

Christopher String Trio

Emilio Castro, violin · Casie Ford, viola · Paul Christopher, cello

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Duo in G major for violin and viola, K. 423

The two duos for violin and viola which Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed in 1783 are his only works for a pair of string instruments. On the contrary, there are no less than twenty-three completed string quartets, and his catalogue also contains works for string trio and six notable string quintets with a second viola added to the familiar quartet lineup. The pairing of violin and viola was not unfamiliar to Mozart, however, for he had already explored this combination in 1779 through his *Sinfonia concertante* for violin, viola, and orchestra. His decision to return to this pairing was not his own, nonetheless: it was a choice made to assist a friend who, due to illness, could not complete a commission himself.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Michael Haydn, the younger brother to the celebrated Joseph Haydn, had been asked to write a set of six duos for violin and viola. He was able to complete the first four in the keys of C, D, E, and F major, but his poor health prevented him from writing the remaining two duos. The younger Haydn had served as *Konzertmeister* in Mozart's native Salzburg from 1763; although his relations with Wolfgang's assertive father Leopold were sometimes tenuous, Wolfgang nonetheless always valued Michael Haydn's friendship and respected his music. Knowing his friend was in danger of not completing the commission, Mozart volunteered to write the other two duos anonymously and let them be presented under Haydn's name. Mozart's duos, those in the keys of G and B-flat major, appropriately complement the four Haydn had already written by impersonating some of the stylistic traits associated with this composer, especially his use of trills and embellishments.

Plenty, however, distinguishes the duos of Mozart from those of Haydn. Most significantly, Haydn treats the violin as the dominant melodic voice while relegating the viola to an accompaniment role typical of the era. Mozart though encourages dialogue and partnership between the two instruments, allowing the viola to be lyrical and virtuosic without sacrificing its traditional role as the bass line in such duos. Violinist Maya Magub has written, "The Mozart duos are true musical conversations: they sound fuller and have an enormous variety of color and texture." Considering Mozart's regard for the viola, it is not surprising that his duos would give more attention to this instrument than other composers had. His formidable prowess as a violinist and pianist is well-known, but Mozart was also an accomplished violist, and he would often take the role of violist in quartet performances. Needless to say, while the two duos of Mozart have been frequently performed and recorded, Haydn's duos have remained somewhat neglected, although his music was highly regarded in its day and his sacred works, in particular, still receive much praise today.

The Duo in G major, K. 423 is set in three movements according to the typical fast-slow-fast pattern. The opening *Allegro* follows sonata principle. It is joyous with its enthusiastic call-and-response texture. The flowing second movement *Adagio* is tender and lyrical in its relaxed conversation. After its wide explorations, it returns to familiar material towards its end. The third movement *Rondeau. Allegro* is in rondo form, alternating between the repeated theme and unfamiliar material. At its center, the movement takes a darker turn before a happier mood is restored to conclude the Duo.

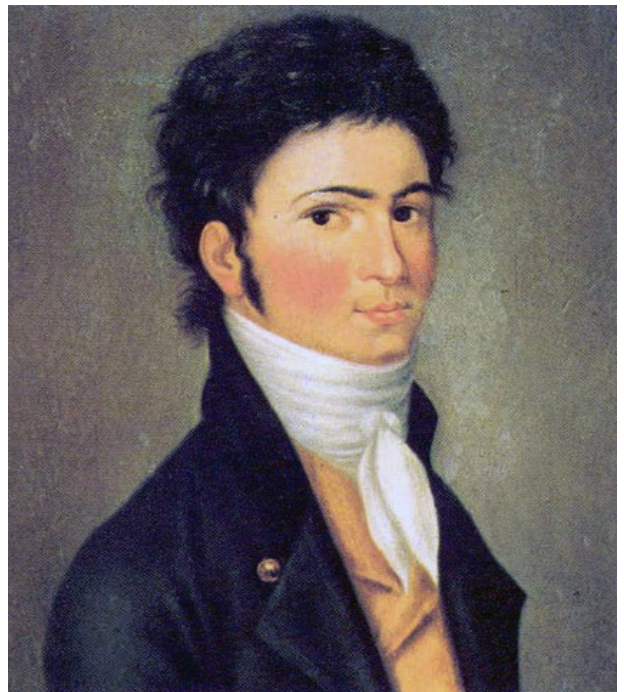
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Trio in D major, Op. 9 No. 2

The genre of string trio was one which occupied Ludwig van Beethoven for only a few years. Yet, alongside the one string trio produced by Mozart, the five created by Beethoven are regarded as among the greatest works in their genre. Beethoven's string trios are all early works, composed within his first ten years in Vienna. After beginning his cycle of string quartets in 1798, he would publish no further string trios. The earliest of the five is the Opus 3 Trio, published in 1796 and set in six movements much like the trio by Mozart. The Opus 8 Serenade for string trio, published the following year, witnesses Beethoven rethinking his approaches to such vital elements as form, color, and texture. Finally, in 1798, Beethoven published a set of three string trios as his Opus 9 from which we hear the second trio tonight.

