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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote 32 violin sonatas during his lifetime, beginning their composition in 1764 and ending them in 1788.¹ His youthful sonatas are at the level of accompanied piano sonatas, but he moved on to create a type of piano duet with obbligato violin while still a young man. Once Mozart reached full maturity, however, his violin sonata reached its pinnacle, with true independence of parts and a place for the violin as a full partner.²

One of the so called “duets” is the sonata K. 304. Mozart wrote this piece while in Paris in the summer of 1778.³ This is the young man’s first look into the world of minor keys. Written in E minor, this piece has an intensity not usually seen with the young composer. This piece was written around the time that Mozart’s mother died, and many have supposed that this piece was a result of those feelings. Even so, the piece still has a surface level to it. The work never moves past a certain point in intensity.

The piece can be played by the piano alone, and no thematic elements will be missing. The violin does add color to the work, and it gains a certain measure of independence, but it remains shackled to the piano for most of the time. It is more

² Ulrich, 212.
³ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Violin Sonata K. 304*. (Kassel: Barentreiter-Verlag, 1964.).
independent than Mozart’s earliest sonatas, but has not gained the level that later works will.⁴

In Vienna in August of 1787, Mozart composed the sonata K. 526.⁵ He was concurrently working on his opera *Don Giovanni*.⁶ The K. 526 is in A-major and is the second to last one he wrote. As with the opera, Mozart was able to show his full maturity as a composer in this sonata. The violin gains full independence and becomes a full partner in the chamber music experience with the piano. Little is known of why he composed this particular sonata, and even less is known of its performances.⁷

This piece absolutely cannot survive without the violin. Both instruments have themes the other does not and the interplay between the two is crucial. There are moments of question-and-answer and even stretto. There is a very large difference between nine years in this composer’s life as regards violin sonatas. An analysis of the first movement from each of these sonatas will show just how much of a difference there is.

The first movement of K. 304 is in sonata form. Right from measure one, the piano shadows the violin in the first theme. It may be an octave and two below, but the theme is completely shared by both instruments. Even in the lower octave, the piano could, in theory, start this piece alone and nothing would be missing (Example 1).

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⁴ Ulrich, 211.
⁵ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Violin Sonata K. 526*. (Kassel: Barentreiter-Verlag, 1964.).
⁷ Hildesheimer, 214
Example 1  Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Violin Sonata K. 304, mvt. 1, mm. 1-8, Exposition, First theme.

As both instruments move to the bridge that leads to another statement of the first theme, the piano actually moves up to unison with the violin (Example 2). This again gives the violin no freedom, and furthers the point that this movement can be played by piano alone, and nothing will be missing structurally from the piece.
As the violin begins its restatement of the first theme in the pickup to measure 13, the piano plays new material that the violin never present. The movement of notes is of an accompaniment style. Now the violin finally has some independence with the first theme, to bring out the timbre and tone of the instrument while the piano accompanies with harmony in quarter notes (Example 3).
As the violin ends the second statement, the piano again moves to new material while the violin provides a pedal on a low E. The violin eventually plays this material, but not until the very end of the movement in the pickup to measure 205. While the piano plays this essentially descending theme, the violin moves from holding the E and jumps the octave to play a chromatic motive beginning in the pickup to measure 23 (Example 4). Every time the piano plays this particular new music, the violin plays this chromatic motive above it. It is stylistically an accompaniment and can be argued that nothing would be missing if the piano alone played what could be considered the bridge to the second theme.
The second theme begins in the pickup to measure 29. The piano actually has the entire theme. The violin cuts in and out of it, once again, accompanying the piano. In measure 36 the violin plays arpeggiation under the piano repeating the theme. Beginning with the pickup to measure 41, the violin finally plays the theme in its entirety (Example 5).
Example 5  Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Violin Sonata K. 304, mvt. 1, mm. 25-42, Exposition, Second theme.

