

Notes on the Program

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Serenade in G major, *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (*A Little Night Music*), K.525

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

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

The jewel-like serenade *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (*A Little Night Music*) is one of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's most familiar and frequently played works. Given the remarkable amount of information that has survived to illuminate the nooks and crannies of his career, it is ironic that so famous a piece should leave listeners so deeply in the dark. Why Mozart wrote it, and for whom, remains a mystery. No mention of it survives in his voluminous correspondence, and there are no contemporary accounts of its performance.

It stands as an anomaly in his oeuvre, since the myriad "incidental" orchestral pieces in his catalogue — serenades, divertimentos, cassations, nocturnos, and so on — almost all date from his early years in Salzburg, where they were routinely commissioned to enliven specific social gatherings. This serenade, however, is no youthful work. It was written six years after Mozart moved from Salzburg to Vienna, at the same time he was composing his opera *Don Giovanni*, which would receive its premiere two and a half months later.

Various theories have been expounded concerning the work's genesis, but all remain in the arena of speculation. Some have linked it to the fact that Leopold Mozart, the composer's controlling father, died on May 28, 1787, back in Salzburg. The musicologist Alan Tyson (who was also a practicing psychoanalyst and helped edit the standard edition of Freud) viewed this serenade as a tribute from Mozart to his late father. Tyson wrote in *Mozart: Studies of the Autograph Scores*:

If one had to select a work to serve as a memorial of this kind to Leopold, one's choice might well fall on the peerless *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, K.525, completed two months later, the perfect serenade to recall all those serenades and divertimenti of the Salzburg years.

Even the original instrumentation of this work has given rise to differences of opinion. The full entry Mozart inscribed in his personal catalogue bears citing: "*A Little Night Music* comprising an Allegro, Minuet and

IN SHORT

Born: January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791, in Vienna

Works composed and premiered:

Eine kleine Nachtmusik, composed 1787; premiere unknown. Violin Concerto No. 3, apparently completed September 12, 1775, in Salzburg; premiere unknown

New York Philharmonic premieres and most recent performances:

Eine kleine Nachtmusik, premiered November 16, 1906, Wassily Safonoff, conductor; most recently performed, October 9, 2001, André Previn, conductor. Violin Concerto No. 3 premiered March 11, 1942, John Barbirolli, conductor, Zino Francescatti, soloist; most recently played, April 28, 2012, Alan Gilbert, conductor, Lisa Batiashvili, soloist

Estimated durations: *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, ca. 14 minutes. Violin Concerto No. 3, ca. 27 minutes

Trio. — Romance. Minuet and Trio, and finale. — 2 violins, viola, and basses.” It is unclear whether he anticipated that the piece would be played as chamber music, with one instrument on each part, or by a chamber orchestra of strings. And what did he mean by “basses”? Cellos? Double basses? A combination of the two? The grouping of two violins, viola, and double bass was a standard assemblage in Mozart’s Salzburg, but this piece relates to a later decade and a different city. A clue about Mozart’s intentions may come from the surviving fragment of a *Larghetto* that apparently represents his original thoughts about a slow movement for this piece, thoughts he abandoned entirely after 16 measures; there he clearly laid out on the page the instrumentation of two violins, viola, cello, and double bass. It has become traditional to take the texture from the movement Mozart did not complete and superimpose it onto the movements he did, which is the practice followed in this performance.

Another mystery: sharp eyes may have noticed that Mozart’s catalogue listing includes two minuet-and-trio movements, though only one figure in the score as it is known today. Evidence bears out that Mozart’s entry was accurate: a page is missing from the manuscript at the point where the second movement — that is, the first Minuet-and-Trio — would have stood. It was already gone when the work was first published, in 1827, on which occasion the publishing firm of J. André claimed that their edition was “made after the original score.”

Eine kleine Nachtmusik is not a deep work by Mozartian standards, but it is an exemplar of Rococo elegance. The opening *Allegro* is charming and transparent, as textbook a sonata-allegro structure as one could hope to find. The *Romance* is warmhearted, with some worried rustlings midway through, proving no more than a brief interruption of the genial emotional climate. The surviving *Menuetto* and its sotto voce trio are graceful, while the *Rondo* finale is thoroughly effervescent.

