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# MOZART

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SYMPHONY No. 29  
A major/A-Dur/La majeur  
K 201



Eulenburg

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WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

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SYMPHONY No. 29

A major/A-Dur/La majeur

Edited by  
Richard Clarke



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The present edition of Mozart's Symphony No.29 K201 is based on readings of the relevant texts published in *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, IV/11.5

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# PREFACE

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The two major landmarks on Mozart's path to first maturity as a symphonist are generally held to be the 'Little' G minor Symphony, K183 (1773), and the Symphony in A major, K201 (1774). Indeed it is hard to find a single dissenting voice on this point. For Stanley Sadie, K183 and K201 mark Mozart's 'emergence from a preternaturally gifted youth into a great composer.'<sup>1</sup> Concert audiences would appear to agree: for the best part of a century they have consistently been the earliest of Mozart's symphonies to maintain a place in the standard orchestral repertoire. K201 has long been a special favourite with commentators. Alfred Einstein singled it out as one of 'Mozart's finest creations', and praised the first movement's central development section as 'the richest and most dramatic Mozart had written up to this time'.<sup>2</sup> Hans Keller found in it 'an unprecedented and, at this stage, unsuspected degree of profundity', and pronounced the first movement's opening theme as 'one of Mozart's greatest discoveries'.<sup>3</sup> More recently Neal Zaslaw has noted its 'thoroughgoing excellence'.<sup>4</sup> Whatever Mozart himself might have made of such remarks, he certainly thought well enough of the symphony to request his father to send the music on to him – along with the neighbouring symphonies K182, K183 and K204 – 'as quickly as possible'<sup>5</sup> two years after his permanent move to Vienna in 1781.

How had Mozart arrived at this new freedom and mastery? No doubt his recent visit to Vienna with his father, Leopold, had been a

major stimulus, even though their hopes (expressed cryptically in some of Leopold's letters) of finding a post at the Imperial Court had come to nothing. The Mozarts returned to their Salzburg home on 27 September 1773. Just over a week later Mozart had completed the G minor Symphony K183; K201 was finished on 6 April the following year. However, Mozart would have found little encouragement for this new adventurousness from his employer. The Archbishop of Salzburg, Count Hieronymus Colloredo, was a cultured man, inclined towards reform within the church, and up to a point sympathetic to the more widely-shared views of the 18th-century 'Enlightenment'; but – in common with many aristocrats of the time – he regarded musicians as servants, and seems to have taken little, if any pride in the young Mozart's growing international reputation. The Archbishop saw two functions for music: either as entertainment (serenatas, divertimentos or suitably lightweight concertos) or for church services – in which case the music should be as condensed and unostentatious as possible.

Mozart's increasing frustration with the Archbishop's attitudes and behaviour towards him is well documented. Given all this, it is unlikely that he summoned up his full mastery in K201 to please his current employer. Possibly he was hoping for an attention-grabbing success somewhere else. The above-quoted letter to Leopold Mozart suggests that he still thought it might perform that useful function nine years later in Vienna. Still, K201 does not begin with a conventional call to attention. The opening theme is presented *piano*, with exploratory harmonies in the lower strings. The theme's full *forte* blossoming, with elegant imitative counterpoint in the bass, is held back until bar 13. This is in marked contrast to the driving syncopated unison theme that sets the first movement of K183 in motion. While the

<sup>1</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London, 1980), 12, 690

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Einstein, *Mozart: His Character, His Work* (New York, 1945; repr. 1965)

<sup>3</sup> *The Symphony, Vol I: Haydn to Dvořák*, ed. Robert Simpson (Harmondsworth, 1966), 66–7

<sup>4</sup> Neal Zaslaw, *The Complete Mozart: A Guide to the Musical Works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (New York, 1990), 193

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Mozart's father, Vienna, 4 January 1783

#### IV

'Little' G minor Symphony can be seen as a brilliant youthful response to the so-called 'Sturm und Drang' ('storm and stress' or 'yearning') style typified by Haydn's Symphony No. 39 (also in G minor), K201 is altogether subtler. True, the intense string tremolandos in bb19–22 of the first movement and the dramatic *piano-forte* alternations that follow are classic 'Sturm und Drang' features, which can again be observed throughout the finale. However, the symphony also shows the influence of Haydn's symphonic wit: especially in the repeated-note oboe-horn fanfares in the Menuetto, whose meaning seems to shift teasingly according to its context (most strikingly when the full strings take it up, *fortissimo*, in b12), and in the rapid upward scale for violins in the finale (first heard in bb60–61). On one level the appearances of the latter are, in Neal Zaslaw's words, 'clear aural signposts to articulate the movement's formal structure'. At the same time there is something slightly disconcerting

about the gesture: for a moment one may find oneself wondering exactly where the 'clear aural signpost' is pointing.

The *Andante* on the other hand is eloquent and sensuous, with the violins muted throughout (until the final *forte* statement in the Coda). The melodic style again recalls Haydn in places, but Mozart shows his hand in the richer inner voices: for example in bb9–13, where Haydn would probably have opted for something leaner and more transparent. The arresting high *forte* interjections in bb62 and 64, and the subsequent wide leaps in the melodic line are also much more characteristic of Mozart. Hearing such moments – and still more when one views the symphony as a whole – it is sobering to remember that this fresh, confident and sophisticated work is the product of an 18-year-old mind.

Stephen Johnson