

Mozart Violin Concertos

Chloe Chua

ZIYU HE · SINGAPORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA · HANS GRAF





Mozart's music has always been very close to my heart. It has grown on me through much exposure to it since young. As one of the towering figures of the Classical era, Mozart's prolific output is so frequently played on radio stations, in concert halls or even by students preparing for their music exams or competitions. I am especially enchanted by the elegant, youthful and energetic characteristics of his music. Hearing and playing Mozart's works makes me feel alive - as if I have just taken a breath of fresh air.

The recording project started in 2022 when I was 15 and completed the following year. It was a huge challenge for me to record the full set of Mozart's violin concertos as these works have already been recorded by so many renowned violinists. I wondered what more can be done. These pieces were largely composed during his teens. Even though they are not as technically demanding as many other concertos, there is abundant melody and elegance in them. I decided to just follow my heart as a teenager like him and find my own interpretations as one.

I am grateful to have this opportunity to make this album with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and especially Maestro Hans Graf, who has elevated my understanding of the Classical style. I have enjoyed the whole process of diving into the details of what can be said and done with each musical phrase and idea. But most of all, getting to know what Mozart was like as a teenager like me.

Chloe Chua





What an amazing discovery for me, some five years ago, when I first met Chloe - and the amazement still goes on. We went our way together through this beautiful and challenging project: recording the astonishing group of violin concerti written by the greatest composer among violinists, Mozart, for his own daily performing needs as a daring young concertmaster in Salzburg.

Unsurpassed in the balance of intimate instrumental knowledge and universal importance, artistic depth and unbridled serenity and humour, recording these concerti is a rare and serious challenge for every violinist and namely for such a young talented artist.

Chloe surprised me and immediately captivated me not only by her immaculate playing but even more by her light-handed maturity, her expressivity and also by the admirable and unforced ability to take new ideas effortlessly into to her own artistic property.

These recordings are the beautiful portrait of a young artist spreading her wings to conquer the world.

In friendship and confidence: my fond remembrances and warmest wishes will always be with her in her musical future.

Hans Graf



Apart from the first, four of Mozart's Violin Concertos were written in 1775, making them more than 250 years old.

The *Violin Concerto No. 1 in B-Flat Major, K.207* from 1773 is considered the first of Mozart's true concertos for any instrument, predating his first piano concerto (K.175) by a few months. From 1769 to 1773, Mozart took three trips to Italy with his father, and the influence of Italian concerto writing can be heard in the outer fast movements. The mature and assuredly graceful *Adagio* with its tender operatic sighs is the breathtaking work of a 17-year-old who had already written seven operas by this time.

Listen for operatic elements in the *Violin Concerto No. 2 in D Major, K.211* as well, which can be heard in the way groups of instruments interact. The pair of oboes add weight to orchestral tutti, anchoring the high violin lines. A lively first movement gives way to a wonderfully expansive

pastorale, in which the oboes and horns punctuate cadences and act as signal-bearers for the solo violin. The rondo-finale opens with the violin solo leading the theme, an especially Mozartian touch, and dances its way to an exuberant end.

Originally programmed in a September 2020 concert, the then 13-year-old Chloe's first formal concert hall appearance with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, she played the Violin Concerto No. 2 with the SSO to an empty hall with video cameras. This video has since garnered nearly a million views on YouTube, arguably reaching a larger and wider audience than the live concert would have.

Mozart's *Violin Concerto No. 3 in G Major, K.216* begins with an introduction borrowed from his own opera *Il re pastore* that he wrote earlier in 1775. The solo violin leads the way in chirpy, summery joy, sharing new material with each entrance. In the

Adagio, flutes appear for the only time in the score, substituting the oboes. Along with muted strings, they set the stage for a heavenly slow movement.

The orchestra opens the final *Rondo* lightly and playfully. The solo violin's simple theme returns recognisably between episodes of new ideas, as Mozart's adventures with the soloist flit between G Major and G Minor. Almost startling in its quiet, unexpected appearance, a pensive folk-song prelude played by the violin over pizzicato accompaniment is soon taken over by a faster dance tune believed to originate from Strasbourg in France. This delightful interlude gives the concerto its Mozart-approved nickname, the "Strassburg Concerto."

Mozart's *Violin Concerto No. 4 in D Major*, K. 218 opens with a sharp arpeggiated fanfare before the soloist enters in its highest register. Though full of vigorous material, the *Allegro* reflects Mozart's

characteristic lightness and charm. The *Andante cantabile* is radiant and serene, evoking late summer afternoons in Salzburg. After the orchestral introduction, the soloist takes centre stage, spinning singing melodies almost uninterrupted, exploring the entire range from bright higher strings to rich lower strings.

In the 18th century there was a longing among European aristocrats for "the simple life", resulting in the curious phenomenon of palace gardens seeing rustic cottages being constructed, in which the nobility would play at being farmers and shepherds, with domestic animals being brought in for their excellencies to milk and herd. One can only imagine what the actual servants thought of this. It is in this spirit that we may view the final *Rondo*, courtly and posed, where an exaggerated gavotte (a French folk dance) turns up halfway through, followed by a bagpipe dance complete with drones on the violin. Nevertheless, before the end,

Mozart takes us back to his elegant style, as if returning to noble hallways of gilded mirrors after an afternoon of agricultural cosplaying.

