

Köchel numbers

I have long associated Mozart's works with the numbers from the Köchel catalogue, so that, for example, the number 465 instantly evokes in my mind the slow chromatic introduction to the C major "Dissonance" quartet. During our first year in Canada, my wife and I lived at a house bearing the number 899, a disappointingly unevocative number, I thought, since I knew that Köchel's catalogue ends at 626 with the Requiem. Then we moved to our present address, 529 Piccadilly Street. The number 529 was equally unevocative; a consultation of Alfred Einstein's Mozart biography revealed it to correspond merely to an isolated song, unknown to me. Compounding my frustration was the fact that the number of the next door house is 533, the Köchel number of my beloved Mozart piano sonata, the contrapuntal two movement sonata in F. I was further chagrined to find that just down the street there are three successive houses bearing numbers corresponding to some of my favourite works, 499 (D major "Hoffmeister" quartet) 511 (A minor rondo for piano) and 515 (C major quintet) – the presence of an intervening side street explains the incongruous jump from 499 to 511. I remained unhappy with my house number until it struck me after a while (no Ramanujan am I) that 529 is the square of the prime number 23, Alban Berg's "magic" number, which pops up in many of his compositions (for example, the number of bars in each movement of his "Lyric Suite" is a multiple of 23). Stimulated by these revelations, it suddenly occurred to me that my initial house number 899 was less dull than I had first thought, mathematically at least: it's the product of 29 and 31, a pair of "twin" primes. I was delighted!