The Opus 9 trios are in the keys of G major, D major, and C minor, respectively. Each is in four movements, according to what was by then the conventional pattern for symphonies, string quartets, and other instrumental genres: fast-slow-dance-fast. In these trios, unlike the Opus 8 Serenade, all three instruments are of equal importance, each member sharing melodic material, occasionally substituting as accompaniment, and periodically embarking on virtuosic passages. Beethoven certainly thought highly of these trios, calling them the "best of my works," and many movements rank alongside those of the Opus 18 string quartets, his first set of six, which Beethoven had already begun sketching by this time.

The Opus 9 set is dedicated to Count Johann Georg von Browne, a Vienna-based patron of Irish descent. Browne and his wife, in fact, were the recipients of several dedications by Beethoven during these first years in Vienna, including one which famously inspired Browne to present Beethoven with a horse! The first performances of the Opus 9 trios were given by Beethoven's friend the violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, likely with his colleagues the violist Franz Weiss and the cellist Nikolaus Kraft or his father Anton. Later, Schuppanzigh and his quartet would become the first professional string quartet and premiere many of Beethoven's works in this genre. Through these activities, Schuppanzigh would not only arouse excitement for Beethoven's music but also become one of the first musicians to create a public audience for chamber music.



Ludwig van Beethoven

The String Trio in D major, Op. 9 No. 2 begins on a playful note with its first movement *Allegretto*. Following sonata principle, this movement's exposition features a heralding first theme with mounting excitement matched by a more lyrical second theme. Short and motivic in construction, both themes change character through sequential repetitions. Early on, the violin alludes to its traditional role as the leading voice by breaking free for brief solo passages, but the viola and cello also demonstrate a willingness to partner either with each other or, as the viola does in the initial statement of the second theme, with the violin. These instruments also have their own solo passages. The development brings both themes into darker directions, before the recapitulation returns the themes to the light. The first movement ends forcefully with a triple stop by the violin and a quadruple stop by the cello, over a final descending trot by the viola.

The second movement *Andante quasi Allegretto* moves into the parallel key of D minor. The opening violin melody is slow and anguished; the violin and cello then alternate verses in the swaying tune which follows. Overall, the movement sounds as if it were a melancholic aria from an opera, an impression helped by the fact that Beethoven was at this time taking lessons in vocal composition from Vienna's leading opera composer, Antonio Salieri. The third movement *Menuetto. Allegro* is cheerier, now back in D major. The repeated minuet section is confident and bounding while the intervening trio is understated and cautious, primarily *staccato* in its expression.

The fourth movement *Rondo. Allegro* opens as the cello offers an encouraging solo which is soon echoed by the violin. After some exchange between these instruments, the violin eagerly launches into the first contrasting theme. Before long, the cello returns to its now familiar theme. Whereas the first contrasting section had followed a clean break, its successor grows

out of this familiar material, emerging as the music grows dark and contrapuntal. The cello again returns us to familiar territory with the violin initiating the final contrasting section, in a manner similar to the first. The final return to familiar material is initiated not by the cello but by the violin in an incredibly subtle fashion.

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About Jackson. Jackson Harmeyer is a composer, music scholar, and advocate of music. Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars' College located in Natchitoches, Louisiana in May 2013 after completing his undergraduate thesis "Learning from the Past: The Influence of Johann Sebastian Bach upon the Soviet Composers." As series director of the successful Abendmusik Alexandria chamber music series from May 2014 to April 2016, Jackson played a vital role in the renewal of interest in chamber music across Central Louisiana. This interest has encouraged the creation of the annual Sugarmill Music Festival and the new series Nachtmusik von BrainSurge, both of which Jackson remains active in as concert annotator and creative consultant. He also blogs at MusicCentral where he shares concert experiences, gives listening recommendations, posts interviews with contemporary composers, and offers insights into his own compositions. As a composer, Jackson has worked to integrate the vocabulary and grammar of modern music into pieces which are not only innovative but also engaging to the general listener. In fall 2016, Jackson began graduate studies in musicology at the University of Louisville where he has recently been awarded the Gerhard Herz Scholarship in recognition of his accomplishments. His current research interests include French spectral music and the compositions of Kaija Saariaho. He also sings with the University of Louisville Chorus and participates in the School of Music Composition Seminar. Learn more about Jackson Harmeyer, his scholarship, and his compositions at www.JacksonHarmeyer.com.