

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) Grand Duo Concertant in Eb, Op 48 (1816)

Allegro con fuoco

Andante con moto

Rondo: Allegro

Weber's musician father had ambitions for his son to match the achievements of the husband of Constanza Weber, Carl's cousin. Though no Mozart, Carl Weber had an extensive and diverse influence over musical life at the start of the Romantic period. Wagner, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Mahler, Glinka, Stravinsky, Berlioz and Debussy admired his orchestral and operatic writing, and, as a conductor, he introduced sectional rehearsals and transformed the conductor's role from mere time-beater to one who moulds the performance. His huge hands helped him become a formidable pianist, and some of the chords in tonight's Duo "cannot be played by normal human beings" (Harold Schonberg).

As a composer, he was precocious: an opera he wrote aged 14 was produced in Freiburg, Vienna, Prague, and Saint Petersburg, and at 20 he was appointed Director of the Breslau Opera. Frustrated by his inability to reform that institution he became private secretary to the king's brother in Württemberg. There his father embezzled huge sums and Carl himself fell heavily into debt; they were both imprisoned and then banished. At the time of writing tonight's Duo, Carl was Director of the Opera in Prague.

Although most of Weber's clarinet music was written for Heinrich Joseph Bärmann, the Grand Duo was written for Johann Hermstedt, to whom Spohr dedicated four of his clarinet concertos. The work makes virtuoso demands on both players, exploiting both Hermstedt's dexterity with the extra keys that the clarinet had acquired, and Weber's own dexterity with his huge hands!