

A painting of a beach scene. The foreground is dominated by a sandy beach with various textures and colors, including shades of brown, tan, and grey. In the middle ground, there is a fence made of vertical wooden posts, and behind it, a line of green trees. The background shows a blue sky with some white clouds and a body of water on the left side. The overall style is impressionistic with visible brushstrokes.

MOZART AMONG FRIENDS

JAMES HOWSMON, PIANO
MARILYN McDONALD, VIOLIN

MOZART AMONG FRIENDS

JAMES HOWSMON, PIANO MARILYN McDONALD, VIOLIN

LESLIE MILLER (1949-2016), PAINTER

After performing the complete set of Mozart Sonatas for Pianoforte and Violin, James Howsmon and Marilyn McDonald decided to share three of the lesser known gems on this recording. Perhaps smaller in scope but not in creativity, these sonatas are wonderful examples of the full range of Mozart's genius. The friends referred to are, of course, the performers, but also their late friend, who painted the landscape on the cover.

1-2 SONATA IN G MAJOR, K. 379

- I. Adagio – Allegro 9:34
- II. Andantino cantabile [Theme and Variations] 9:29

3-5 SONATA IN F MAJOR, K. 377

- I. Allegro 6:32
- II. Temo con variazioni. Andante 9:01
- III. Tempo di menuetto, un poco allegretto 5:33

6-8 SONATA IN A MAJOR, K. 526

- I. Molto allegro 7:06
- II. Andante 6:48
- III. Presto 7:38

Total: 61:41



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

JAMES HOWSMON has collaborated on more than 1,000 recitals in North America, Europe, and Japan, and has performed with principal players of every major American orchestra. In recent seasons, he has played in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington, D.C. (at the Kennedy Center), Philadelphia, Dallas, Montreal, and Minneapolis. Highlights include performances of Stravinsky's *Les Noces* with the Cleveland Orchestra, conducted by Pierre Boulez; a series of the complete Mozart sonatas for piano and violin with violinist Marilyn McDonald; and several performances of Schubert's *Die Schöne Müllerin* with the prominent Dutch bass-baritone Robert Holl. He is a frequent performing artist on Oberlin Conservatory's stages, recently playing Poulenc's *Aubade* with the Oberlin Sinfonietta and Messiaen's *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste* with the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble.

Howsmon is professor of instrumental accompanying at Oberlin Conservatory, where he oversees the instrumental collaborative activities of the school's 100 piano majors. He is also on the faculty of Credo, a summer chamber music program held on Oberlin's campus. From 1999 to 2006, Howsmon served on the piano faculty of the Brevard Music Center. He has given guest master classes in accompanying and chamber music at the Juilliard School, Cleveland Institute of Music, Interlochen Arts Academy, Arizona State University, University of Colorado, University of Minnesota, and the University of Alabama, among others.



Jeudi 23
11 HEURES

THE SMITHSONIAN SINGING QUARTET

Oeuvres de
Beethoven - Mozart
Brahms

DONALD
K

A violinist whose performances have been called “sparkling with dazzling virtuosity” (*Houston Chronicle*), **MARILYN McDONALD** has toured worldwide as a member of the Castle Trio, Smithson String Quartet, Oberlin Baroque Ensemble, and Ensemble Pierrot, a group specializing in contemporary music. She is a member of the Axelrod Quartet, in which she performs on the Smithsonian Institution’s Stradivarius instruments.

McDonald’s appearances reflect her versatility: soloist with the Milwaukee Symphony, concerts at the Caramoor Festival, Yale University, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alice Tully Hall, Library of Congress, Mostly Mozart Festival, and the Utrecht Festival. Summer festivals include Oberlin’s Baroque Performance Institute, Colorado College Festival, and the Fairbanks (Alaska) and Bowdoin festivals.

