

Trio in C Major, Op. 20, No. 2

Jan Vanhal

Jan Vanhal (the name was also spelled Wanhall, Wanhal, and Van Hall) (1739–1813) was born in Nechanice, Bohemia. At the age of twenty he journeyed to study with Dittersdorf in Vienna and soon became one of the city's leading composers. In 1769, he made a long and successful tour of Italy, but soon upon returning to Vienna, suffered a mental breakdown. Thereafter, he visited the estate of Count Erdody in Hungary, remaining until 1780, when apparently he returned to Vienna. He lived in Vienna until his death in 1813.

Vanhal, overshadowed first by Haydn and Mozart, later by Beethoven, is often unjustly considered to be only the author of rich and melodically beautiful literature for students of keyboard instruments, but that is only one facet of his diverse musical legacy, and one connected to his life-long vocation as a successful and sought-after teacher. In addition to his piano works, Vanhal was a prolific composer of church music, symphonies, quartets, concertos, and chamber music, several of which include wind instruments. His best works were created in the 60s and 70s of the eighteenth century, and by the 80s of the same century, his works were much favored in the repertoire of the time and he enjoyed the support of many noble patrons. His music became of interest to leading European music publishers, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century, word of Vanhal's reputation even reached the shores of the United States.