

MOZART AND MORE. A little informative lecture on Mozart and the (magic) flute

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1. Awakening of a Master - Talent or Practice?

Six Sonatas for piano with the accompaniment of flute (violin) KV 10-15

Musicians and scientists have long questioned the connections between talent and practice. In the case of Mozart it seemed obvious, that his talent was so overwhelmingly great and exceptional, that his formative years have been a bit overlooked.

For the flute, we have these six sonatas for piano with the accompaniment of either a flute or a violin. The quality and originality of these works makes it hard to believe that Mozart accomplished this level of mastership at an age of 8 years.

The Sonatas were a present to the Queen of England during Mozart's first visit to London in March of 1765. In England, the flute was a very popular instrument at the time and possibly this is the reason for choosing this instrumentation (various methods for the one keyed flute were just published or were about to be published in London: Charles Delusse in 1760, Louis Grannon in 1770 or Luke Heron in 1771).

The dedication reads: "Six Sonates pour le clavecin qui peuvent se jouer avec violon ou flaute traversière, très humblement dédiés à sa Majesté Charlotte, Reine de la Grande Bretagne, composées par J.G. Wolfgang Mozart âgé de 8 ans. Oeuvre III, London"

The Sonatas KV.10-15 are filled with energy and indicate a zest for life. They are a beautiful example of the early abilities of a young composer and present very playful experiments.

The question remains:

Talent or Practice?

Through the fundamental work and the studies of psychologists such as K. Anders Ericsson and Angela Duckworth or musicologists such as Gary McPherson we nowadays have a quite accurate understanding of what leads to expert performance.

Sir Francis Galton (1869-1979) was the first scientist to look at expert performance in diverse fields. He found that eminent individuals in the British Isles were more likely to have close relatives who were also eminent and concluded that eminence must be an "inherited ability". Thorndike discovered the importance of repetition and thematises the direction of practice (1921) in achieving a high level of performance. Simon and Chase concluded in 1973, that nobody attained the level of a chess master with less than about a decade's intense preparation in the game. Finally, Anders K. Ericsson publishes his article "The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance" in 1993, in which he concludes that 10000 hours of "deliberate, task oriented practice" will lead to expert performance. Angela Duckworth added a new term to the equation in 2007. It turns out, that there is one more important ingredient in becoming a master performer, which she names GRIT. Grit overlaps with achievement aspects of conscientiousness but differs in its emphasis on long-term stamina rather than short-term intensity. The gritty individual not only finishes tasks at hand but pursues a given aim over years. Grit is also distinct from depend- ability aspects of conscientiousness, including self-control, in its specification of consistent goals and interests (Duckworth, 2007).

Geoff Colvin writes a chapter on Mozart in his book "Talent is overrated". He states, that Wolfgang had expert training from an expert teacher, who lived with him (Colvin, 2008) and had maybe achieved about 7500 hours of deliberate practice by the time he was 8 years old and continued to do so.

When we now look at the formation of Wolfgang Gottlieb (only later he called himself Amadeus) Mozart we first see a very prominent father figure. Leopold Mozart is - together with Quantz and C.P.E. Bach one of the three major "time windows" into the performance practice of the 18th

century. His method for the violin was published in 1756, the year Wolfgang was born. He worked as court musician at the court of the archbishop in Salzburg and was a dedicated father. We know much of his interest in child upbringing because in his retirement he became the sole caretaker for his daughter's (Maria Anna / Nannerl) first son and took an active role in training and education of the boy reporting in long letters about his progress. Also, the family had already lost a few children, being left with Nannerl, a five year old girl and Wolfgang. Leopold spoke several languages, was well integrated into society and had many noble men amongst his close friends. He was very religious and lived strictly by catholic rules. His interests were politics, science, medicine and he was broadly educated.

There are many myths and stories about when Mozart started to compose and play music. It is certain that he was always present at his sister's music lessons. Since the mind of a child is like a sponge and children are learning so much through experience in these early years, it is no wonder Wolfgang wanted to match his sister's activity. Certainly he was immersed in music, even before he was born.

The family also provided a peaceful and loving environment, Leopold and Maria married out of love and remained very close their whole life. They lived in Salzburg with few servants and were a very close and friendly family from what we can learn from their letters. There was always music in the house, after church on Sunday, the family would spend time at the "Bözlzelschiessen", a Shooting game and afterwards they would play cards. When we now look at the FLOW psychology, and search for Mozarts position on it, Csikszentmihályi shows that the state of FLOW may happen easily, when "play" is possible. Mozart was a master player, he knew 17 card games and loved every kind of play. We know, that play has an immense potential for learning, especially in young children. The conditions for play and flow are a tension free environment. When we read the letters about the Mozart family's first tour of Europe and the many accounts on which Wolfgang would just lose himself fantasising on the piano during travels, during meetings at courts or visits, nothing could describe this state of FLOW better. Flow furthermore happens in the small channel between Anxiety and Boredom and it seems, that with his playful character trait Mozart would always work on pushing the boundaries further and the chance for immediate feedback from his father. It is this dynamic feature, that explains why flow activities lead to growth and discovery. (Mihaly Csikszentmihayi, 1990)