Since 1979, McDonald has been professor of violin at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where she earned the Excellence in Teaching Award. She enjoys an international reputation as a pedagogue of both Baroque and modern violin. Her students are well represented in orchestras throughout the world and have been first-prize winners in the Naumberg, Locatelli, and Berkeley Bach competitions. She has held visiting professorships at Indiana University and the Eastman School of Music.

McDonald has recorded for Sony, Vox, Smithsonian, Gasparo, Decca, Harmonia Mundi, Telarc, and Virgin Classics, which released the Castle Trio’s critically acclaimed complete Beethoven trios.

Mozart's mature instrumental music represents our civilization's sign for the beautiful. We cannot think of him without thinking of beauty; we cannot refer to beauty without recalling his music.

—Maynard Solomon, *Mozart: A Life*

The sentiment that inspired the title of this recording holds a dimension beyond the first layer—one that is rather more historical. Chamber music during Mozart's time was not the spectator sport it has become today. Public concerts of these kinds of pieces were rare, so people who wanted to hear them had to get together and play them. The performers were, strictly speaking, amateurs, though the term "amateur" admittedly carried a different meaning in mid-18th century Europe than it does for us today. In Mozart's time, music instruction was de rigueur for children of the middle and upper classes. Those so-called amateurs were quite well schooled: Keyboards were found in most homes, and many children learned stringed instruments as well. It was for this home audience that Mozart wrote his 30-some duo sonatas for piano and violin. Their significance in this context is that they clearly arose from an amateur musical culture that was social in nature and essential to the meaning of chamber music. It was, in other words, "Mozart among friends."

—James Howsmon and Marilyn McDonald

NOTES

JOHANNES CHRYSOSTOMUS WOLFGANGUS THEOPHILUS MOZART, to quote his full baptismal name, was born January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria, the youngest of seven children.

His first dozen sonatas for piano with violin, almost unknown today, are juvenilia—so early in his output that they come down to us only in his father's handwriting. The first mature sonatas date from 1778, when Mozart was a ripe old 22. They appear in Köchel's thematic catalog of Mozart's works as K. 296 and 301-306 and were written during the Mozart family's travels to Paris and Mannheim. They show the influence of regional musical styles encountered by Mozart, and the harrowing E-minor sonata, K. 304, is said to reflect his grief upon the death of his mother in Paris during the summer. He published K. 301-306 as Opus 1 that year.

Returning home with his sister, Mozart quickly chafed under the provincial musical life in rural Austria. He was employed for several years by the Catholic Archdiocese of Salzburg, where his duties included producing sacred liturgical music for the cathedral and secular instrumental music, including at least 34 of his 40 or so symphonies, for his employer and patron, the redoubtable Prince-Archbishop Colloredo.

The year 1781 brought a decisive break with Mozart's past: He left the archbishop's employ and moved permanently to the capital city of Vienna. Piano/violin duos continued to be of creative importance to him—a fact evidenced by his choice of a set of six sonatas for piano and violin as his first Viennese publication. Four of them, K. 376-377 and K. 379-380, had just been written and thus can lay plausible

claim to having been the first music he wrote as a new resident of the imperial capital. The collection, designated Opus 2, was released by the firm of Artaria and Co. One reason for publishing quickly was purely practical: Vienna had a robust demand for sheet music intended for home use, and the retail shops of the city's numerous music publishers enjoyed a steady business in sheet music aimed at amateurs and suitable for home consumption and performance. Mozart, as a recent arrival seeking to make a name for himself, needed some new works displayed in music shop windows. With these six sonatas in print, he could appeal to the music-loving (and music-buying) public and also have some "calling cards" that could be used for the contacts he needed to make and in the concerts he started to organize for himself.

