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CLASSICS

Julian Bliss

Nielsen Clarinet Concerto
Mozart Clarinet Concerto

Royal Northern Sinfonia
Mario Venzago



NIELSEN CLARINET CONCERTO MOZART CLARINET CONCERTO

Clarinet Concerto

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|--------|
| 1 | I. Allegretto un poco | [8.02] |
| 2 | II. Poco adagio | [5.03] |
| 3 | III. Allegro un poco | [6.59] |
| 4 | IV. Allegro vivace | [4.30] |

5	Non che non sei capace, K. 419	[4.44]
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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, arr. Julian Bliss

6	Der Liebe himmlisches Gefühl, K. 119	[5.49]
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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, arr. Julian Bliss

Clarinet Concerto in A

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|---------|
| 7 | I. Allegro | [12.22] |
| 8 | II. Adagio | [7.00] |
| 9 | III. Rondo: Allegro | [9.01] |

Total timings:	[63.32]
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JULIAN BLISS CLARINET
ROYAL NORTHERN SINFONIA
MARIO VENZAGO CONDUCTOR

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ARTIST'S NOTE

Mozart's Clarinet Concerto is probably one of the most well-known works for the clarinet, and much-loved the world over. Having learnt this piece from the age of 12 or so, it was a great honour and a privilege to be asked to play it for Queen Elizabeth II on her 80th Birthday in 2006. The highlight of that evening was getting the chance to meet the Queen and Prince Philip again. The whole evening was one that I will cherish for many years.

As a contrast, I chose to pair the Mozart with the beautiful Nielsen Concerto. Long considered one of the most difficult concertos, it requires technical prowess from both orchestra and soloist alike. It is certainly a piece in which you hear new things every time you play and listen to it. On the surface it can seem quite a busy, fast-paced concerto but if you listen to what is happening underneath, it is full of amazing textures and harmonies. Having the snare drum as a prominent part in a concerto is rare, however I think it gives a greater dynamic range to the piece and a great contrast to the quieter, more melancholic passages.

Both of these concertos are favourites of mine and for different reasons. The Mozart is not particularly difficult on a technical level, but to me that alone makes it challenging. You have nothing to 'hide behind' and it is all down to being musical and making it meaningful. By contrast the Nielsen is a piece that on the surface can seem like it's all about technique. In order to really understand it however, you have to completely forget about the technical challenges and just play from the heart. There are a few cadenzas that take ideas from the rest of the piece. It's the creative freedom in Nielsen's Concerto that I enjoy – that, and you get to make lots of noise!

To record the Mozart live was a fantastic experience. There is a completely different feeling on live recording as compared to in the studio. When you are live, there is excitement and adrenaline. We decided that we wanted to try and eternalise that feeling.

It was a real pleasure to work with the Royal Northern Sinfonia in their gorgeous venue, The Sage, Gateshead. It was a few days filled with fun and some great music making. I can't wait until the next time.

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MOZART & NIELSEN CLARINET CONCERTOS

The Clarinet Concertos of Mozart and Nielsen stand as the two greatest such works in the repertoire for the instrument, twin examples of what can be achieved by composers who have been truly inspired to write for the clarinet, using its uniquely expressive qualities to produce enduring and comprehensively masterly compositions. Although the worlds of Mozart and Nielsen during the periods when these concertos were written could hardly have been more different, separated in time and place as they were by almost 130 years, there remain several extra-musical connections common to both works which may relate them more closely than might initially be imagined.

In the first place, these Concertos come from the final period in each composer's life. Mozart's Clarinet Concerto was his last for any instrument, being completed a few months before his death. Similarly, Nielsen's Clarinet Concerto was his last concert work, composed in 1928 following a major heart attack three years before – although he continued composing until his death in 1931. Both works, too, were written for clarinetists who had befriended

the respective composers: Mozart's Concerto for Anton Stadler, for whom he had composed his Clarinet Quintet two years earlier, and Nielsen's for Aage Oxenvad, clarinetist of the Copenhagen Wind Quintet, the ensemble which had inspired Nielsen to compose his Wind Quintet in 1922, with each part in that work allegedly reflecting something of the character of the original player. Nielsen intended to expand on this idea, to compose five wind concertos, one for each musician, but in the event just two were completed, his concerto for flute of 1926 preceding the present work by two years.

If, as seems true, Nielsen created some kind of musical portraiture in the solo parts of his two wind concertos, he was following the example set by Mozart. He, too, had good-humouredly poked fun at his friend Joseph Leutgeb in the horn concertos he wrote for him, and may well have reflected something of Stadler's nature in the solo part in his last concerto, for the character of this Clarinet Concerto is by no means dissimilar from that of the earlier Quintet, with which it also shares the same key.

