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Program Notes for Mozart Birthday Party

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791): Ingenious Master of Small Forces

Our endless fascination with Mozart reflects the impact this incredible artist made in his short 35-year life. While Mozart was not revolutionary in the way that Beethoven would be in the years following Mozart's death, Mozart's compositional models were groundbreaking nonetheless. Mozart's music exerted a profound influence over the composers that followed, often simply by demonstrating a new and vast range of possibilities within the forms that he inherited in 18th-century Austria.

Where Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) can be said to have invented the string quartet and modernized the symphony, Mozart took both of these forms further, with sophisticated melodies and the use of nuanced and complex harmonic devices. If Claudio Monteverdi can be credited with inventing opera in the early 17th century, it is Mozart who perfected the fusion between the theatrical and the musical in opera between 1782 and 1791, leading the way for the popular canon to follow.

For all of Mozart's miraculous musical "re-inventions," his own original inventions are somehow rarer but they do exist. Not only do the two works to be played tonight demonstrate Mozart's ingeniousness, but one of those pieces, the *Divertimento* K. 563, blazes a new trail that composers after him would choose to follow in reverence.

Duo for violin and viola in B flat, K. 424

The Duo for violin and viola in B flat, K. 424 was composed in the summer of 1783, along with a companion duo in G, K. 423. Several early sources relate that Mozart wrote these pieces to help his ailing older friend, composer Michael Haydn (brother of Franz Joseph Haydn). As the story goes, Haydn had become too ill to finish work on six duos commissioned by his employer, Hieronymus Joseph Franz Colloredo, the archbishop of Salzburg. Mozart is said to have stepped in to complete the set of six duos in Haydn's name to meet the deadline. If this story is true, then Mozart would probably have taken a measure of satisfaction in helping his friend fend off the suspension of his salary from the Archbishop, who happened to be Mozart's own much-despised former employer.

Some have suggested that the somewhat unusual trills and figuration in both of the duos may reflect Mozart's efforts to disguise his work as that of Michael Haydn. But Mozart endlessly experimented and often appropriated (and improved on) styles he encountered, making it difficult to ascribe intent to any stylistic shifts one might observe. It has also been recorded that the submission was accepted by Colloredo, with Mozart's hand going undetected.

This origin story of the duos first appears in the 1808 *Biographische Skizze von Michael Haydn*, by Werigand Rettensteiner, Georg Schinn, and Joseph Otter. Further support for the story is found in a surviving autograph score of the duos, on which a recital of the story was handwritten by the Austrian musicologist, Aloys Fuchs (1799-1853), the first important authenticator of Mozart manuscripts.

But a 1788 announcement of the forthcoming publication of the duos in Mozart's name would seem to call the whole episode into question. Early Mozart chroniclers, including Mozart's widow Constanze, her second husband, Georg Nikolaus von Nissen, and the musicologist Otto Jahn, all knowingly or unknowingly engaged in the posthumous embellishment of Mozart's biography, sometimes for commercial gain and other times seemingly out of romanticized sentimentality. The duos weren't actually published until 1792, a year after Mozart's death, so no edition approved by Mozart exists. The often-told story, while charming, may simply be an invented fantasy with little or no basis in actual events.

Whatever the truth, Mozart's voice is clear and strong in both works. The composer ingeniously optimizes the violin and viola together to create full-scale pieces. The K. 424 in B flat opens with a grand introduction to a Sonata Allegro form opening movement. The second movement, in E flat major, is a florid and beguiling aria for the violin that could easily have served as a soprano aria in an opera. The third movement is a glistening theme and variations that build tension over the successive variations to a brilliant ending.

Divertimento for String Trio, K. 563

1788 was a year in which Mozart produced a miraculous string of masterpieces, including his symphonies #39, #40, and #41, the Adagio in B Minor for piano solo, K. 540, the C Major Sonata K. 545, and the so-called the "Coronation" piano concerto K. 537 among others. Not least among these is the great *Divertimento for String Trio* K. 563, an extraordinary and unique work in all of western music. Mozart's manuscript for the *Divertimento K. 563* was lost, and the only reference to it in Mozart's hand can be found in a catalog of works the composer maintained from 1784-1791. Mozart notated a six-bar quotation of the piece with the title, "A *Divertimento*" for 1 violin, 1 viola, and violoncello, in six movements. The entry includes a completion date of September 27, 1788, placing it just weeks after the completion of his Symphony #41, *The Jupiter*.

The impetus for this uniquely sublime masterpiece remains unexplained. The piece is thought to have been dedicated to Michael Puchberg, a fellow freemason and friend to Mozart who was a frequent source of loans to Mozart over his last years. A dedication to Puchberg is supported circumstantially, but hard evidence is thin. Whatever the inspiration was, nearly 6 months passed between the composition of K. 563 in September 1788 and its first known performance

at the *Hôtel de Pologne* in Dresden on April 13, 1789, with Anton Teyber on violin, Mozart on viola, and Antonín Kraft on cello. Mozart was passing through Dresden on a tour of sorts, and presumably, the concert that included the *Divertimento* was staged as an earning opportunity for Mozart. But no further information has come to light about the reasons the piece was programmed or the initial reception it received.

Mystery surrounds even the title of *Divertimento* for K. 563. In the 1780s, the term was used more or less interchangeably with terms like *Serenade* and *Cassation* to denote outdoor music that would serve as light accompaniment to aristocratic social events. However, this moniker seems at odds with the seriousness and sublimity of the music in the *Divertimento* K. 563. To be sure, its form corresponds to the structure for a *Divertimento* (three to nine movements with minuets interspersed), and the music is written in a lighter, more subtle manner than Mozart might have chosen for a more dramatic setting. But K. 563 is by no means “outdoor background music.” In each of the six movements, subtle rhythmic textures, achingly beautiful harmonies, and extraordinary melodies are woven together into a narrative musical fabric with an indescribably iridescent sheen. K. 563 is a subtle, sophisticated work that cleverly demands the listener’s attention without hitting them over the head.

Clocking in at 45 minutes, K. 563 is nearly the longest work in Mozart’s chamber music oeuvre, exceeded in length only by the *Gran Partita* for winds. It is the earliest example of a string trio in which the three voices share equal independence and importance. The piece pushes the technical boundaries of each instrument, demanding true virtuosity from all three performers.

The *Divertimento* K. 563 was published posthumously in 1792 by Artaria, just a few months after Mozart’s death. It enjoyed popularity long before the now ubiquitous *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, which remained unpublished and unknown until 1827. The length and sophisticated subtlety of K. 563 creates programming challenges which may help to explain why the much more accessible *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* would eventually overtake K. 563 in popularity. But the *Divertimento* holds a special place among musicians as both the groundbreaker for independence of voices in a string trio, as the pinnacle of the form, and as a work that contains some of the most unique and sublime music in all of Mozart’s output.