SONATA IN G MAJOR, K. 379

Mozart himself gave the first performance of the sonata in G, K. 379, on April 8, 1781, with the visiting Italian violinist Antonio Brunetti. He told his father that he had composed the sonata "last night between 11 o'clock and midnight," and thus had had time to write out only the violin part before the concert, playing the performance with "my own part in my head." (A glance at the manuscript in the Library of Congress confirms this story.) The sonata has an unconventional shape, with a centrally placed, minor-key Allegro of unusual vigor and intensity, balanced on either side by a florid Adagio in G major and a set of variations on a cheerful, ingratiating theme, also in G. The outer sections sing; the middle storms and rages. Overall, it gives the impression of unimaginable talent flexing its muscles, preparing to soar.

SONATA IN F MAJOR, K. 377

In juxtaposition to the formal audacity of K. 379, the Sonata in F, K. 377, contains a nod to an older tradition: the minuet as finale. Minuet finales had been a common convention in Mozart's youth, and there are dozens of examples in his Salzburg-era works. They tended to be (and this particular finale is no exception) lighter in weight and intensity than the opening allegros and the slow movements. This reflected the Classical practice of putting the weightier movements at the beginning of a multi-movement work, thus creating the effect of a lessening of tension over the course of a piece. Beethoven is usually credited with changing this model, but in fact both Haydn and Mozart experimented with distributing the emotional weight of a multi-movement piece more evenly across its duration. The six sonatas of Mozart's Opus 2 show varying approaches to this question, with the K. 377 sonata seeming to be the most old-fashioned in its formal layout. His decision to acknowledge a past practice in the new F-major sonata might be interpreted as a deliberate and decisive leave-taking, since the minuet finale becomes extremely rare in his multi-movement works after 1781. We can be thankful for this last lingering look at an old tradition, though, for this movement is enchanting in its elegance, eloquence, and poise. Indeed, the decreasing musical tension is well calculated here. The first movement brims with triplet-driven energy in almost every bar, and the middle-movement variations are unexpectedly serious, at one point anticipating the variations of the later D-minor string quartet, K. 421.

SONATA IN A MAJOR, K. 526

These first Viennese sonatas reveal another innovation noticeable in the musical language of the era: the emancipation, in duo writing, of the violin from the piano, a token of the gradual democratization of part writing that Haydn was experimenting with at the time. This would soon become apparent in Mozart's six string quartets dedicated to Haydn, composed between 1782 and 1785. In the genre of the duo sonata, it ultimately bore fruit in the three Viennese sonatas Mozart wrote between 1784 and 1787. The third sonata in the series (K. 526) is thought by some to be the greatest. Here we find Mozart in his glorious prime, showing effortless mastery of every facet of the composer's art: an unerring sense of texture, a seemingly endless font of melody, and a contrapuntal ease, especially in the spacious rondo that ends the piece, that never feels self-conscious or impinges on the music's feeling of inevitability and perfection.

OBERLIN MUSIC is the official record label of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. It celebrates the artistic vision and superlative talent of Oberlin's faculty, students, and alumni—on campus and on tour. Essential to this mission is Clonick Hall, a superior recording facility dedicated to capturing studio sessions in the heart of the conservatory. Oberlin Music titles are available on CD and digital music channels worldwide. For more information, visit oberlin.edu/oberlinmusic.

OBERLIN CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC, founded in 1865 and situated amid the intellectual vitality of Oberlin College, is the oldest continuously operating conservatory in the United States. Recognized as a professional music school of the highest caliber, it was awarded the National Medal of Arts, the country's highest honor given to artists and arts patrons.

LABEL DIRECTOR: Michael Straus

EDITORIAL DIRECTORS: Cathy Partlow Strauss and Erich Burnett

PRODUCER: Paul Eachus

AUDIO ENGINEERING, EDITING, AND MASTERING: Paul Eachus

PHOTOGRAPHY: Jenn Manna, jennmanna.com

GRAPHIC DESIGN: Judith Hudson Design

COVER IMAGE: Leslie Miller

DEAN OF THE CONSERVATORY: Andrea Kalyn

Recorded in January and February 2014 at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

