MOZART Sinfonia concertante — Lesson 1
Lessons and activities by Stani Dimitrova, New York Philharmonic Teaching Artist

For this lesson you’ll need:
- Headphones or a speaker
- Space to move
- Something to write on and something to write with

Introduction
Watch a video introduction to this lesson.

Activity 1: Who was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart?
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91) was born in the Austrian town Salzburg, into a musical family. His father, Leopold Mozart, was a violinist, violin teacher, and composer and his older sister, Maria Anna, played the piano. Wolfgang showed incredible musical talent as a very young child. Already playing well both on keyboard and violin, he started composing at the age of five. Between the age of 11 and 17 he traveled all around Europe with his family, and he and his sister performed for some of the most important royalty in Europe. At age 25 he moved to the Austrian capital, Vienna, where he achieved great fame. During his final years there, he composed many of his best-known symphonies, concertos, and operas.

To this day Mozart is considered among the greatest classical composers of all time and has greatly influenced many later composers.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his place of birth in Salzburg, Austria
Five fun facts about Mozart

1. At the age of four, Mozart could learn a song on the piano in only 30 minutes.
2. He started composing music at the age of five.
3. He wrote more than 600 musical works.
4. He had a pet bird (a starling) that could perfectly imitate melodies from his music.
5. He wrote one of the most famous and beloved tunes of all time, which we now know as the song Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.

Activity 2: The orchestra family

Watch a video introduction to Activity 2.

The orchestra is like a big family — the way that you, your siblings, your parents, your grandparents, and all your uncles, aunts, and cousins are one big family. Within this big orchestra family there are four smaller families — the way that you, your parents, you’re your siblings are one smaller family, while you your aunt, uncle, and cousin are in another smaller family. There are four basic families in the orchestra:

**String Family**
- violin
- viola
- cello
- double bass
- harp

**Woodwind Family**
- piccolo
- flute
- bass clarinet
- saxophone
- clarinet
- English horn
- oboe
- bassoon

**Brass Family**
- trumpet
- French horn
- tuba
- trombone

**Percussion Family**
- triangle
- gong
- maracas
- claves
- tambourine
- cymbals
- snare drum
- bass drum
- orchestra bells
- timpani
This is an orchestra seating chart — a map that shows how the different instruments are usually arranged on a concert stage. Notice how each instrument sits close to others in its family. The instruments that produce the greatest volume (meaning, that are the loudest), like the percussion and brass, sit toward the back while the quieter instruments, like the strings, are often greater in number and sit toward the front of the stage.

**Activity 3: Same family, different voices**

Mozart’s Sinfonia concertante features two solo instruments: the violin and the viola, which are both in the string family. The two instruments are very similar, but the violin is a little bit smaller and has a higher sound, and the viola is bigger and wider and has a lower sound. Because of these differences, each of these two instruments has a very distinct voice, the way each person in your family has a different voice.

How is your voice different from that of your mom or dad, or your grandma or grandpa?

Compare your own voice with the voice of a grown-up in your family. Look at the four pairs of images below. In each pair, decide which item you would match with your voice and which you would match with your grown-up’s. Draw lines to connect them. What do you notice?
Activity 4: The voices of the violin and viola

Now let’s listen to the sound of our two solo instruments — the violin and the viola. You’ll hear each play almost the exact same melody. What do you notice about the sound of the violin and viola that make them different? Think about the pitch of instruments (how high or low they play) and the quality of their sound (how bright or dark). Do they play at the same time, or do they take turns?

Sinfonia concertante **Excerpt 1**

Can you hear the differences between the two instruments? Do the two instruments sound like they are getting along? Why do you say that?

Violin (left) and viola (right)

**Surprise bonus challenge!**

If you want to try a really fun challenge, listen to these other excerpts of the violin and viola from the Sinfonia concertante, below. This time try closing your eyes and answer this question: “If each instrument was a person, what would their personality be like based on the sound you hear? What descriptive words come to mind?” Here are some words you might find helpful: happy, grumpy, quiet, fun, playful, sleepy, quick, slow, small, big.

Sinfonia concertante (viola) **Excerpt 2**
Sinfonia concertante (violin) **Excerpt 3**

Can you draw a picture of a character to match the sound of the viola and violin you just heard?

**We hope you’ve enjoyed learning about Mozart and two of his favorite instruments — the violin and viola!**

Share with us!

We’d love to see how you’re learning at home. Scan or take a picture 📸 of your work and send it to: education@nyphil.org.