

MOZART Sinfonia concertante — Lesson 2

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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 inspired Mozart?



Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745–99)

Mozart wrote his Sinfonia concertante for Violin, Viola, and Orchestra in 1779 at the age of 23. At the time he wrote this piece, the genre of the sinfonia concertante (at least two soloists plus orchestra) was very popular around Europe. It's possible that Mozart first encountered it when he was in Paris, where he heard a similar work by composer Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745–99). Like Mozart, Saint-Georges was a [virtuoso](#) violinist. He was also the best-known classical composer of African ancestry from this period. He popularized the genre of the sinfonia concertante, and is considered to be one of the originators of this type of composition.



A plaque on a Parisian street named for Chevalier de Saint-Georges

Five fun facts about Saint-Georges

1. In addition to being a violinist and a composer, he was also a conductor and went on to conduct the leading symphony orchestra in Paris.
2. A master fencer, his swordsmanship was virtually unmatched by his contemporaries.
3. He survived two assassination attempts.
4. He was an early supporter of racial equality in France and England.
5. As a colonel, he led the first all-black regiment in Europe during the French Revolution.

Activity 2: Who inspires you?

It's quite possible that Saint-Georges inspired Mozart to write a work for two soloists and orchestra — the Sinfonia concertante you heard in the video. Can you think of a time when you saw or heard somebody (a friend, a relative, a teacher, or perhaps a famous person you haven't met) do something that impressed you so much that it inspired you to do something great, too? Below you can find some helpful prompts to guide your thoughts. You can use the space below, a separate piece of paper, or just have a discussion.

I was inspired when _____ said / did / made / created / cooked:
(name of person who inspired me)

They made me want to do / create / write / draw / read / see:

Activity 3: Musical conversation in Mozart's Sinfonia concertante

Mozart loved writing operas and when he wrote for instruments, he often imagined that they were singers in an opera having a musical conversation. Throughout his Sinfonia concertante, Mozart creates a playful musical conversation between the solo violin and solo viola. Imagine having a conversation with a grown-up you know well. What are some ways that we have conversations with one another? Here are some possibilities:

- 1) **Listening and taking turns:** you say something and the grown-up listens and then responds.
- 2) **Bantering:** you go back-and-forth with the grown-up, speaking quickly and playfully.
- 3) **Speaking "in sync":** the grown-up agrees with and supports what you are saying.

Listen to the following three excerpts. As you listen you can trace the shape of the melodies with your hand in the air to help you follow along. Simply move your hand down when the

instruments go lower and move your hand up when the instrument climb higher in [pitch](#). Can you try following the violin melody with your left hand and viola melody with your right?

See if you can match the excerpts with the three types of conversations on the previous page.

[Excerpt 1](#)

[Excerpt 2](#)

[Excerpt 3](#)

Answers:

Excerpt 1: Bantering; Excerpt 2: Speaking “in sync”; Excerpt 3: Listening and taking turns

Activity 4: Let’s have a musical puppet show!

Now we’ll put the types of conversations from Activity 3 together to make one longer conversation. To help you start, we’ll imagine that each of your hands is a puppet: one hand will be the violin and the other the viola.

See if you can have your “hand-puppets” talk to each other during the two instruments’ musical conversation. You can follow this excerpt and imitate what you’re hearing.

[Excerpt 4](#)

What did you imagine the two instruments were talking about? Did you imagine a story?

Below, or on a separate sheet of paper, you can write down any ideas about what the two instruments might be talking about. Or you can draw a picture based on your Sinfonia concertante hand-puppet conversation. The more details you come up with, the better!

We hope you’ve enjoyed learning about musical conversations!

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.