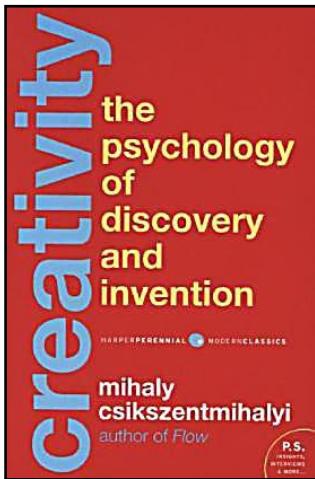


“Unlocking Creativity”

Telemann — 250 years after his death.

by Petra Music

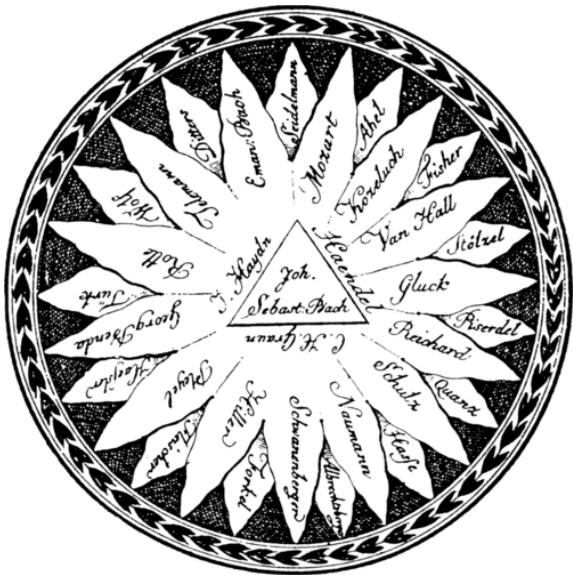


Georg Philipp Telemann died at the age of 87 on a summer evening in 1767 at his home in Hamburg. He had just finished his last major composition, a St. Mark's Passion and composing was indeed the essential part of his entire life. Of his generation, he was one of the most authentic and original composers, driven by curiosity and interest, always representing state-of-the-art musical style. In his long life, he never relied only on his experience. From his very first steps creating music in a *new and galant* style to his masterworks *Tageszeiten* or *Ino Kantata* he was constantly improving developing, searching and reinventing the way music was perceived.

At the end of the eighteenth century, both the musical style and the way people thought about artists has suddenly changed substantially. In 1740—shortly after Telemann’s time in Paris, Voltaire claimed the true poet to be *creative*. This was the start of a shift in the understanding of the artist. Since Ancient Greek times the act of creation simply meant *to make something*. Later with the rise of Christianity, all creation had to begin with god and artists were *inspired* by some supernatural force. Humans were not meant to create independently. The artist rather had a “*genius*” helping him in the process. With enlightenment ideas, however the human artist instead *became* the genius, emancipating himself from this supernatural force. This shift of prepared for the *genius-cult*, that we know in 19th century art. Sadly, Telemann — with his immense body of work incorporating more than a thousand of compositions — didn’t fit this *genius* category. It is only ironic, that, just years after his death, writers and critics completely disregarded him as a composer and described him as a mere *polygraph without masterworks*.

Today however, with his unique creative drive, his artistic passion and his ever new inventing nature, Telemann becomes a perfect example for creative living.

In his book *Creativity. The Psychology of Discovery and Invention* from 1997, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi — known for his in-depth explanation of *Flow* — interviewed roughly 100 people, all members of the creative elite in different fields on three subjects: career and life priorities, personal relationships and working habits. Subsequently, he tried to find common patterns and similarities in the answers to determine the primary factors which seem to influence successful creative living. It is no surprise to find a range of these aspects covered in Telemann’s biography. His diverse outlook on life, his spark and inspiration throughout is something that Telemann had in common with many of Csikszentmihalyi’s interviewees.



