

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

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

Born: January 27, 1756, in Salzburg

Died: December 5, 1791, in Vienna

First performance: Unknown, although perhaps in Mozart's native Salzburg with Antonio Brunetti as soloist

The “sunny genius” Tchaikovsky so admired in **Mozart**'s music, the ability to create a seemingly effortless flow of captivating melodies and harmonies within the elegant style of late-18th century composition, is fully displayed in the Austrian composer's five concertos for solo violin and orchestra. Mozart wrote these concertos between April and December of 1775. His purpose in doing so has been variously accounted for by his biographers but cannot be stated with certainty. The composer, at age 19, was himself an accomplished violinist, and we know from his letters that he performed at least one of these concertos in public. But he probably fashioned the **Violin Concerto No. 5 in A Major, K. 219**, the last piece in this series, for Antonio Brunetti, a violinist who shared with Mozart the duties of concertmaster in the orchestra maintained by the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg.

In his violin concertos, Mozart's musical invention takes on an aspect of caprice that we rarely encounter in his other major instrumental works. Melodies pour so abundantly from his pen that they need not be thoroughly developed, and the flow of music is sometimes interrupted for fascinating but inexplicable digressions. The first movement of the A major concerto begins with the usual orchestral exposition, one whose several brief themes convey an almost operatic élan. But the entrance of the solo violin changes the music's character completely. Indeed, the featured instrument seems to have stumbled into the wrong composition, rhapsodizing in slow tempo over a murmuring accompaniment. Having thereby perplexed us (though in a not unpleasant way), Mozart once again shifts gears and returns to the original tempo, allowing the movement to develop more or less as we might expect.

The ensuing *Adagio* is more conventional, being concerned chiefly with the theme given out by the orchestra in the opening measures. But the finale, built on a minuet type of melody, has as its third episode a humorous interlude in “Turkish” style. Musical evocation of the land of the Pashas constituted a popular strain of composition among Austrian musicians of the late 18th century. Mozart resorted to this type of exoticism in a number of pieces, most famously the Piano Sonata in A major, K. 331, with its well-known *Rondo “alla turca,”* and his opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. For the quasi-exotic episode in its finale, the present work is sometimes referred to as Mozart's “Turkish” Concerto. The conclusion of this surprising passage returns us once more to the minuet theme, as though the strange oriental excursion had been only a dream.

What to Listen For

Following the very vigorous orchestral paragraph that begins the concerto, the solo violin seems to stroll into the proceedings in an incongruously relaxed manner. Mozart offers other surprises in the form of unexpected harmonies and little bits of melody that sound briefly, then give way to others. Here and in the slow movement that follows, Mozart provides opportunity for a cadenza, a quasi-improvisational solo for the featured performer. The finale begins as a dance in lilting

triple-pulse meter. The very Austrian character of this music makes the “Turkish” episode midway through the movement all the more surprising.

Program Notes © 2015 Paul Schiavo