

WATCH [rte.ie/culture](https://www.rte.ie/culture)

LISTEN RTÉ lyric fm



FRIDAY 7 MAY 2021, 7pm

National Concert Hall

MOZART Piano Concerto No. 9 in E-flat major, 'Jeunehomme'

HAYDN Piano Concerto No. 11 in D, Hob. XVIII/11

RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra

Finghin Collins piano/director

Presented by **Paul Herriott**, RTÉ lyric fm



RTÉ lyric fm

Live-streamed on [rte.ie/culture](https://www.rte.ie/culture)
and broadcast live on RTÉ lyric fm

PROGRAMME NOTES

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART 1756-1791

Piano Concerto No. 9 in E flat major, K. 271, 'Jeunehomme'

- i. *Allegro*
- ii. *Andantino*
- iii. *Rondo (Presto)*

Composed in 1777 when he was 21, Mozart's Ninth Piano Concerto was, in the eminent American music critic Michael Steinberg's opinion, the first of the prodigiously talented composer's works in which, 'Mozart, so to speak, became Mozart'.

Although the nickname of *Jeunehomme* still stubbornly attaches itself to the concerto, by rights it ought to be called *Jenamy*. The mis-attribution arose from Mozart's description of it as 'das für die jenomy' (the one for the Jenomy)'.

The confusion was added to by the Franco-Polish musicologists Georges de Sante-Foix and Théodore de Wyzewa in their biography of Mozart, published in 1912, when they mistakenly decided 'jenomy' referred to a 'Mademoiselle Jeunehomme'. The name stuck.

Until, that is, as recently as 2003 when the mysterious dedicatee's identity was finally revealed. Victoire Jenamy was the daughter of the French choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre - famously hailed by the actor David Garrick as 'the Shakespeare of the Dance'. An accomplished pianist, Victoire had met Mozart in Vienna and Paris (where he composed music for her father's ballet *Les petits rien*) and it seems likely that she gave the first performance of the work in 1777.

Almost blithely disregarding of and refusing established practice, it is a work that could only be the product of a colossal talent on the verge of his prime.

Dubbed 'Mozart's *Eroica*' (a nod to Beethoven's rule-changing Third Symphony) by the musicologist Alfred Einstein, and declared 'the first unequivocal masterpiece [of the] classical style' by the pianist-critic Charles Rosen, it has also been hailed as 'a wonder of the world' by the venerable pianist Alfred Brendel, who chose to play it at his farewell concerts in Vienna in 2008 when he pointedly referred to it as *Jenamy*.

Scored for piano, twin oboes, two E flat horns and strings, it begins as it means to go on by flouting convention with disarming wit and lightly thrown-off virtuosity. A brave, if somewhat anarchic, new world is announced from the off, the piano boldly asserting itself (in what must have seemed a daring innovation to contemporary audiences – Mozart never attempted such *chutzpah* again) after just one bar to cheekily complete the orchestra's opening phrase. The interruption sets the tone for what follows. Insisting on parity with its ensemble accompanists, the piano cockily attempts to overturn the concerto soloist's inherited obligation of subservience by locking antlers with the orchestra in a flagrantly irresistible defiance of handed-down custom.

The jousting is conducted with spirited good will on both sides, the orchestra diplomatically ceding to the piano on occasion as an abundance of lyrical themes are tossed, returned and transformed between the two with all the graceful élan of a balletic game of tennis. With characteristic mischievousness, Mozart seizes one last opportunity to cock a snook at convention. Having deliberately provided his own cadenza (traditionally a valedictory statement after which came enigmatic silence) he allows the rascally piano to return to repeat its opening statement.

An abrupt change of tone and temper is announced by the troubled minor key middle movement *Andantino* – the first movement in any Mozart concerto to employ such a shift. From somewhere, clouds have gathered, the light dimmed, the mood dampened. Suddenly we

are transported from levity to profundity, the piano emerging out of gently keening orchestral voices to give vent to a pained monologue that speaks of some unknown tragedy. But perhaps the movement's most affecting quality is the support immediately offered to the soloist by the wholly sympathetic orchestra – a warming illustration of the tender generosity and compassion that coloured and would come to define so much of Mozart's mature music.

The concluding *Rondo* finale is packed with surprises, not least the piano's impetuous rush at its opening to assert itself with a teeming, liquid cascade of notes. Playing catch-up, the orchestra gleefully joins in the high spirits, discretely supporting the animated flights of fantasy spinning off the keyboard like coins tumbling from a one-arm bandit paying out an unexpected jackpot.

