

Notes on the Program

by Dr. Jannie Burdeti

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Sonata for Piano and Violin in G major, K. 301

In the year 1777, at the age of twenty-one, Mozart sent a letter to his father and sister, along with the scores of Joseph Schuster's Six Duets for Keyboard and Violin, writing that they were very popular and that he would like to compose something "of the same style." At the time, Mozart had been traveling through Munich, Mannheim, and Paris, having recently left his employment in Salzburg. Accompanied by his mother, he had decided to find a permanent job, one he felt would be worthy of his stature. It was during this trip that he would write what are known as his six "Palatine Sonatas," dedicated to Maria Elizabeth, electress of the Palatinate. His Sonata in G major, K. 301, is the first of that set, written while Mozart and his mother were looking for opportunities in Mannheim. As soon as they arrived, Mozart began rekindling old ties and creating new friendships in hopes of finding work. During these attempts, he met Dr. Ferdinand Dejean, a wealthy surgeon and amateur flautist from the Netherlands, who commissioned Mozart to write a few easy flute concertos and quartets. While Mozart was not able to compose all these pieces, there is evidence that the G-major Sonata was first conceived as one of the flute commissions from Dejean. The manuscript's first page features the word *flute*, and its octave transposition is crossed out and replaced by violin.

The Sonata in G major, K. 301, contains two movements, perhaps inspired by Johann Christian Bach, both of them marked *Allegro*. To say that this work redefines the violin sonata is an understatement. Mozart refers to them as "duets" in his letters, emphasizing the fact that both instruments are now on equal footing, unlike his earlier violin sonatas, which were presented as keyboard pieces with an optional melodic accompaniment.

The first movement of K. 301, marked *Allegro con spirito*, is filled with hope and warmth. Following a lyrical and affable theme played by the violin is a short four-bar passage in unison octaves—an idea that occurs throughout the movement under different guises. The second movement is a graceful and lilting piece in triple meter, while the middle section, in the minor mode, is a siciliano with constant sixteenth notes in the piano.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Sonata for Piano and Violin, Op. 12, No. 1 in D major

Beethoven was intimately familiar with both the violin and the piano. While he had a career as a virtuoso pianist, one of his first jobs as a teenager was as a violist in the court orchestra in his hometown of Bonn. He later befriended important Parisian violinists of the day, such as Louis Spohr and Pierre Rode. These acquaintances certainly influenced his approach to idiomatic violin writing. Of Beethoven's ten violin sonatas, nine were written before he reached the age of thirty-two.

Beethoven journeyed to Europe's musical capital, Vienna, in 1792, with the intention of studying with Joseph Haydn. However, due to the older composer's heavy traveling schedule, Beethoven ended up studying with Johann Georg Albrechtsberger and the opera composer Antonio Salieri, two of the most sought-after pedagogues in the city. Salieri later became the dedicatee of his first three violin sonatas. It was during this time, between 1797 and 1798, that Beethoven wrote his first Sonata for Pianoforte and Violin.

Beethoven begins this large-scale work with optimism and vitality, using an exuberant rhythmic figure in unison, followed immediately by the violin taking over the melody. The conversation between the partners is that of a true duo, with both musicians taking on equal roles. The development contains a surprising shift to F major before the piano uses the opening rhythmic motive to transition back to the return of the exposition. The second movement is a gracious theme followed by four variations. The third variation is in the minor tonic, a common move for both Mozart and Haydn in variation movements, yet unmistakably Beethovenian in character. The last movement is a frolicking, humorous, and brilliant rondo. At the end of a particularly melodious middle section, one hears glimmers of the first movement's opening rhythmic motive being used as transitional material. Even during this early work, one has a foretaste of Beethoven's organicism and economy of material, a trademark of his later works.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 21 in E minor, K. 304

During the time when Mozart wrote his Violin Sonata in E minor, he had written in a letter, "You have no idea what a dreadful time I am having here. . . . You may have gathered that I am not very happy, and that . . . I am trying to get away as quickly as possible." The twenty-one-year-old composer had come to Paris in 1778 at the behest of his father, accompanied by his mother, Anna Maria Mozart. The young Mozart encountered difficulties finding a job and soon grew tired of traveling from house to house, performing for nobility that understood neither his music nor his abilities. As if that weren't enough, soon after, his mother's health began a rapid decline. Due to poor living conditions, hunger, and Mozart's financial hardship, his mother passed away in July of 1778. The composer was left alone in a foreign country, mourning his mother's death and struggling with finding work that he enjoyed. These feelings are reflected both in his E-minor Violin Sonata and his A-minor Sonata for Piano, written soon after.

Of the thirty-six violin sonatas by Mozart, the Sonata in E minor, K. 304, is the only work in a minor key. It is the penultimate piece in the six Palatine Sonatas (K. 301 to 306). The work, in two movements, begins with a terse, unadorned unison between the violin and piano. Each time this theme returns, the mood is shown in a slightly varied light through a different harmonization or texture in the accompaniment. The development section begins in the even bleaker key of B minor, becoming more dissonant as it progresses. The somber second movement is marked *Tempo di menuetto*. An elegiac opening theme is heard over a left hand, which outlines a "lament bass" (a line that descends stepwise, a motive dating back to the late Renaissance period), traditionally a symbol for death and grief. The simple yet somber theme becomes more intensely chromatic and texturally thick with each return. The middle section features a tender trio in E major, contrasting in its sweetness. One could conjecture that it may be a memory, or even Mozart's desire for peace. Before the close of the piece, he introduces a new theme, perhaps the most beautiful and moving measures of the movement. This gesture reinforces the view that Mozart's music was never rigid within the classical form. His pen was always overflowing with new ideas that were nevertheless seamlessly related: a testament to his improvisatory mind.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Violin Sonata in F major, Op. 24 ("Spring")

Beethoven's Violin Sonata in F major, Op. 24, written between 1800 and 1801 when he was thirty-one, is his fifth sonata for the instrument. While its nickname, *Spring Sonata*, is not from Beethoven, its key of F major held associations with nature, even before Beethoven's own *Pastoral* Symphony in the same key. He originally conceived it as a companion piece to the

preceding violin sonata, Op. 23, which, along with Op. 24, was dedicated to Count Moritz von Fries.

The Sonata in F major begins with Beethoven in his most melodious mood. Unlike in his preceding sonatas, the violin alone introduces the theme, accompanied by the piano. Soon after, the roles are reversed. A sprightly and rhythmic second theme is used as the main material for the development section. The slow movement begins with an intensely intimate theme. As the music progresses, it grows evermore inward and fanciful in its embellishments. The third movement is a lighthearted diversion after the preceding movements. Beethoven consistently—and humorously—features the violin a beat late. It is not until the middle trio section that the discrepancy is resolved and the two instruments play in perfect rhythmic cooperation. In the final Rondo movement (which opens uncannily similarly to the last movement of his Piano Sonata, Op. 22), Beethoven returns to the melodic graciousness of the first movement. Despite some blustery triplets and dotted rhythms, the main theme invariably returns with gracefulness. As the piece nears its end, a new theme never heard before emerges, one that the great philosopher Theodor Adorno calls an “affirmative gesture of thanksgiving.”

Angelo Xiang Yu writes, “The ‘Spring’ Sonata by Beethoven has a very unique meaning during the pandemic. This piece itself was never meant to describe the blue sky, green grass, and beautiful flowers of the spring as many people thought—quite the contrary—it is a piece which is filled with struggling and yearning, which makes the hope of spring even stronger. I hope it is a piece that gives people hope during this difficult time through Music.”

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