In addition, with one notable exception, the orchestral strength demanded by both composers is remarkably similar: for Mozart, his orchestra comprises two flutes, two bassoons, two horns and strings, and although Nielsen asks for no flutes, his orchestra also requires just two bassoons, two horns and strings, which combination produces a naturally 'darker' orchestral sound, befitting the character of the work. This is exemplified more obviously in the 'notable exception' for Nielsen – a snare drum, of such importance in the score that it almost becomes a second solo instrument, rather than providing colouration or rhythmic emphasis. None the less, in each Concerto, for both composers the solo clarinet's part is clearly designed not to be overshadowed or submerged by the orchestra at any one time.

And with these features – although there is one other characteristic to which we shall later return – such connecting links between these works appear to come to an end, for their outward structural differences are immediately apparent. Mozart's Concerto is in the customary three movements of a classical concerto; Nielsen's, however, is a single-movement work, broadly laid out in four continuous sections played without a break.

We referred to the character of Mozart's concerto: it appears to inhabit a world of great serenity and beauty, entirely devoid of angst or strong drama, and yet its profound subtleties do not abjure contrast or discourse. It is an inherently melodious work, demonstrating the inseparable nature of an instrument that, for Mozart and his contemporaries, had come to be accepted within the orchestra relatively recently: neither Bach (who had died in 1750) nor Handel (who died in 1759) ever wrote for the clarinet. It also demonstrates – not for the only time in Mozart's output – his ability to create a transcendental work of art completely divorced from the emotional and personal situation in which he found himself in his daily life, for, seemingly constantly beset by financial worries, with a promised work-load and deadlines crowding in upon him, and the personal uncertainties of his family life – had his wife Constanze been unfaithful during his long absence from their home towards the end of the previous year? Was he indeed the father of her recently-born son Franz Xaver? Such factors as these might well have driven a lesser creative figure to distraction, but it was surely through Mozart's unique creative genius that he was able to enter a different world, aside from day-to-day distraction, and produce, in

this masterly score, a work whose serenity and beauty, as we mentioned earlier, occupies a different existence, untouched by human affairs.

The opening theme of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto – its length, shape, melodiousness and peaceable character – sets the tone of the entire work from the very beginning: it is ideally suited to the inherent nature of the clarinet, with its wider range than oboe or flute and its natural ability to blend with other instruments: here is, surely, an instrument of concord – individually expressive, certainly, but never standing too far apart from the general discourse.

Throughout this work, the listener is beguiled by the inherent beauty of Mozart's lyrical, song-like themes and where they take us, the clarinet leading, but never commanding, throughout each of the three varied movements. In addition, and wholly exceptional for a Mozart concerto (or, indeed, for almost any concerto of the period), there are no cadenzas (in the generally accepted sense) indicated in the work, and analysis can reveal (as in the case of the Clarinet Quintet) that across the entire composition the thematic material is evolved from that self-same opening theme.

If it is not drama, but subtleties, that unite Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, Nielsen's masterpiece has aggression enough (and subtleties, too, but of a different kind): the snare drum sees to the aggression, alongside the darker-hued orchestral colouration, yet at the heart of this intensely human music, as if we were witnessing characters on a stage, the aggression is not so much combative as suggestive of a choleric character running through the music. For underlying the score's aggressive qualities, there is a sub-stratum of tenderness and poetry, inherent – as Mozart also knew – in the nature of both composers' solo instrument.

Nielsen's drama is not one to take a breather: the music is continuous, although (as we noted earlier) the single-movement structure is multi-layered. The Concerto begins with an apparently simple tune from the orchestra, almost as a fugal exposition, before the clarinet soon enters, up and down its register, a little to one side of the tune. It's not long before Oxenvad's character goes its own way, abetted at first by the snare drum. Thereafter, the clarinet leads the discussion, at times quietly musing to itself in quasi-cadenza passages, before a secondary theme appears

from the orchestra, also quiet and combined with the first, after which a somewhat agitated orchestra tends to up the ante, the snare drum more to the fore, setting the clarinet off momentarily.

