

Bassoon Concerto in B-flat major, K. 191 / 186e

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

- **Composed:** June 4, 1774
- **Premiere:** Unknown (likely Salzburg, summer 1774)

Historical Context

In June 1774, an 18-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart completed his **Bassoon Concerto in B-flat major, K. 191**, while serving as court musician to the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, Hieronymus von Colloredo. Though Mozart was already a seasoned composer with dozens of symphonies and chamber works to his name, this piece marked his very first concerto written specifically for a wind instrument.

The exact circumstances of its commission remain slightly mysterious. Scholars widely attribute the work to a request from an aristocratic amateur bassoonist, Thaddäus Freiherr von Dürnitz, an avid patron who commissioned several works from Mozart around this time. However, the soloist at the premiere may well have been a member of the Salzburg court orchestra, such as the skilled local bassoonist Heinrich Banson.

In the late 18th century, the bassoon was primarily regarded as an orchestral foundation instrument, tasked with doubling the bass line alongside cellos and double basses. Mozart was among the first major composers to exploit the instrument's full solo potential—celebrating its wide tonal compass, nimble agility across wide register leaps, and surprisingly vocal, lyrical character. Today, K. 191 remains the cornerstone of the bassoon repertoire and a staple audition piece worldwide.

Musical Structure & Movement Analysis

The concerto follows the classical three-movement form (*Fast–Slow–Fast*), demonstrating Mozart's early mastery of dramatic balance, graceful melodies, and operatic lyricism.

I. Allegro

The opening movement opens with a brisk, cheerful orchestral introduction (*tutti*) that introduces the primary themes. When the solo bassoon enters, it asserts its presence with a confident, ascending octave jump—a gesture that highlights the instrument's dramatic range. Mozart weaves virtuosic scale passages, rapid arpeggios, and wide interval leaps into an elegant conversational dialogue with the accompanying oboes and strings, demonstrating both technical brilliance and playful wit.

II. Andante ma Adagio

The central movement shifts to F major, offering a serene, expressive aria-like landscape. Muted strings and sustained oboe chords create a warm, cushioned texture over which the bassoon sings a long-breathed, delicate melody. Listeners familiar with Mozart's operas may recognize this theme: six years later, Mozart adapted this very melody for the aria "*Porgi, amor*" sung by the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro* (*Le nozze di Figaro*). The movement highlights the bassoon's poetic tenor register, transforming the instrument into a dramatic vocal soloist.

III. Rondo: Tempo di Menuetto

The finale is framed as a courtly French minuet in 3/4 time. Rather than a stormy allegro, Mozart chooses a graceful, lighthearted dance rhythm. The recurring main theme (*refrain*) is catchy and charming, alternating with contrasting episodes (*couplets*) where the bassoon engages in playful staccato runs, rapid register shifts, and decorative ornamentation. The piece closes with effortless Classical poise and charm.