final recapitulation of the first theme brings the concerto to a brilliant conclusion.

*Footnote: Mozart wrote this concerto for Anton Stadler, who played both clarinet and basset horn (a.k.a. basset clarinet or alto clarinet); it was probably composed for basset horn, but no original score exists, and it is known that publishers altered the score to accommodate clarinet performances.

Performances with the basset horn, whose range extends a major third below that of the standard clarinet, offer a different experience.

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