The mood is calmer now, the clarinet weaving long-breathed meandering melismata, based upon its original initial phraseology, and then a little march-like figure enters, growing in intensity with the snare drum asserting its presence, and disappears – almost as soon as it had entered – before a longer orchestral section begins with a solo horn theme, also derived from the clarinet's initial phrases. The soloist appears none-too-pleased at this turn of events, the orchestra flashes a little, but a peaceable mood is not long-lasting as the character of the music soon changes to one of chiaroscuro-like variety, at all times led by the increasingly irascible clarinet. A cadenza catches the soloist at his most seemingly irrational, but it doesn't last: the orchestra provides momentary calm, in which the clarinet joins and leads the way: but now a sudden outburst of energy from everyone grows in intensity, the bi-polar nature of the solo line clear for all to hear as the final part of this intriguing masterpiece begins to unfold.

The orchestra's opening idea is turned upside-down by the soloist; other elements are recalled, with the snare drum both urging and interrupting the argument, before the soloist, now resigned to the orchestra's companionship, brings this wonderful work to a beneficial close. Mozart, had he heard Nielsen's Concerto, would have surely smiled to himself in knowing understanding of that underlying substratum of Nielsen's tenderness and poetry we mentioned earlier, similar to that with which Mozart so often infused his own music.

Mozart's wife, *née* Constanze Weber, was a noted singer in her day, as were her sisters, the most famous being Aloysia Weber (with whom Mozart was at one time enamoured). In 1783, Aloysia was to appear in Vienna in Pasquale Anfossi's highly successful opera *Il curioso indiscreto*, and Mozart composed three arias for insertion in Anfossi's score, two of which were written for Aloysia. The first of these is 'Non che non sei capace' ('No, you are not capable') K. 419.

Another of Mozart's single soprano arias, 'Der Liebe himmlisches Gefühl' ('Love's heavenly feeling'), K. 119/K 382h exists only in a piano reduction. The circumstances surrounding the

composition of this aria are unknown but it was very possibly intended also as an insertion aria, for an opera by another composer; the character of its writing (the poet is also unknown) has echoes of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.

Julian Bliss has arranged both of these exquisite arias for clarinet and orchestra, the instrument assuming the melodic line in effortless fashion.

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JULIAN BLISS

Julian Bliss, one of the world's finest solo clarinetists, excels as concerto soloist, chamber musician, jazz artist, masterclass leader, public speaker and tireless musical explorer. He has inspired a generation of young players, as guest lecturer and creator of the Leblanc Bliss range of affordable clarinets, and introduced a large new audience to his instrument. The breadth and depth of Julian's artistry are reflected in the diversity and distinction of his work. He has appeared with many of the world's leading orchestras, including the London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, and performed chamber music with Joshua Bell, Hélène Grimaud, Steven Isserlis, Steven Kovacevich and other great interpreters.

Born in St Albans (UK) in 1989, Julian began playing at the age of four. He moved to the United States in 2000 to study at Indiana University and subsequently received lessons from Sabine Meyer in Germany. Julian's prodigious early career included performances at the prestigious Gstaad, Mecklenburg Vorpommern, Rheingau and Verbier festivals,

and critically acclaimed debuts at London's Wigmore Hall and New York's Lincoln Center. His first album for EMI Classics' Debut series was greeted by five-star reviews and public praise following its release in 2003.

Julian stands today among the finest musicians of his generation. He launched the Julian Bliss Septet in 2012 at Wigmore Hall and Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club in London and fronted their debut disc, Benny Goodman – *The King of Swing*. Julian recently released a recital disc with pianist Bradley Moore of works by Debussy, Milhaud, Glinka, Françaix & Prokofiev. Julian will be performing the Nielsen concerto across the world in 2015 to mark the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth. His future plans include the performance and recording of a Latin inspired project with the Julian Bliss Septet, and a pioneering collaboration with jazz pianist and composer Julian Joseph, cellist Matthew Barley and accordionist Miloš Milivojević.

www.julianbliss.com



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ROYAL NORTHERN SINFONIA

Royal Northern Sinfonia, Orchestra of Sage Gateshead, is the UK's only full-time chamber orchestra and the leading professional orchestra in the North East. Since its inception in 1958, it has built a distinctive reputation as a fresh-thinking and versatile orchestra, performing with a trademark zest and stylistic virtuosity. It is the only UK orchestra to have a purpose-built home for all its rehearsals, concerts and recordings, with acoustics rated by Lorin Maazel as 'in the top five best halls in the world'.

Playing a wide repertoire of thrilling, diverse orchestral music, RNS works regularly with a roster of globally renowned artists from all genres. In recent years, these have included Sir Mark Elder, Pierre Laurent-Aimard, Yannick Nézet-Séguin and Ian Bostridge, as well as leading popular voices such as Sting, The Pet Shop Boys and Efterklang. The orchestra also contributes to the continuing re-invention of orchestral repertoire with regular commissions

and premieres, most recently from Benedict Mason and David Lang, John Casken and Kathryn Tickell.

