

Violin Concerto No. 3 in G major, K.216

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born

January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria

Died

December 5, 1791, in Vienna

Work composed

apparently completed September 12, 1775, in Salzburg

World premiere

No information exists about this work's early performance history.

New York Philharmonic premiere

March 11, 1942, John Barbirolli, conductor, Zino Francescatti, soloist

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance

December 1, 1998, André Previn, conductor, Pamela Frank, soloist

Estimated duration

ca. 26 minutes

We think of Mozart as being a composer first and foremost, but in his day he was also renowned as a musical performer. He was acknowledged to be one of the finest keyboard virtuosos of his day, but he was also an accomplished string player, having been tutored in the violin by his father, Leopold, whose extensive violin treatise (published the year of Wolfgang's birth) still stands as a monument of 18th-century pedagogy. The young Mozart became adept enough to serve as a court violinist — eventually as concertmaster — in his native Salzburg, and he never lost the ability to demonstrate musical ideas convincingly with violin in

hand. However, once he left Salzburg for Vienna he seems nearly always to have preferred playing the violin's alto cousin, the viola, which he often did in chamber music.

Nonetheless, nearly all the music Mozart wrote for a solo string player features the violin, most notably his 33 full-scale sonatas and two sets of stand-alone variations for violin and piano (more than half of these dating from his maturity) and his five concertos for violin and orchestra. His Concertone for Two Violins and Orchestra and his famous Sinfonia concertante for Violin and Viola round out the list of his extant orchestral works that spotlight solo strings, and in his chamber-music catalogue we might highlight his two superb Duos for Violin and Viola. There also survive three independent movements for violin and orchestra: the Adagio in E major (K.261), Rondo in B-flat major (K.261a), and Rondo in C major (K.373).

Mozart may have composed his concertos for his own use, but if that was the case they were deemed so excellent that other musicians soon mastered them as well. Apparently the first virtuoso to pick them up was Antonio Brunetti, a Neapolitan who was appointed Court Music Director in Salzburg on March 1, 1776, and succeeded Mozart as concertmaster the following year after one of the latter's fallings-out with his employer, the Prince-Archbishop Colloredo. (Colloredo himself was an amateur violinist; it is not inconceivable that he, too, might have tried his hand at Mozart's concertos.) On October 9, 1777, Leopold Mozart wrote a letter to his son (on tour in Augsburg) in which a relevant comment appears:

Brunetti now praises you to the skies! And when I was saying the other day that after all you played the violin *passibilmente*, he burst out: "Cosa? Cazzo! Se

suonava tutto! Questo era del Principe un puntiglio mal inteso, col suo proprio danno.” [“What? Nonsense! Why, he could play anything! That was a mistaken idea the Prince persisted in, to his own loss.”]

It was formerly thought that Mozart composed all five of his violin concertos in quick succession from April through December 1775, in accordance with the dates inscribed on his autograph scores. However, it turns out that here, as with many of his coeval symphonies, things have been confused through later date-tampering on the manuscripts. Musicological consensus now suggests that the Concerto No. 1 may date from 1773, with the other four following in 1775. That information should not come as a surprise since the first concerto is a far less mature accomplishment than the others. In fact, the Violin Concertos Nos. 4 and 5 reach considerably farther than do even Nos. 2 and 3; I wouldn't be surprised if we learn someday that some time separates those dyads as well.

In any case, the Fourth and Fifth Concertos are by far the most frequently performed of the bunch, but the Third, in G major (played here), is a work of very considerable charm, a fine example of how Mozart was experimenting with adventurous ideas while still adhering to an essentially Rococo-Classical idiom. So it is that the opening *Allegro* breaks at one point into what seems a recitative for the soloist; the *Adagio* sports an orchestration that is fundamentally different from the movements that surround it, with flutes temporarily replacing oboes and the orchestral strings installing mutes. The *Rondeau* finale is interrupted by tempo and meter changes that give the movement a distinctive character.

Instrumentation: two flutes, two oboes, two horns, and strings, in addition to the solo violin.

Cadenzas: Mozart did not provide cadenzas for this work. In this performance, Mr. Dicterow performs cadenzas by Sam Franko and Eugène Ysaÿe.

Listen for ...

In the *Rondeau finale* of Mozart's G-major Violin Concerto the tempo suddenly slows to *Andante* precisely at the movement's midpoint; at that spot the meter changes from triple to duple, the key morphs from major to minor, the soloist plays a halting and mournful tune we have not heard before (it rather resembles a *gavotte*), and the orchestral strings accompany with hushed pizzicatos. This section lasts a mere 12 measures and then Mozart introduces yet another theme, a slightly faster *Allegretto*, with the mode now switched back to major:

Allegretto

Solo Violin



p

This tune is developed at considerable length before the rondo theme returns (and with it the triple meter) and the movement approaches its close. Both of the slower incursions have a folksy ring to them. The first (the minor-key passage) does not correspond to any known folk song, but in the 1950s it was discovered that the second (quoted above) corresponds to a Hungarian tune that is written out in a collection that was assembled in 1813, where it is marked “à la mélodie de Strassbourger.” With this discovery it became clear that this was the piece Mozart referred to in a letter as his “Strassbourg concerto,” though since there are no words attached to the melody we have no idea what its connection (if any) is to the city of Strasbourg.