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CLASSICS

# MOZART Clarinet Quintet in A Major K. 581

# WEBER Clarinet Quintet in B flat Major



CARDUCCI STRING QUARTET • JULIAN BLISS clarinet

## **Clarinet Quintet in B flat Major, Op. 34, J. 182**

*Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826)*

- |   |                                     |         |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------|
| 1 | I. Allegro                          | [10.16] |
| 2 | II. Fantasia - Adagio ma non troppo | [5.15]  |
| 3 | III. Minuetto Capriccio - Presto    | [5.14]  |
| 4 | IV. Rondo - Allegro giocoso         | [6.13]  |


## **Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K. 581**

*Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)*

- |   |                                  |        |
|---|----------------------------------|--------|
| 5 | I. Allegro                       | [9.20] |
| 6 | II. Larghetto                    | [6.21] |
| 7 | III. Menuetto - Trio I - Trio II | [6.57] |
| 8 | IV. Allegretto con Variazioni    | [9.15] |

Total Timings	[58.53]
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**JULIAN BLISS clarinet**  
**CARDUCCI STRING QUARTET**

hroughout every period of musical history the artistry of outstanding singers or instrumentalists has inspired many composers to write works with their individual characteristics – technical prowess, tonal quality, imaginative range – in mind. Within a period of about 25 years – between about 1790 and 1815 – the clarinet repertoire in particular was enriched by two major composers – Mozart and Weber – who each wrote a succession of works which remain pre-eminent in their respective genres.

Towards the end of his life Mozart wrote a concerto, quintet and trio for his close friend Anton Stadler. (The aria ‘Parto, parto’ in Act One

of his opera *La Clemenza di Tito* includes a basset clarinet obbligato also composed for Stadler.) About 20 years later Weber began a succession of six clarinet works directly resulted from his friendship with Heinrich Baermann, generally regarded as the finest clarinettist of his time. (Around 1890 Brahms – having announced his retirement from composing – would further enhance the repertoire after being inspired by the playing of Richard Mühlfeld. His creative energies revitalised, he composed a quintet, a trio and two sonatas for Mühlfeld.)

The close friendship between Weber and Baermann developed from their second meeting, in Munich in 1811. Preparing a concert of his own works, Weber quickly wrote

his Concertino for Baermann to play on this occasion. Baermann had recently been engaged as principal clarinet in the Munich court orchestra of King Maximilian I. The king was so impressed with his performance of Weber's Concertino that he immediately commissioned the composer to write two clarinet concertos, both of which were completed in 1811. Weber wrote three other works for Baermann – a quintet and two pieces for clarinet and piano: the Grand Duo Concertant and a set of variations. 1811 was also the year in which he began his **Clarinet Quintet in B flat Major**, though the piece was not finally completed until 1815. Just before meeting Weber, Baermann had acquired a new, improved clarinet with

ten keys, made by Griessling and Schott. New possibilities included greater facility in chromatic scales. Weber's quintet is virtually a mini-concerto, the clarinet being more consistently soloistic and dominant than the strings. In all his clarinet works Weber demands considerable virtuosity, but this is never at the expense of the essentially poetic character of the music. Weber's vocal style, which he developed in his five surviving operas, clearly influenced his clarinet-writing. Even in the rapid passage-work in the outer movements of the quintet, lyricism and elegance prevail, while wit – as in Paganini's violin music – is another attractive feature. Weber's affinity with the clarinet is obvious in his superbly idiomatic writing for the instrument. His *Der*

*Freischütz* is usually described as the first German Romantic opera, but Weber's status as a pioneering figure of the Romantic period also derives from his colourful and imaginative orchestration. His treatment of both the horn and the clarinet within the orchestra imbued these instruments with a new and potent romanticism.

The Clarinet Quintet begins with a disarmingly simple theme for the strings, the repeat of which is joined by the clarinet's undemonstrative *pianissimo* entry. Weber learnt from Mozart and Beethoven that a soloist's entrance may be equally effective when unobtrusive. A crescendo blossoms into a lyrical melody characterised by jaunty dotted rhythm, whereas the second

main theme (in F major) takes the form of a brief dialogue between cello and clarinet. Between the two themes the strings introduce a more assertive idea (*fortissimo*), answered by more poetic clarinet phrases. There is much attractive and florid passage-work for the clarinet – chromatic scales both descending and ascending, and some extremely wide leaps between the extremes of its range. The development section, which includes a new clarinet melody, is unpredictable and surprisingly strenuous, before the cello provides an elegant lead-back to a recapitulation which proves to be a creative reworking. Here Weber redistributes much of his material, while his continuing development of the assertive idea involves robust imitative writing. With simple

understatement, Weber belatedly recalls the clarinet's first entrance, before an emphatic final cadence.

