



**HARRISON PARROTT**

## **Q&A with Lorenza Borrani: Spunicunifait's Mozart String Quintets project**

### **1) How did the Mozart project come about?**

From our many chamber music night sessions – when we meet after dinner to read chamber music among friends. Sometimes these go very late into the night – the best ones do! The five of us have played together in different contexts for many years, mostly in Spira mirabilis, Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. We often decide to meet and play – Haydn quartets, Brahms and Mozart quintets, the Schubert Octet and Beethoven Septet are among the evergreens. Every time we faced the Mozart quintets, we realised how incredible the scores are and how rarely musicians give them the time they deserve to be studied and interpreted. The dream of creating this time and a group dedicated to it grew over the years. And here we are!

### **2) Do you remember the first time you heard or played any of the quintets, and how you felt about them?**

I first played some of them in various chamber music festivals, together with other wonderful guest players. Of course, I felt the genius shining all around the scores, but I had no occasion to go very deep in exploring them. I had a chance to go further during my years with Orchestra Mozart, when Claudio Abbado programmed some of us to play them across various orchestral projects, but the work was still limited by lack of time, as part of a busy orchestral schedule. Whenever I've been in the audience listening to them, they've always been performed by a string quartet with a guest viola player. The effect of having four-plus-one rather than five is always clear – it doesn't allow the players to transmit the special essence of the quintets.

### **3) What makes them special?**

These works are special in so many ways. Mozart manages to reach the perfection of his string quartets, but with five voices. The extra instrument multiplies the possible combinations of voicing and roles, so he can use an even more operatic way of writing, passing the arias to different instruments while maintaining a rich accompaniment, which is more difficult with only four instruments. The alchemy of the instruments switching roles is unbelievably varied and constantly surprising. Through Mozart's imaginative genius, the six quintets inhabit six entirely different worlds, planets and dimensions.

### **4) What are the challenges of playing them?**

The challenge is to bring out the many different characters and gestures that are in the scores, while also conveying Mozart's magic, which exists both inside and beyond these characters and gestures. Sometimes that brilliance doesn't shine brightly enough, and that's when we put our instruments down and start talking, sometimes for hours and hours.



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### **5) What do they show us about Mozart?**

The quintets are effectively an overview of Mozart's life, from the earliest one, written when he was 17, to his final year. We can trace the development of his style and the influence of his operatic work. Through these six different worlds, which all contain other universes, we have a prism effect that reflects his many different faces and dimensions. They could easily be delivered as the expression of pure beauty, but there is so much more to them, which manages to be relevant to our lives today.

### **6) Why do you think they aren't played more widely?**

There are no artistic reasons for why they aren't played more. The quintet repertoire is not as wide as the string quartet one, so it is easier to fix string quartets and add one player, but this adds costs, so it doesn't happen very often. And because there are not many groups designed to play them, they stay in the occasional dimension.

### **7) How do you work together?**

We work on period instruments because they 'talk' even more than they 'sing', which is something we care about. They create colours and a balance that helps us give life to the ideas we have about this music. When we rehearse, we focus on the rhetorical figures, metric structure and changes of character. We have a common feeling and instinct about these, so we try not to speak too much during rehearsals. Sometimes we find corners that we need to discuss, though, and then we can go on for hours, beyond the score and the actual issue, exploring our own emotions and values. Thanks to this way of working, we have become very close – we often cry together!

### **8) You're also playing the clarinet and horn quintets – how does that change the group dynamic?**

The two pieces are totally different and having clarinet and horn players Lorenzo Coppola and Alec Frank Gemmill changes the sound and the dynamics of rehearsing, but not the vision of the music and how to deliver it. Wind instruments are different from string instruments and we think in a slightly different way, but we are playing different characters and interacting voices, whatever our instrument. The main problem is that one of us has to drop out – a viola in the clarinet quintet and a violin in the horn quintet – which is sad!

### **9) What are your hopes with this project?**

We hope to bring these scores to as many people as possible. Performing the complete cycle shows how special each one is, and how different they all are, so we'd like to perform them as a whole, especially the six string quintets. We are also planning to record them, and doing this, having studied and performed them for a few years, will give the recording a special value. We are also considering different concert formats that include singers performing opera arias, but that is a work in progress.