

Programme notes by Chris Darwin: use freely for non-commercial purposes

W.A. Mozart (1756-1791) Five Fugues for String Quartet (from Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier Bk 2) K. 405 (1782)

- I. C minor (after BWV 871)
- II. E-flat Major (after BWV 876)
- III. E Major (after BWV 878)
- IV. D-sharp minor (after BWV 877)
- V. D Major (after BWV 874)

We have the diplomat Baron Gottfried van Swieten and Mozart's soon-to-be wife Constanze to thank for the various fugues that Mozart arranged and composed in 1782. Van Swieten had returned to Vienna from the Austrian embassy in Berlin where he had accumulated a large collection of the works of Bach and Handel. He invited Mozart round on Sundays to play them to him.

On April 20, 1782 (239 years ago on Tuesday) Mozart wrote to his sister Nannerl about a prelude and fugue (K.394) that he had just written:

"My dear Constanze is really the cause of this fugue's coming into the world. The Baron van Swieten, to whom I go every Sunday, gave me all the works of Handel and Sebastian Bach to take home with me (after I had played them to him). When Constanze heard the fugues, she absolutely fell in love with them. Now she will listen to nothing but fugues, and particularly (in this kind of composition) the works of Handel and Bach. Well, as she had often heard me play fugues out of my head, she asked if I had ever written any down, and when I said I had not she scolded me roundly for not recording some of my compositions in this most artistic and beautiful of all musical forms and never ceased to entreat me until I wrote down a fugue for her. So that is its origin".

Today's five 4-part fugues from the Well-Tempered Clavier were arranged (along with some 3-parters) to be played with other Sunday guests at the Baron's. Mozart's own fugues from this period are rather un-Mozartianly dry, but this grounding in baroque technique served his music and his marriage well.