A Little Light Music

During Mozart’s decade in Vienna, the city enjoyed an abundance of public music-making, which had been cultivated for at least a century. In 1684, for example, the English traveler Edward Browne, in his book *A Brief Account of Some Travels in divers Parts of Europe*, described his experiences in Vienna and particularly associated the profusion of outdoor music he heard to the musical enthusiasm of the Emperor Leopold I — “which makes so many Musicians in Vienna; for no place abounds more with them; and in the Evening we seldom failed of Musick in the Streets, and at our Windows.” It is certainly possible that Mozart’s serenade ***Eine kleine Nachtmusik***, though born of a later time, may have been conceived for that same purpose.



Vienna’s public social scene in the early 18th century

Mozart is regarded as being a composer first and foremost, but in his day he was also renowned as a musical performer. He was acknowledged as one of the finest keyboard virtuosos of his day, and 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) 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 relinquished the ability to demonstrate musical ideas convincingly with violin in hand. Once he left Salzburg for Vienna he seems to have

preferred playing the violin's alto cousin, the viola, which he often did in chamber music.

Nonetheless, almost all the music he wrote for 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 concerted string works, and highlights of his chamber music catalogue include two Duos for Violin and Viola. There also survive three stand-alone movements for violin and orchestra: the Adagio in E

Mozart Takes a Bow

Johann Andreas Schachtner (1731–95) was a trumpeter, violinist, and cellist in the Salzburg musical establishment, a close friend of the Mozart family, and a librettist or literary collaborator for several of Mozart's early works. Shortly after Mozart's death the composer's sister, Nannerl, asked Schachtner to write his recollections of Mozart. His memoir includes an account of Mozart's first steps as a violinist, which took place at a trio rehearsal at the Mozarts' home, during which Johann Wenzl played first violin, Schachtner played second, and Leopold Mozart (the composer's father) played viola. (Apologies in advance to our distinguished second violin section.)

Little Wolfgang asked to be allowed to play second violin. As he hadn't had any lessons yet, your Papa reproved him for his silly begging, thinking he would be unable to make anything of it. Wolfgang said: "You don't need to have taken lessons to play second violin."



When your Papa insisted that he go away at once and not bother us, he began to cry, and went off in a sulk with his little fiddle. I asked that he be allowed to play alongside of me. At last your Papa said: "Play along with Herr Schachtner, then, but so softly that you can't be heard, or you'll have to go." Soon I noticed to my amazement that I was superfluous. Quietly I laid my violin aside and watched your Papa, who had tears of wonder and pleasure running down his cheeks. Little Wolfgang played through all six trios. He was so elated by our applause that he said he could play the first violin part. We let him do it for a joke, and almost died of laughter. His fingering was incorrect and improvised, but he never got stuck.

Mozart at age six, in a portrait commissioned by his father, Leopold

major (K.261), Rondo in B-flat major (K.261a), and Rondo in C major (K.373).

Mozart may have composed concertos 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 in 1776, and succeeded Mozart as concertmaster the following year after one of Mozart's fallings-out with his employer, the Prince-Archbishop Colloredo. (Colloredo was himself an amateur violinist; it's 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 malinteso, 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; but 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 seems to be that the Concerto No. 1 may date from 1773, with the other four following in 1775. That information is comforting since the first concerto sounds to be a much less mature accomplishment than the others. In fact, the Violin Concertos Nos. 4 and 5 reach considerably farther than even Nos. 2 and 3 do, and it would not be a surprise to learn someday that chronology separates those dyads as well. The Fourth and Fifth Concertos are the most frequently performed of the bunch, but the **Concerto No. 3 in G major** (played here), is nonetheless a work of very considerable charm, a fine example of how Mozart was experimenting with adventurous ideas while 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 fundamentally different from the movements that surround it, with flutes temporarily replacing oboes and the orchestral strings (but not the soloist) installing mutes; and the *Rondeau* finale is interrupted by tempo and meter changes that give the movement a distinctive character.

Instrumentation: *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* employs a string orchestra only. Violin Concerto No. 3 calls for two flutes, two oboes, two horns, and strings, in addition to the solo violin.

Cadenzas: Mozart did not provide cadenzas for the Violin Concerto No. 3. In these performances, Sheryl Staples plays cadenzas by Sam Franko.