Scored for solo violin, two oboes, two horns, and strings, the *Violin Concerto No. 5 in A Major*, K. 219 "Turkish" begins with the standard *Allegro* orchestral introduction before the solo enters. Mozart surprises our ears with an unexpected and captivating six-bar *Adagio* before returning to the *Allegro*. The E Major *Adagio* is lyrical and contemplative, with sighing themes passing between the strings and soloist. Melancholy and graceful, the ABA form ends with a cadenza for the soloist.

It is the *Rondo* that gives the work its nickname "Turkish". During Mozart's time, anything from the East was fashionable – Turkish coffee, fabrics, and fashions, as well as chinoiserie. In the middle of a graceful minuet, Mozart transports us to Ottoman lands as he changes metre and switches

to a minor mode as violin and orchestra take up a wild theme intended to represent Turkish music. Without drums, cymbals, and jingles for colourful touches, Mozart here gives us strong accents, exotic chromatic scales, sudden crescendi, and a percussive drone from the celli and basses striking their strings with the bow stick (col legno). As suddenly as it began, this interlude disappears and we return to end amidst the poise and gilded mirrors of 18th-century Vienna, with Mozart giving us a final wink.

The Adagio, K. 261 and Rondos, K. 269 and K. 373

In 1776, the Italian violinist Antonio Brunetti arrived at the Salzburg court orchestra of Count Hieronymus Colloredo, soon taking over Mozart's post as concertmaster. Little is known of Brunetti's life apart from their professional relationship at the court orchestra, in particular his role in asking Mozart to write substitute movements for performance.

The serene *Adagio in E Major for Violin and Orchestra*, K. 261 is an alternate middle movement for Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5, which Brunetti requested after finding the original not to his liking. Likewise, Mozart wrote the Rondo in B-Flat, K. 269 as a replacement for the Violin Concerto No. 1's finale. Brunetti is also responsible for the existence of Mozart's *Rondo in C*, K. 373 (1781). This later composition is believed to be a replacement finale for an unidentified violin concerto Brunetti was performing. Each is now highly regarded as standalone pieces.

The Sinfonia Concertante, K. 364

In 1779, having just returned to the Salzburg court from a concert tour of Paris and Mannheim, Mozart wanted to experiment with the new forms and styles he had encountered. One was the *sinfonia concertante*, a form popular in Paris, rather like the Baroque concerto grosso (where groups of soloists alternate with full ensemble), but with greater emphasis on the

soloists. The product—a hybrid symphony-concerto of massive proportions, sees Mozart returning to the instrument of his childhood while simultaneously indulging in pure creativity.

Unlike his concerti and symphonies, the *Sinfonia Concertante's* orchestration is relatively light—only pairs of oboes and horns in addition to the usual strings. He splits the violas in two, making for essentially a five-part string texture, a feature that harks back to rich sound-world of viol consort music from the early 1600s. The first movement *Allegro maestoso* opens with a galant-style fanfare. The soloists enter and converse, and Mozart (who particularly enjoyed playing viola) never permits the viola to shine less than the violin. In fact, his original score notates the viola part in D Major, necessitating the player to tune up all the strings up a semitone, giving the darker viola an additional brilliance next to the violin. While the Parisian *sinfonia concertante* usually had two movements, Mozart gives



us three. Mozart usually wrote reflective major-key slow movements, but this *Andante* is one of his rare minor-key examples and feels almost Baroque. Here the genius partnering of violin and viola result in an uncommonly heartfelt depth of emotion, and the entire C Minor movement feels like a tragic scene from one of his operas. The final *Presto* is a bubbly rondo where the irrepressible Mozartian smile returns, with horns and oboes punctuating the galloping of the strings. Alas for Mozart, Count Colloredo did not look kindly upon his musical experiments at the expense of his duties as court organist. Following their disagreements, Mozart asked to be dismissed and was given leave “with a kick on my arse” (as he puts it) in 1781. Salzburg’s loss was Vienna’s gain, as Mozart moved to Vienna for the next chapter of his life, buoyed by his newfound freedom, aged 25.

Edward C. Yong, Leon Chia, & Thomas Ang



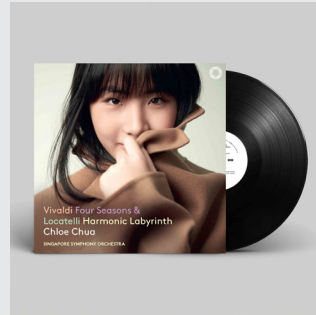
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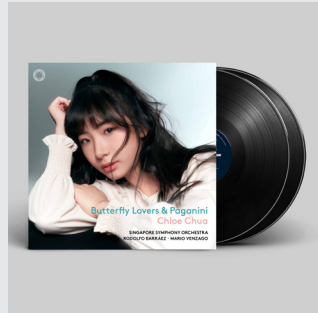
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Acknowledgements

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