Recollections of Telemann’s childhood

Seeing Telemann’s biography unfold, we can observe many parallels to the findings of modern psychology. First of all, Csikszentmihalyi’s interviewees had a positive recollection of their childhood, even if they came from difficult backgrounds with problematic situations, they focused on the positive side of their upbringing. Also their social status fits a certain pattern: interviewees either came from poor families (workers or farmers with respect for education) or academic families with a large foundation of academic family history. Interviewees from comfortable middle class were an exception. One common feature for male interviewees was

the subject of growing up without a father. Telemann had lost his father, when he was only four years old. His mother then sent him to boarding school to be prepared for the study of law. Little did she know that the directors the schools were music enthusiasts and supported both Telemann's talent and his musical development greatly. When Telemann's musical talent emerged in the staging of his first opera at age 12, his relatives tried very hard to inhibit his musical interests. By the time he got sent to Leipzig to study law, he had finally promised his mother to quit his musical activities for good. But then, Telemann found himself in Leipzig in his first boarding room — a chamber decorated with musical instruments of all kinds and a very keen musical roommate. Within a short time, one of Telemann's manuscripts was discovered and subsequently performed in church. Telemann finally accepted his fate and with his mother's blessing became organist and music director at the Neue Kirche in Leipzig.

The environment in which Telemann grew up was also rather international and extremely cultured. French culture must have surrounded Telemann in his childhood and his use of French in letters, poems or quotes is very refined. His hometown of Magdeburg became a center for French culture with many Hugenot refugees settling there after 1680. The French immigrants helped to turn the city — destroyed in the 30 year war — into a cultural capital.

The Creation of Unique Career Paths

Telemann's career represents a collection of different highly skilled activities. He did not follow a single planned out career path but rather designed his own unique creative life. One of the main things, Czikszentmihaly's interviewees had in common, was the this unique creation of career paths. Rather than finding an existent job, they seemed to have *developed their personal journey into a unique career*.

Telemann certainly was a man of many talents. While working as church music composer, organist and conductor, Telemann became his own agent, organising private concerts and events and started his own publication business for mostly instrumental music, bringing him international fame and a strong reputation as a composer. His vocation as a composer was the urge to develop music from the *old style* to an *empfindsam, galant* style in which the Italian and the French traditions merge into a musical sensation. As a student, Telemann humorously claimed to have only had two weeks of training in counterpoint because he was afraid he would adopt the style he was taught by a local organist. As a young court composer in Sorau, Telemann had access to the scores of Lully and decided in an instant to write about 200 Ouverture-Suites. Whereas *form* was essential in the French suites, Telemann took his development one step further. In composing his 12 *Fantasies for Flute or Violin* he introduced a certain freedom to this art of composition, a truly modern invention. A few decades later, during his stay in Paris, he had the chance to witness two generations of composers (Lully and Rameau) in direct competition with each other. One can only imagine how privileged Telemann must have felt to be able to witness opera performances of both composers at first hand.

All these interests and influences later lead him to composing his masterpieces of Cantatas and Oratorios. Telemann left the court in Sorau to accept the positions as director of both, the Johanneum School and the public opera *Oper am Gänsemarkt* in Hamburg. In the following years, Telemann focused his work on vocal compositions. He wrote, directed and staged more than a dozen operas, incorporating French and Italian forms and stressing the importance of text and music, he reformed the traditional "Baroque Opera". He soon claimed that *all* music should be based on song and reinvented the art of song writing with his first collection of songs, *Singe-, Spiel- und Generalbassübungen*. His major aim was to stress the importance of natural melodies and declamation, thus already pointing towards the *Classical* style. Telemann also was a gifted musician himself, having practiced and mastered many different musical instruments. Especially his love for the flute family leaves us with wonderful orchestra and chamber music parts written in a musical language perfectly fitting to the instrument.

This ability to create a specific writing style for a variety of instruments was a great talent of his; one which is still greatly appreciated by musicians today. Also, he found the time to work as a writer publishing sonnets and poetry covering a wide range of subjects in magazines and newspapers and was also an inspired teacher and headmaster of his school. With his compositions for the amateur musician market, he was one of the most important instrumental pedagogues of his time (the 12 Methodical Sonatas show that clearly). But most influential to the preparation of his *international* career was his publication and editing business. Only the publication of his instrumental chamber music brought him international fame. In particular, his *musique de table* found a large number of prominent subscribers all over Europe, especially making his name known to the French audience. Telemann subsequently visited Paris in 1737 for eight months at the invitation of Michel Blavet.

