

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791): Duo für Violine und Viola in G-dur, KV. 423

Mozart composed his G-major Duo for violin and viola as one of two duets for his old friend Michael Haydn (the younger brother of the more famous Joseph Haydn). The idea was for Mozart to write pieces he could pass off as Haydn's own, as his friend was unable to finish a commission from the Archbishop of Salzburg, Hieronymus Collredo, due to a protracted illness. The resulting two works, in G and B-flat, received widespread praise, more than the four duets of the set of six that Haydn had composed himself! As Mozart's relationship with the Archbishop was never a cordial one, it must have pleased him to know that his old enemy was unwittingly enjoying the music of his disliked former employee.

This duo is in three movements (fast-slow-fast as is the usual convention). Instead of relegating the viola to its usual role as accompanying voice, Mozart treats the two instruments as equal partners. The first movement features sparkling interchanges between the two instruments, the slow movement has an aria-like theme, reflecting on Mozart's love for opera and the human voice, and the last movement is a lilting rondo.

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