And then, unpredictably, given the free-flowing momentum of what has been, a brief, delicately slow and tentative minuet insinuates itself, in which the piano is afforded a poetic soliloquy lifted to more sublime realms by a cossetting orchestral accompaniment. From here on, we are taken through the looking glass on a helter-skelter experience of transcendental proportions, Mozart exalting in youthful bravado even while hinting at the depths of understanding yet to be fully articulated in a headlong rush to a conclusion lit up by a display of astounding accomplishment.

For all the debate about the proper name for Mozart's Ninth Piano Concerto, perhaps, in the final analysis, *Jeunehomme* is more apt than any, given it is the very embodiment of a 'young man' reaching to and beyond his prime towards the considerable riches still to come, in search, as Rabelais said, 'of the great perhaps'.

Programme note Michael Quinn © RTÉ

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN 1732-1809

Piano Concerto No. 11 in D major, Hob. XVIII/11

- i. *Vivace*
- ii. *Un poco adagio*
- iii. *Rondo all'Ungarese: Allegro assai*

That Haydn originally composed the last of his keyboard concertos, No. 11 in D major, 'for the harpsichord or forte-piano' is a reminder that, even in the 18th century, composers were affected by the emergence of new technology.

Although the forte-piano could trace its antecedents back to the beginning of the previous century, it was the models produced by Johann Andreas Stein in his Augsburg workshops from 1750 onwards that popularised the instrument in German-speaking countries.

Stein's more sophisticated forte-pianos would usher in the end of the once long-dominant harpsichord in those territories, although they would, in turn, soon be overtaken by the emergence of what we recognise today as the pianoforte. But for every minus there is a plus, and composers such as Haydn, Mozart and, later, Beethoven, were quick to capitalise on what they saw as progress.

Despite the near quarter-century gap between them, Mozart and Haydn shared a mutual admiration and respect for each other's music. Indeed, it's possible to hear the influence of the younger man's buoyant *joie de vivre* in Haydn's keyboard concerto swansong.

Certainly, it carries itself with a sense of dazzling ebullience, buoyancy and brio that one would not immediately associate with a man in his late 40s when it was composed in or around 1780 (it was first published in 1784). But it does at least explain why it should have been – with its sparkling keyboard writing and poetic sense of well-being capped by

an animated finale infused with dazzling Gypsy vitality and colour – the most popular of all Haydn’s 40 concertos during his lifetime.

Although Haydn described it as being ‘for the harpsichord or forte-piano’, he would have been wholly familiar with the pianoforte and it remains a work that blooms and blossoms when heard, as here, on a modern grand piano.

Throughout, the piano is accompanied by twin oboes and horns, bassoon and strings. From such slender resources, Haydn produced one of the high-watermarks of the Classical-era keyboard repertoire. Taking his cue from Mozart’s earlier Piano Concerto No. 9, *Jeunehomme* (composed in 1777 when he was 21) Haydn employs a tumbling profusion of themes while flouting convention by fusing the conventional concerto ritornello design inherited from the Baroque era with the newly ascendant sonata form.

Cast in three movements, the concerto opens with an extended orchestral introduction that announces several new themes concocted from meringue-light textures immediately echoed by the piano even as it adds a bubbling commentary of its own, shot through with an effervescent sense of playfulness. The result is a beguiling playground game of give and take, one kaleidoscopically shaped and coloured by the alert and lively interaction of piano and orchestra that is all the more pleasurable for the sheer innocent delight both seem to take in the other.

Offering a welcome moment of rhapsodic repose, the beautiful, lilting *Un poco adagio* middle-movement finds the piano as lyrical as it is thoughtful, with cosseting wind instruments supporting chains of suspended notes against long, lissom phrases in the strings.

Cut from an entirely different cloth is the *Allegro Asai* finale: a *Rondo all’Ungarese* (‘in the Hungarian style’) accented by themes borrowed

from Bosnia and the Dalmatian coast (in Haydn's time, part of the vast Austro-Hungarian Empire) and with a sprightly Croatian dance, the *Siri Kolo*, at its heart. Here the piano confidently takes the lead, spinning off one virtuosic display after another to excite a series of willing and vivacious responses from the orchestra before both bring this bright, effusive and often charming concerto to a high-spirited conclusion in irrepressibly joyful unison.

Programme note Michael Quinn © RTÉ