The Importance of Luck

Many of Czikszentmihaly's interviewees mention luck as an important factor in the development of their careers. The lifelong journey, following station after station piecing these careers together, often got forgotten. But of course the factor of "luck" and "coincidences" also come to light in Telemann's biography. The opportunity to go to Paris was due to a lucky circumstance: Quantz had met Blavet in Paris in 1726 and it is entirely possible that Quantz had recommended Telemann. German composers were not widely acclaimed in France at the time. Still, Telemann's Grand Motet was performed at the renowned Concert Spirituel in the Tuileries palace and the publication of his *Nouveaux Quatuors*, written for Blavet and his quartet brought him the official printing privilege of the King.

The formation of a professional network of colleagues and possible future employers was a very important factor in Telemann's early career. While he worked in Frankfurt, the court of Darmstadt was close by and provided sufficient inspiration to write his secular cantatas and to present them as a series of concert events in the city. The collaboration with the popular author Brockes on a very graphic text about the Passion of Christ brought Telemann instant fame; Brockes soon joined the city council of Hamburg, paving the way for Telemann's next move.

A positive nature

Divergent Thinking, a concept described by psychologists as a prerequisite for creative thinking, is greatly improved by playfulness, a positive mood and good humour. Indications are that Telemann was a very social person, liked by many of his contemporaries and respected by the composers of his time. Both in his autobiographical publications and in his letters we find him to be a man with a good sense of humour, who never took himself too seriously. He never lost his humour, even in difficult times and the next project, the next composition, the next move seems to be always lurking around the corner. Later in his life he developed an interest in gardening and started collecting precious flowers, an interest he shared with many of his contemporaries. In reading Telemann's three main autobiographical essays from 1718, 1729 and 1739 we register increased humour and delight with every edition.

Diverse Network of Social Contacts and Interests

The setup of professional networks seem to be a typical development for Czikszentmihaly' interviewees. Professional network start to grow early on. Mentors and teachers play an important role. All interview partners felt extremely well supported by teachers, mentors and colleagues, who treated them as equal partners throughout their childhood. On trips to Halle, the 20 year old Telemann met the 16 year old Haendel and they became life long friends. Telemann was extraordinarily well connected with artists, writers, composers and politicians of his time and every station in his career path brought him a step closer to becoming the complex artist he was. The Bach family, but also Quantz, Blavet and an array of prominent composers of his time were amongst his close friends. In his later years Telemann adopts an interest for flower collection. At the time this was a popular past time, and even Handel sent him a selection of Englands most precious plants.



Resilience

When asked about their greatest achievement, most interviewees mention their successful family lives. In 1710, Telemann had just started this journey and was very happy in his private and professional life after his first marriage. But there is another personality trait influencing success: the term of *Resilience* in dealing with problems and overcoming difficulties. After the death of Telemann's first wife and with the birth of his first daughter, his life changed significantly. Telemann searched for a more comfortable position and moved to Frankfurt/Main to take on the role of city music director in 1712. In Frankfurt, he married his second wife, Maria Catharina Textor. Nine children were born in the following years, the marriage however failed. Outside his musical career Telemann raised ten children mostly on his own to become creative and successful members of society in very different fields.

