“You have no idea how well you play the violin. If only you would do yourself justice and play with boldness, spirit and fire, as if you were the greatest violinist in Europe!” Thus Leopold Mozart admonished his son Wolfgang Amadeus in 1777. A fine violinist, respected composer, and famous pedagogue, Leopold had published a popular treatise on violin playing in 1756, the year his son was born. The treatise, *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule*, remains very influential to this day.

The young Mozart began violin lessons at the tender age of six under the primary tutelage of his father. As a touring child prodigy, he performed on both violin and keyboard throughout Europe. At age 13, Mozart became second concertmaster to Michael Haydn (brother of Franz Joseph) of the Archbishop of Salzburg’s court orchestra. He led the orchestra frequently and took solo parts, often in his own works. But by 1777, he had been succeeded in this position by the Italian virtuoso Antonio Brunetti. Mozart’s concert activities were focused on the piano, and he usually favored the viola for playing chamber music. His father must have been quite disappointed. Perhaps their complex relationship had played a role in Mozart’s choices.

The last three of Mozart’s five violin concertos were composed in 1775 when he was 19. It is uncertain whether Mozart composed these five concertos for his own use or for Brunetti; both men had a set of parts in their possession. We do know that Mozart chose the alto voice in the Salzburg premiere of his final concerted work for violin, the 1779 Sinfonia concertante in E-flat major for violin and viola KV364. Brunetti performed as his soprano-voiced partner.

All five concertos follow the same basic pattern. The first movements are in sonata-allegro form with a double exposition (the first taken by the orchestra and the second by the soloist). The soloist is expected to perform an improvised or composed cadenza at the end of the recapitulation. The second movement of each concerto is in a contrasting key from the outer movements. They are also in sonata-allegro form and leave room for a cadenza just before the concluding phrase. The last movements of all except the first concerto are in rondo form. The Rondos of KV216, 218 and 219 each feature a middle section of a contrasting and individual character. Before each return to the rondo theme, the soloist is invited to play an *eingang*, a miniature cadenza-like flourish that serves as a connecting bridge.

KV219 in A major is the most popular of Mozart’s five violin concertos. It is the longest as well as the most original and adventurous, featuring some daringly imaginative structural experiments. The first movement is marked Allegro aperto (“open,” “frank”), a rare marking in Mozart's instrumental music but more common in his operas. The joyful opening tutti is followed by a surprise; the soloist enters with a tender Adagio, a type of interlude that does not appear in any of his other concertos. The Adagio material never again appears in the movement. After this brief digression, the soloist continues to startle by playing an entirely new Allegro melody while the orchestra repeats the original opening theme of the exposition, now transformed into an accompaniment. The soloist introduces additional new material of such a dramatic nature that one can almost imagine an operatic dialogue taking place between two characters, at times flirtatious, sentimental, anxious, and even angry. The second movement is calm, filled with graceful sighing figures and lovely melodies of an almost painful beauty. After the poignant development section, the main theme returns as a brief fugato. Inexplicably, Brunetti was dissatisfied with this movement and requested a replacement that became the equally gorgeous Adagio in E major, KV261.

The last movement is a gracious minuet. The solo and tutti iterations of the rondo theme are constantly varied with an inventiveness and playfulness that feels improvisatory. Halfway through the movement, aggressive, exotic-sounding music suddenly intrudes. Menacing and march-like, this music is typical of the "alla Turca" style that was immensely popular in the Classical period. Mozart imitates the clanging percussion of a Turkish military band by directing the cellos and basses to bang the wooden parts of their bows against the strings. "Alla Turca" music was used by such composers as Gluck and Haydn and famously by Mozart in his KV331 piano sonata and The *Abduction from the Seraglio*. So widespread was the fad for this type of faux-Turkish music that pianos built for home use often included an extra pedal that operated a pair of cymbals.

Far from a harmless amusement, this type of caricature stems from deep-seated cultural and political attitudes that reflected the Western world's fear of and fascination with Eastern and Arabic cultures and which exaggerated the "otherness" in order to retain a sense of superiority. In his 2010 book, "Representations of the Orient in Western Music: Violence and Sensuality," musicologist Nasser Al-Taee effectively argues that such problematic artistic responses are not confined to past centuries and memories of the Ottoman Empire, but in fact continue in our own time. While perhaps not as controversial as, for instance, American music in the minstrelsy tradition, an informed performer's decision whether to play Western music in the "alla Turca" style presents something of a moral dilemma. However, at least some of today's classical musicians in Turkey do not share my ambivalence. During my February 2011 Turkish debut, my colleagues in Ankara's Bilkent Symphony explained that they proudly embrace Mozart's Violin Concerto in A major, even augmenting the orchestra with authentic Turkish percussion instruments during the "Turkish" section of the last movement.

In Mozart's day, concertos usually were performed without the benefit of a baton-wielding conductor. The soloist would lead the orchestra and join in with the first violin section when not playing his own solo part, or would direct the tuttis with his hands if playing a different instrument such as the piano or clarinet. I follow this tradition even for performances when a conductor helps me in the leadership duties. This chamber music approach, in which I am the first among equals, enables the music's flow and texture to sound more authentic and to feel more satisfying than if I were to drop in and out as in a Romantic concerto.

Mozart did not leave any written cadenzas or *eingänge* for the violin concertos as he did for the piano. Soloists from Mozart's time created cadenzas extemporaneously. Later on, many great violinists of the 19th and 20th Centuries composed and published their cadenzas. Contemporary soloists often choose to play these, particularly Joseph Joachim's. However, I always play my own, as I feel that this is the most personal and organic way to express my feelings about the music. My cadenzas for KV211, 216, 218 and 219 are included in The Rachel Barton Pine Collection, a book of sheet music published by Carl Fischer.

--Note by Rachel Barton Pine