

## UNDERSTANDING CLASSICAL MUSIC – Report by Ian Royston

In February we continued with part 2 of the BBC 'drama documentary' on the "Rise of a Genius – Mozart"

Mozart by 1781 had tired of provincial Salzburg and ventured to Vienna where he was determined to be recognized as a 'great composer', not only in the court of Emperor Joseph II but also throughout all of Europe for Vienna was the artistic, cultural and political capital of the continent. Composers of symphonies, concerti and operas vied to gain favour with the emperor but though Mozart felt himself entitled himself to the top job the court was dominated by Italians such as Salieri and Clementi. On a famous occasion just before Christmas 1781 Mozart belittled Clementi by his flair and skill at improvisation but as contemptuous and mischievous is Mozart seen, that the Emperor simply pays him off.

Encouraged by his marriage to Constanze (younger sister of Aloysia Weber) and funded perhaps by a 225 florin 'gift' from Joseph II he set about producing ever-larger concerts by subscription which proved highly lucrative, much more so than a position in court ever could and allowed Mozart both artistic and financial freedom. Mozart quickly became the most celebrated showman and composer in Europe allowing him endless indulgences and the conceit to believe he needed no royal patronage or endorsement.

This led to him taking on Italian opera in the shape of *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), deliberately choosing the controversial work of Beaumarchais which cocked a snook at gentile and aristocratic society. A thinly veiled attack on the upper classes the opera gained short-term critical acclaim but was seen as too rebellious to last long in gentile Vienna.

In the second part of our meeting, still mercifully free from interruptive advertisements we learned a little more of the family of woodwind instruments. In an instructive but at times amusing video we learned that not only are these instruments notoriously difficult to play well, particularly in terms of tonguing technique but also that for the woodwind section to play as one, the absolute need to synchronize breathing across the whole section as well as listening carefully to other woodwind players and also the lead strings.

The next meeting is at 10:00 on Friday 27 **March** at Startforth Community Centre.