Now the violin rests in measure 44, as the piano begins to cadence. The violin must wait for this before being allowed the opportunity to follow with roughly the same material. The difference really lies in measure 53, where the violin begins a chromatic ascent, reminiscent of the earlier accompaniment to the piano’s bridge material. The violin finishes with a powerful cadence in the relative major of G (Example 6).
Beginning in measure 59, the closing section belongs once again to the piano. The piano begins by breaking apart the first theme. When the violin presents the same material in measure 63, it is underneath the piano in range. This continues until measure 67 (Example 7).
In measure 67 the piano takes bits from the second theme, with the violin following in measure 70. After that, the violin holds double stops while the piano expands on the dotted motive of the second theme (Example 8). The section ends with the piano an octave above the violin and the violin in the low to middle range of the instrument, giving it a weak voice to close the exposition.
The development section of this movement is very short, consisting of 27 and one half measures. The violin begins by resting, while the piano plays the first theme in a new key. In measure 89, the violin does begin alone in stating new material based upon the first theme, but the piano follows a measure later. A measure of independence is gained, however, as the violin continues to spiral the new material into a true statement of the first theme in the tonic (Example 9). The piano merely sequences the new material. It could be argued, however, that the piano has the real new material in measure 90, and the violin is accompaniment. In measure 98 the violin plays the new material in the same
way as the piano did in measure 90, leading one to think that perhaps the violin merely preempted the piano in measure 89.

Example 9  Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Violin Sonata K. 304, mvt. 1, mm. 85-105, Development.

As the violin provides a pedal E again, the tonic, in the form of eighth notes in measure 96, the piano begins the last half of the first theme in a new key for another time. In measure 100 the violin begins a trill sequence while the lower staff of the piano plays the fragments of the bridge from the beginning of the exposition. In measure 104, the development is moving into the recapitulation, so the mood becomes a bit more intense. The piano begins a brilliant chromatic passage for two measures, repeated twice, while the violin plays its own chromatic line. While not as intense by any means as the piano’s dramatic run downward, the violin lends a complementary chromatic accompaniment.
Finally in measure 108, the two play the bridge from the exposition in unison linking the first theme. It, of course, links the development to the recapitulation, with a restatement of the first theme in the tonic.

The violin attains a modicum of independence here as it states the first theme alone, with the piano pressing out eighth-note accompaniment. From here to the end, however, the recapitulation is just like the exposition in terms of independence of parts. The recapitulation is almost identical to the exposition with only minor details changed, such as the return to E-minor for the entire recapitulation.

The real changes happen in measure 173. The violin here is still playing the double stop accompaniment it was in measure 73, but now the stops have a chromatic push to them (Example 10). In measure 183 the violin is once again pushed an octave below the piano’s range as they state new material based on the first theme (Example 11). The violin has a difficult time being heard as it is still in the low to middle range of the instrument.
Example 10  Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Violin Sonata K. 304, mvt. 1, mm. 169-180, Recapitulation, Second theme fragments.

Example 11  Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Violin Sonata K. 304, mvt. 1, mm. 169-180, Recapitulation, New material.

In the pickup to measure 193 the violin embarks on a more independent part, or at least a more audible part, until the end of the piece. Once again the violin restates the first theme alone, with an eighth-note accompaniment from the piano. Finally in the
pickup the measure 205, the violin plays the new material from the exposition that the piano had so many times before. The violin is also an octave above the piano (Example 12). They play this music together, but the violin is able to soar above the piano into a truly more suitable range, and ends the movement proudly.

Example 12  Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Violin Sonata K. 304, mvt. 1, mm. 189-209, Recapitulation, Closing section, First theme.

Performance issues to consider when playing this movement and this piece include considerations of balance so the violin is heard. The piano is often above the violin in range, while the violin is in a lower range. It is important for the performer to
recognize these spots and adjust accordingly. The violinist must not be afraid of overpowering the piano. The violin does not get a lot of freedom either, so when it does happen, the performer should highlight these moments. The violin has the capability to bring an intense character to this piece. Careful analysis of the piece will provide the performer with the tools needed to make this piece a “duet,” rather than just a piano sonata with violin accompaniment.

In stark contrast to this early sonata is Mozart’s Violin Sonata K. 526. The number comes directly after K. 525, which happens to be the opera Don Giovanni. Many consider this opera to be the pinnacle of his œuvre. He actually composed this sonata while he was writing the opera. No longer is the violin an obbligato over the piano’s solo sonata; now both instruments truly engage in chamber music together. If one part is taken away, the other cannot stand alone. At Mozart’s full maturity is true independence of parts and a true violin sonata.

The first movement in sonata form begins lively with the piano stating the first theme and the violin copying a third above. The piano begins the bridge in measure five while the violin accompanies the motives. In measure nine the violin takes over and repeats the first theme, soaring high above the piano’s accompaniment. The violin also takes the bridge in measure 13, while the piano copies the violin accompaniment from before (Example 13). Already this exchange and lack of unison parts shows a great deal of difference between early and late sonatas.
In measure 22, both instruments begin to play material that neither will imitate. Piano and violin are each playing something unique. The piano plays a sweeping sixteenth-note measure in the middle of the phrase while the violin plays a gentle slurred eighth-note accompaniment.