Open in its approach and broad in its reach, Royal Northern Sinfonia engages audiences and communities throughout its own region as well as further afield, with residencies at festivals from Aldeburgh to Hong Kong, as well as regularly featuring in the BBC Proms and neighbouring Edinburgh Festival. Back home at Sage Gateshead, Royal Northern Sinfonia works with adults of all ages and young people, through the Young Musicians programme and In Harmony project both of which provide unbeatable instrumental learning opportunities.

In September 2014, Royal Northern Sinfonia welcomed Lars Vogt as Music Director Designate, taking up the Music Director post from September 2015. Lars Vogt is an artist whose virtuosity and commitment to communicating the deepest values of orchestral music knows no bounds. He follows in the foot-steps of Conductor Laureate, Thomas Zehetmair, whose twelve year tenure had a profound impact on the orchestra's style, with his maxim always to perform "as if the ink was still wet on the page." For more information about the orchestra and its home, visit sagegateshead.com

Violin 1

Bradley Creswick
Kyra Humphreys
Sara Wolstenholme
Iona Brown
Jane Nossek
Stephen Payne
Sarah Roberts
Alexandra Raikhlina

Violin 2

Andre Swanepoel
Leslie Raulet
Jonathan Martindale
Jenny Chang
Ian Watson
Sylvia Sutton

Viola

Mike Gerrard
Malcolm Critten
Tegwen Jones
James Slater

Cello

Louisa Tuck
Daniel Hammersley
James Craig
Gabriel Waite

Double Bass

Sian Hicks
Roger McCann

Flute

Juliette Bausor
Eilidh Gillespie

Oboe

Steve Hudson
Michael O'Donnell

Bassoon

Stephen Reay
Robin Kennard

Horn

Peter Francomb
Chris Griffiths

Trumpet

Richard Martin
Marion Craig

Timpani

Marney O'Sullivan

Percussion

Graham Johns

MARIO VENZAGO

Mario Venzago is Chief Conductor of the Bern Symphony Orchestra, Principal Conductor of the Royal Northern Sinfonia, Artist in Association with the Finnish Tapiola Sinfonietta and "Schumann Guest Conductor" of the Düsseldorfer Symphoniker.

Venzago lead the following orchestras and theatres as Chief Conductor resp. Music Director: Winterthur Symphony Orchestra, Heidelberg Opera House, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Graz Opera House and Philharmonic Orchestra, Basel Symphony Orchestra, Basque National Orchestra San Sebastian, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. From 2000 to 2003 he was succeeding Pinchas Zukerman and David Zinman as Artistic Director of the Baltimore Summer Music Fest.

Mario Venzago's distinguished conducting career has included engagements with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the orchestras of Philadelphia and Boston, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Filarmonica della Scala and

the NHK Symphony Orchestra. He regularly conducts prestigious symphony orchestras such as the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra as well as famous chamber orchestras like Tapiola Sinfonietta and Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne. In 2012/13 and 2013/14 he conducted amongst others the Bayerisches Staatsorchester, the Konzerthausorchester Berlin, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, the Residentie Orkest Den Haag and the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.

Mr Venzago performed with many renowned artists of the world's concert stage including Martha Argerich, Nelson Freire, Gidon Kremer, Lang Lang, Radu Lupu, Misha Maisky, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Gil Shaham, Christian Tetzlaff, Maxim Vengerow, Thomas Zehetmair, Krystian Zimerman and Frank Peter Zimmermann and with many of the world's finest singers such as Francisco Araiza, Juliane Banse, Agnes Baltsa, Ben Heppner, Cornelia Kallisch, Elsbeth Moser, Yvonne Naef, Lucia Popp and Ruth Ziesak. He has collaborated with famous stage

directors Ruth Berghaus, Peter Konwitschny and Hans Neuenfels.

Maestro Venzago's varied discography has earned him several major awards, including the Grand Prix du Disque, the Diapason d'or and the Edison Prize. The recordings of the operas "Venus" and "Penthesilea" and the whole choral oeuvre by Othmar Schoeck were highly acclaimed by the international critics and earned several prizes. So did his first feature film, "My Brother the Conductor" by Alberto Venzago which was released throughout Europe and on DVD. At present Mario Venzago together with the CPO label is working on a complete recording of all ten Bruckner symphonies for his project "The other Bruckner", whose single releases were already highly acclaimed by the international critics.



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The Irish Times

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