

# Violin Concerto No. 5 in A major, K.219, Turkish

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

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## Born

January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria

## Died

December 5, 1791, in Vienna

## Work composed

completed December 20, 1775, in Salzburg

## World premiere

unknown

## New York Philharmonic premiere

February 14, 1904, Jacques Thibaud, soloist, with Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony (which merged with the New York Philharmonic in 1928 to form today's New York Philharmonic)

## Most recent New York Philharmonic performance

October 26, 2007, Christoph von Dohnányi, conductor, Nikolaj Znaider, soloist, in Greenvale, New York

## Estimated duration

ca. 29 minutes

stands as a monument of 18th-century pedagogy. The young Mozart became adept enough to serve as a court violinist (eventually concertmaster) in his native Salzburg. 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.

Nearly all the music Mozart wrote for solo string-player features the violin, most notably his 33 full-scale sonatas, two sets of stand-alone variations for violin and piano, five concertos for violin and orchestra, *Concertone* for Two Violins and Orchestra, and *Sinfonia concertante* for Violin and Viola. There also survive three independent movements for violin and orchestra: the *Adagio* in E major (K.261) and the *Rondos* in B-flat major (K.261a) and C major (K.373).

Mozart is believed to have composed his concertos principally for his own use, but 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 who succeeded Mozart as concertmaster the following year after one of Mozart's fallings-out with Prince-Archbishop Colloredo. On October 9, 1777, Leopold Mozart wrote a letter to his son (who was on tour in Augsburg):

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."]

We think of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart as being a composer first and foremost, but he was also a renowned musical performer. He was acknowledged as one of the finest keyboard virtuosos of his day, as well as an accomplished string player, having been tutored in the violin by his father, Leopold, whose extensive violin treatise

It was formerly thought that Mozart composed his five 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, as with many of his coeval symphonies, there has been some confusion because of later date-tampering. Musicological consensus now seems to be that the Concerto No. 1 may date from 1773, with the other four following in 1775. That information bolsters one's intuitive response to the works, since the first concerto is a far less mature accomplishment than the last.

This last of Mozart's violin concertos serves as a fine summation of what he achieved in the genre. The opening movement is elegantly balanced between the soloist and the orchestra, and it combines a sense of spaciousness with a crystalline texture. The *Adagio* is the largest-scaled slow movement in any of the composer's violin concertos, and it maintains its

sense of quiet grace and introspection throughout.

Explicably, Brunetti seems not to have been satisfied with this movement, so Mozart apparently composed a new one for him, in the same key (E major) and tempo (*adagio*) as the original. (That replacement movement is almost never played in the context of the concerto, but it is sometimes programmed on its own as Mozart's E-major *Adagio*, K.261.) The finale is an amiable rondo that leads to a false ending, at which point the music careens into a long episode with an east-of-Vienna Gypsy spirit, a highly spiced section that earned this concerto its geographically approximate nickname, *Turkish*.

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

**Cadenzas:** Mozart did not provide cadenzas for this work. In this performance, Julia Fischer performs her own cadenzas.

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## An Unusual Tempo Marking

The first movement of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 sports an unusual tempo marking: *Allegro aperto* (literally, an "open" or "frank" *Allegro*). It's not a unique marking in the composer's works, as we also find it used in arias in his early theater piece *Ascanio in Alba* (K.111) and his oratorio *La Betulia liberata* (K.118), both from 1771, as well as for the first movements of his Keyboard Concertos in B-flat major (K.238) and C major (K.246, both from 1776) and his Oboe Concerto (from the spring or summer of 1777, and revised

in 1778 into his Flute Concerto No. 2, K.314). After that he never used it again.

This rarely used term is almost exclusive to Mozart, although it has been spotted — again, attached to first movements — in an oboe quartet by Franz Krommer and a clarinet concerto by Antonio Casimir Cartellieri, both of whom were active in Vienna at the turn of the 19th century. Perhaps they had noticed the marking in Mozart's scores; perhaps they just liked its implications of candor and forthrightness.



Mozart's manuscript score for his Violin Concerto No. 5