The Fantasia slow movement, an extended aria for the clarinet above a mostly unobtrusive accompaniment, begins with a fine example of Weber's skill in creating an evocative atmosphere with economy of means. Twice the serene mood is punctuated by long chromatic scales for the clarinet – *fortissimo*, then a ghostly *pianissimo* echo, incidentally demonstrating Baermann's celebrated dynamic range.

For the mercurial and witty third movement Weber again clearly indicates the character of the music with the term *capriccio* in the

heading, though the trio section is much more sustained and relaxed. The light-hearted rondo finale begins with a rhythmic pattern established by the strings and a perky melody on the clarinet. In the subsequent contrasting episodes Weber introduces two lyrical themes, but most of the movement is dependent on the clarinetist's agility. In line with contemporary fashion, the most technically demanding writing is reserved for the final section – clearly aimed at stimulating maximum applause, but without descending into empty display.

Completed in September 1789, Mozart's **Quintet in A Major, K. 581** was the second of the three major works which he

composed for Anton Stadler, the others being the Trio for clarinet, viola and piano, K. 498 and the Clarinet Concerto, K. 622. A contemporary wrote of Stadler's playing: "I have never heard the like of what you contrive with your instrument. Never should I have thought that a clarinet could be capable of imitating a human voice so deceptively ... Indeed, your instrument has so soft and so lovely a tone that nobody who has a heart can resist it." Stadler had recently developed a slightly extended lower range with four additional notes, creating the so-called basset-clarinet. It soon became obsolete, but this was the instrument for which Mozart originally composed his concerto and probably the quintet. Although an increasing

number of performers play these two works on reconstructions of the extended instrument, the orthodox clarinet remains the more commonly used.

The spacious Allegro first movement has a wealth of melodic material, and although all the themes are lyrical in character, there is no lack of contrast. Notably, most of the melodic material of this movement is first introduced by the strings. A suave opening melody for the quartet is answered in bars 7-8 by the clarinet (an upward arpeggio then descending groups of semiquavers), but the most poignant theme is the one introduced by the first violin with pizzicato cello, before being expanded by the clarinet above gentle syncopation. In the

development section the clarinet phrase from bars 7-8 is taken up by each of the strings successively in the most animated passage in the movement. In the recapitulation Mozart introduces many modifications in the restatement of his original material. In the very first theme, for instance, the roles are exchanged: the clarinet now plays the melody line, the first violin the answering phrase. At the return of the flowing second theme, the clarinet restates as before, but then develops in a new direction.

The sublime Larghetto, in which the violins play with mutes, is even lovelier than its counterpart in Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. The clarinet melody is accompanied by gently rocking quavers in

violins and viola and a well-defined cello line. From bar 20 a dialogue unfolds between first violin and clarinet – the same kind of eloquent exchange which develops between solo violin and solo viola in the slow movements of the Sinfonia Concertante K. 364 and the C major String Quintet K. 515. In this exquisite central part of the movement ascending scales are a recurring feature above gentle suspensions. In the return of the material from the opening section Mozart adds more elaborate melodic decoration, until viola and cello respectively take over the triplet patterns for the final bars.

In the amiable Minuet, in which the five players are treated equally, *forte* and *piano* phrases alternate.



Unusually, there are two trio sections, strikingly contrasted. The first, in A minor, has a violin melody of poignant melancholy, while the clarinet is silent; the second, more rustic trio (in A major) is in the style of a *ländler*, an Austrian country-dance.

The jaunty theme of the finale gives rise to variations encompassing a wide range of moods. In Variation 1 Mozart exploits the clarinet's characteristic ease in moving quickly between high and very low notes, here leaping across two octaves. Whereas in a concerto the traditional orchestral passages naturally allow the soloist some necessary breathing space, this same relief must be more carefully managed in a chamber work. Thus

in the second and third variations the clarinet contributes very little. Variation 2 has a first violin melody accompanied by triplets on second violin and viola throughout. Variation 3 is an eloquent lament in A minor for the viola, Mozart's own favourite instrument when playing chamber music. This soul-searching is dispelled by the brilliance of Variation 4, with joyous semiquaver passages played alternately by clarinet and first violin. Following a serene, meditative Adagio, the work ends with a cheerful Allegro.

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# JULIAN BLISS

Julian Bliss is one of the world's finest clarinetists excelling as a concerto soloist, chamber musician, jazz artist, masterclass leader and tireless musical explorer. He has inspired a generation of young players as guest lecturer and creator of his Conn-Selmer range of affordable clarinets, and introduced a substantial new audience to his instrument.