Measure 28 sees the piano begin the second theme. The violin rests here and waits to follow. When the violin does follow, the piano truly accompanies the theme, with material that is nothing like the theme, and nothing like anything the violin has or will play in the movement. The piano takes off in measure 43 with running sixteenths, as
the violin accompanies with simple double stops (Example 14). This bridge material is again separate for each instrument.

Example 14  Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Violin Sonata K. 526, mvt. 1, mm. 33-52, Exposition, Second theme and bridge.

The violin begins the third theme in measure 54, while the piano arpeggiates below it. When the piano echoes the theme in measure 65, the violin takes over the arpeggiation, but it is not the same as the piano’s previous accompaniment. It is suited better to the instrument at hand and follows more of a rising than descending pattern.
The exposition closes with the two instruments echoing brilliant sixteenth-note runs. In measure 90, both instruments play a chromatic figure followed by a move to cadence. What happens instead is a bridge into the development section. Piano and violin trade chromatic eighth-note patterns, but the violin comes in as a surprise in measure 97, closing the section with a sixteenth-note run and string chords (Example 15).

Example 15  Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Violin Sonata K. 526, mvt. 1, mm. 92-104, Exposition, Closing section.

The development begins again with the piano playing a fragment of the first theme and the violin copying at the third below. Two measures later have the same with a modulation and the violin now a fourth below. Upon conclusion, measure 105 brings back the idea played ever so briefly in the closing of the exposition. The piano begins the
eighth-note chromatic slide ascent with an arpeggiation down for two measures. The violin answers with one measure and the piano retorts that with a loud chord in the upper stave and the same pattern in the lower stave (Example16).

Example 16  Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Violin Sonata K. 526, mvt. 1, mm. 98-111, Development, First theme fragments and chromatic passage.

Now the violin plays with this new theme in measure 109. The piano answers and the violin plays the jarring surprise chord while the piano still plays that new motive in the lower stave. In measure 120, the fragments of the first theme come back, with the piano first playing and the violin creating a stretto a measure later. Measure 129 sees a return of the chromatic sweep as each instrument echoes one measure at a time.
In measure 136 the violin begins a sequence, with the piano starting just before, giving another stretto effect. This sequencing leads to measure 140, where the recapitulation begins. Because there has already been so much independence of parts as of this section, the recapitulation offers no real extra moments for either instrument. It is identical to the exposition, except as regards key, and the ending of the movement ends just as the exposition ended. There is no need to add anything extra for the violin as it has already had quite an equal hand in this movement.

As regards performance issues, the same applies as before, but for different reasons. The violin must be heard, not because the piano is playing the same thing an octave higher, but because the violin is a true partner and is playing material the piano will not. The violinist must answer the pianist as an equal and graceful partner. Analyzing the piece shows the equality therein and the performer must be ready for the task.

After careful analysis of these two movements, it is quite easy to see what a difference Mozart placed on the role of the violin in a sonata as he aged and matured. Although the E-minor sonata was his first foray into minor keys and is considered to be a work of unusual intensity for the young man, the violin part is not integral to the piece, it may only lend a somber and sighing tone that piano cannot muster. The A-major sonata, however, cannot survive without the violin. Take it away and one would listen to huge gaps in music as themes went missing and bridge material simply vanished.

At the time of his youth, Mozart was really following the example of the “Piano Sonata with Violin Obbligato” set before him by his predecessors and contemporaries.
As an example, the six violin sonatas of Handel read more as improvisations by both piano and violin. There are movements where the piano has an almost figured-bass part, while the violin improvises above. Other movements have a duet characteristic to them. The elder Haydn composed violin sonatas that were completely characteristic of a duet. Some movements even mirror the E-minor sonata in that the violin part could possibly be taken out and nothing thematic would be missing from the pieces. In fact, the only sonata he actually composed for the medium is opus 70. All the other sonatas are arrangements of other works, mostly piano sonatas.

As Mozart matured he came into his own and saw that the violin could be an equal partner with the piano, and that true chamber music could exist between them. Mozart paved the way for the famous violin sonatas of Ludwig van Beethoven, who from the start, gave equal footing to both instruments in his works. Once at maturity, Mozart caused the violin sonata to never be looked at in the same way again. He allowed it to truly join the world of chamber music.

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