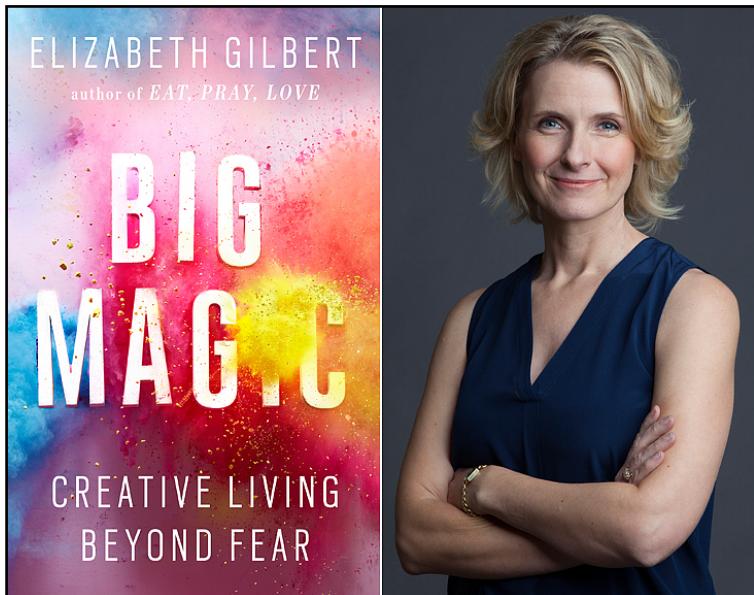
Generativity

The task of Generativity and the question of succession become interesting factors for the creative elite of Czikszentmihaly. The quest to find a successor of some sort was important to most interviewees. When Telemann moved to the court of Eisenach, he found himself close to the Bach family and a life long friendship

with mutual admiration and respect became the result. Telemann later became godfather to Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach. It is interesting to follow Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach's biography as successor to Telemann. But also in his own family he managed to leave a musical successor. Telemann's grand son George Michael later went to become director of music in Riga. He learned from his grandfather and even served as his assistant during the later years of Telemann's life.

Creative Ageing

On the subject of *Creative Ageing*, Csikszentmihaly's interview partners mention both positive and negative aspects of ageing. For Csikszentmihalyi, however, it was very interesting that these opposites were well balanced throughout. *Fluid Intelligence* seems to decline, *Crystallized Intelligence* increases. The former suggests an increased difficulty in reacting quickly to tasks. The latter, however, implies that the ability to judge and make sensible decisions improves with age. All interviewees were dedicated to achieving *integrity*, some how making sense of their career paths on a deeper level. The prospect of the infinite inspired them to seek religion or to form a general sense of the universe in terms of spirituality. For Telemann his phase of Oratoria composition fits nicely with these developments. After the loss of many friends and contemporaries, Telemann writes his masterworks as an ageing composer: *Die Tageszeiten*, *Donnerode* and the *Ino Kantata* are fine exquisit examples of a new musical style, clearly pointing towards the Classical period. One of his last compositions is the *Orchestersuite in D*, a work he deliberately dedicates to the *Old, Middle and New Style*. It might be seen as Telemann's musical will.



Big Magic — the Power of Small Impulses

In dissecting Telemann's biography it seems natural to take the example of Telemann as an example of an extraordinarily lived life. The drive and passion from one idea to the next, and the humorous lightness of his character provide a deeper insight into thinking about and performing his music. Elizabeth Gilbert explains creative concepts and their application in everyday lives in her book *Big Magic* from 2015. She calls it *the curiosity driven path*, in which creative people follow small impulses that lead to bigger impulses rather than waiting for the big inspiration, that might or might not happen. I see Telemann's work very much in this light. Constantly finding inspiration and joy in small steps, creating extraordinary body of an oeuvre in the end, filled with masterworks and treasures.

Elizabeth Gilbert further writes about the importance of distinguishing **hobby**, **job**, **career** and **vocation** for any creatively lived life. When applying these categories to Telemann's biography we find out, that Telemann's hobbies must have been gardening, writing poetry and collecting exotic flowers. His Job was writing music for the church year and teaching the students of the Johanneum. He did it joyfully, but did not invest more than was required. His career became a result of all the little things he did during his long life at his own time: writing chamber music, publishing and distributing scores and performing concerts, writing and directing operas, focusing on oratorio composition and enjoying his social professional network. Maybe his vocation was to change the way music was perceived and to introduce a new quality and sensation to the musical experience. In the end, it probably did not matter for Telemann, what his job was, or where he lived. What matters is, that he started his path with his very first composition and kept on finding beauty in writing his music every single day throughout his productive life.