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W. A. Mozart (1756-1791) Oboe Quartet in F K.370 (1781)

Allegro

Adagio

Rondo: Allegro

In 1777 Mozart had been impressed with the playing of the oboist of the Mannheim court orchestra, 'whose name I have forgotten but who plays very well, and has a delightfully pure tone. I have made him a present of my oboe concerto [K.314] and the fellow is quite crazy with delight' (Mozart's letter to his father from Mannheim 1777). The oboist in question, Friedrich Ramm, was indeed delighted with it and performed the concerto five times in the space of two weeks. Three years later Mozart was commissioned to write an opera seria (*Idomeneo*) for the Munich 1781 Carnival season of the court opera. Mozart met up with Ramm again who was still playing in the court orchestra and wrote an Oboe Quartet for him. Ramm, who had been appointed to the court orchestra when aged only 14, must have been a formidable player, for Mozart's quartet tests even today's oboists on their technically much more sophisticated instruments.

The piece is a showcase for the range of expression of the instrument, from the exuberance and virtuosity of the outer movements to the soulful aria-like slow movement.

Although thematically the piece is impressively economical, with the opening theme doing double service in the first movement and then metamorphosing into the *Rondo* theme, Mozart does not economise



on the technical demands made of the player: melodic leaps across almost the whole range of the instrument, isolated *piano* top Fs (the highest note on the classical instrument) and blisteringly fast passage work. The *Rondo* in particular requires extraordinary nimbleness. Its 6/8 semiquavers seem fast enough, but halfway through the movement the oboe leaves the strings chugging along in 6/8 quavers while it heads in 2/2 cut time, squashing 16 semiquavers into bars that previously only held 12. After this breathtaking episode, the oboe has to navigate some tricky fast semiquaver octave leaps before cheekily bowing out on yet another quiet top F.