Born in the UK, Julian started playing the clarinet age 4, going on to study in the USA at the University of Indiana and in Germany under Sabine Meyer. The breadth and depth of his artistry are reflected in the diversity and distinction of his work.



In recital and chamber music he has played at most of the world's leading festivals and venues including Gstaad, Mecklenburg Vorpommern, Verbier, Wigmore Hall (London) and Lincoln Center (New York).

As soloist, he has appeared with a wide range of international orchestras, from the São Paulo Symphony, Chamber Orchestra of Paris, and Auckland Philharmonia, to the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

In 2012 he established the Julian Bliss Septet, creating programmes inspired by King of Swing, Benny Goodman, and Latin music from Brazil and Cuba that have gone on to be performed to packed houses in festivals, Ronnie

Scott's (London), the Concertgebouw (Amsterdam) and across the U.S.

Album releases receiving rave reviews from critics, album of the week spots and media attention, include his recording of Mozart and Nielsen's Concertos with the Royal Northern Sinfonia. Recent chamber discs include a new piece for clarinet & string quartet by David Bruce – *Gumboots* – inspired by the gumboot dancing of miners in South Africa and a recital album of Russian and French composers with American pianist, Bradley Moore.

Recent highlights include an exciting new concerto by Wayne Shorter, with the Argovia Philharmonic, an extensive USA tour with his septet, and chamber concerts with the Carducci Quartet.



© Tom Barnes

# CARDUCCI STRING QUARTET

Matthew Denton and Michelle Fleming *violins*

Eoin Schmidt-Martin *viola*

Emma Denton *cello*

Described by The Strad as presenting “a masterclass in unanimity of musical purpose, in which severity could melt seamlessly into charm, and drama into geniality”, the award winning Carducci Quartet is internationally acclaimed as one of the most accomplished and versatile ensembles of today. Not only mastering the core repertoire, the quartet is presenting each season a selection of new works and diversifying further with programmes of film music, pop and rock. Founded in 1997 by Matthew Denton (violin), Michelle Fleming (violin), Eoin Schmidt-Martin (viola), and Emma

Denton (cello), the ensemble has won numerous international competitions, including the Concert Artists Guild International Competition, and First Prize at Finland’s Kuhmo International Chamber Music Competition. In 2016, they took home a Royal Philharmonic Society Award for their project, *Shostakovich15*, an immense cycle of Shostakovich’s Quartets performed across the UK, North and South America with a marathon one day cycle hosted by Shakespeare’s Globe, London. The project was accompanied by a recording of the 4th, 8th, and 11th Quartets: their

second disc for Signum Classics, and was recognised by BBC Music Magazine as “a fine achievement, boasting excellent ensemble, musical insight and sensitive attention to detail”.

The Carducci Quartet has appeared at prestigious venues across the globe including the Wigmore Hall, London; National Concert Hall, Dublin; Tivoli Concert Hall, Copenhagen; The Frick Collection and Carnegie Hall, New York, Library of Congress and John F. Kennedy Center, Washington D.C., St Lawrence Center for the Arts, Toronto, and Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. Festival residencies include Cheltenham, Ryedale, Lichfield, Presteigne, Kilkenny and West Cork. 2018 saw the quartet perform complete cycles of the Bartok Quartets at Kings Place in London, Gloucestershire and Oxford. They tour

to Canada, Italy, France, Spain and Germany and return to the studio to record a second Shostakovich disc.

Recent collaborations include projects with pianists Denis Kozhukhin and Martin Roscoe, guitarist Craig Ogden, oboist Nicholas Daniel, clarinetists Julian Bliss and Emma Johnson, cellists Benedict Kloeckner and Guy Johnston and acclaimed folk-rock icon Ian Anderson of Jethro Tull.

Highly celebrated for their interpretation of contemporary repertoire, the Carducci Quartet has curated many diverse projects and is regularly invited to perform new works. Recent and upcoming premieres include works by Simon Rowland-Jones, Gavin Higgins, Kemal Yusuf and Kate Whitley. In 2015 they curated projects around Philip Glass and Steve Reich, as

part of the Royal Philharmonic Society Award winning *Minimalism Unwrapped* at Kings Place in London, their recording of the Philip Glass Quartets, for Naxos, has reached over 6 million plays on Spotify. More recently they released an acclaimed recording of David Bruce's clarinet quintet *Gumboots* with Julian Bliss, for Signum Classics.

Education work is an important element of the Carducci Quartet's work, earning them a place on the Royal Philharmonic Society Award shortlist for their family concert 'Getting the Quartet Bug!'. The Carducci Music Trust was set up to support their work in schools and with young musicians. They also perform a number of school concerts each year supported by the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust.



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Producer & Editor: Nicholas Parker  
Recording Engineer: Mike Hatch  
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