

# String Quintet in G Minor, K. 516

## Concert Guide



St. Louis Symphony  
Orchestra

Stéphane Denève : Music Director

### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

String Quintet in G Minor, K. 516

Allegro

Menuetto: Allegretto (11:20)

Adagio ma non troppo (16:32)

Adagio-Allegro (24:57)

First performance: 1789

Approximate duration: 35 minutes

String Quintet in G Minor, K. 516 was  
recorded on February 28, 2021.

This concert is available at  
[slo.org/digital-classroom-2024](https://slo.org/digital-classroom-2024).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) is often known for being a child prodigy and composing many musical compositions in his short life. He wrote several sonatas (solo instrument with piano accompaniment), concertos (solo instrument with orchestra accompaniment), operas, 41 symphonies, and 23 string quartets.

Mozart wrote 23 string quartets in his lifetime, which are considered some of the most significant examples of chamber music. Chamber music is classical music composed for a small group of instruments, typically no more than ten players. During Mozart's era, chamber music was often played in the intimate setting of a patron's (a paying customer's) home, as it was considered a form of entertainment for a small group of friends or family members. The string quartet, consisting of two violins, a viola, and a cello, was a popular ensemble for chamber music during Mozart's time.

In 1787, Mozart composed a viola quintet (two violins, two violas, and a cello) as part of his new job composing chamber music for Emperor Joseph II in Vienna. Unlike his popular string quartets, the quintets were not well-received by his audiences. As a result, he spent much time and effort promoting the pieces to get them published and to have them performed.

The String Quintet in G Minor by Mozart is composed of four distinct movements. The first movement, "Allegro," is lively yet tense. Throughout the movement, the middle and lower-pitched instruments play short, repeated chords to accompany the two main melodies performed by the violin and viola. The second movement is a minuet, a traditional French social dance for two people typically done in 3/4 time. Mozart deviates from a traditional minuet's elegant, dance-like feel by interrupting it with sharp, almost angry-sounding chords. Marked "Adagio" or slow, the third movement features tender melodies played on muted strings. Rather than starting the fourth movement with a lively tempo to contrast the slow third movement, Mozart begins with a slow and intense melody accompanied by repeated chords reminiscent of the first movement. Eventually, the tempo changes to a lively "Allegro," bringing the quintet to a much brighter ending.

# Viola String Quintet in G Minor, K. 516

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## Activities To Enrich Student Learning

1. Mozart usually composed music for money. If you could pay a composer like Mozart to write a piece of music for a small group made up of you and your friends, what instruments would the piece be written for? What occasion would you want it played at? What would you want the music to express – a story, a mood, a scene?
2. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) was a famous composer born about 50 years after Mozart's death. Tchaikovsky was a big fan of Mozart and his work. He wrote this about the third movement of Mozart's quintet: "No one has ever known as well how to interpret so exquisitely in music the sense of resigned and inconsolable sorrow." Do you agree? Do you think the third movement sounds resigned and sorrowful? What makes it sound like that?
3. Learn from the pros! Discuss how the experience of seeing and hearing the SLSO has informed your own music-making. What did you see or hear the SLSO musicians doing that you could strive toward, both individually and as an ensemble? What do you think it would take for you to perform with a professional music ensemble one day?
4. Following the concert, complete the following statements: "I noticed...", "I enjoyed...", "I wonder..."

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