Wolfgang's and Nannerl's schoolwork mostly happened during the family's first tour. In 1762, the family went to Vienna and later to Munich. In June 1763 the family continued on to a long tour that lasted 3,5 years. The children learned to speak Italian, French and English and were taught a broad general knowledge by their father, who made sure they would make the most of their trip as a learning experience. The family touched Munich, Augsburg Ludwigsburg, Schwetzingen, Heidelberg, Mainz, Frankfurt, Koblenz, Köln, Aachen, Brussels, Paris (where they arrived in November 1773 and London, where they arrived in April 1764, back to Salzburg via Dover, Den Haag, Amsterdam, Utrecht Mechelen, Paris, Dijon, Lyon, Genf, Lausanne, Bern, Zürich, Donaueschingen, Ulm, Munich. In every town, they would network, meet the most renowned composers of their time and the finest musicians in Europe, hear concerts and operas and immerse themselves in the art and culture of their environment. To earn the money for the travels the children were popular guests among the aristocracy and bourgeoisie. This is the environment which made Mozart compose his first piano sonatas and his symphony in Eb Major.

I cannot highly enough recommend you to read the letters that Leopold wrote back to Salzburg during these years. It is a sophisticated insight into different cultures across Europe at the time, a window in a time long gone - with the practicalities of everyday life such as a broken coach wheel or the recommended medicine for rheumatism, the flue or the pocks, political situations at the time, a general scale of prices and conversions of local money, gossip of every kind and a deep insight into the family's core.

2. Mozart and his (Magic) Flutes - Instruments of Mozart's time to key or not to key... that is the question.

In "The Art of Playing the German Flute", published in London in 1793, John Gunn points to a controversy of aesthetics in flute tone production:

"Two methods seem chiefly to prevail on the method in which the instrument is ought to be played. The first is, that an equal fullness of tone ought to be aimed at throughout; and this, when required, is thought to be the greatest excellence of which the instrument is capable (...). The other opinion, in direct opposition to this, those (...) say, that this kind of tone is contrary to the very nature of a Flute. I often smiled at the conflict (...) and have given little satisfaction to either party, by declaring that it was like asking a painter, whether it were better for a picture to be light or all shadow" (Bowers, 1992).

Of course, these conflicts started much earlier, between the followers of the ideal "amorous" sound of the flute in the French baroque tradition opposed to the virtuosic Italian Baroque style. At the end of the 18th century, however this comment also may be an indicator of innovations in flute making. The standard one keyed flute of the baroque repertoire of course comes with certain limitations to play in different keys. Quantz even advises in his tutor not to play in difficult keys for a public which does not understand the nature of the instruments, because its limitations will make the performance unpleasant to amateur ears.

The flute plays of course an important part in Mozart's orchestra and opera works. The flute with its sound characteristics of transcendence turn the instrument into one (or two, including Papageno's Piccolo) lead character in the opera "Zauberflöte". The writing in this opera is so colourful and rich, that we can hardly believe, Wolfgang was serious, when he wrote to his father, that he did not like writing for the instrument. Another very peculiar case is the Piccolo Solo in "Die Entführung aus dem Serail". Mozart uses Turkish music in this opera and had (according to his letters) a box of a special selection of turkish instruments (flutes and drums) to join the orchestra in all these "Turkish" parts. At the time, Turkish fashion was very adored in Vienna and the city was full of Turkish culture. The piccolo part played at the written pitch does not make any sense here, since on a modern piccolo it is so low, that it could hardly be perceived. Mozart particularly asked for a Piccolo in G, meaning Piccolo shorter than a modern Piccolo in C. The Piccolist, then would finger an F4 for the March (sounding a C5). I don't think a perfect intonation was here the required aim; rather the added shrill colour of the turkish music must have been his aim.

While Mozart stayed in Mannheim in 1777, before his journey to Paris, he became a close friend to Johann Baptist Wendling, flutist at the Mannheim court. Him and his mother even were invited to stay with his family for a while. Mozart helped Wendling with his compositions (some beautiful concertos) and has nothing but praise for the musician. So he states to Wendling's brother:

"Well you know, it's different with your brother. First of all, he is not such a doodler, and then you don't always have to be afraid with him when a note is about to come, that it is going to be much too low or too high; see, here it is always right. His heart is in the right place and so are his ears and the tip of his tongue, and he does not believe, that you are done with blowing and fingering, and then, he also knows what Adagio means" (Bowers 1992).

Wendling organises a commission by the Dutch physician Ferdinand Dejean and Mozart writes for him his two concertos and three quartets. Also, he wrote the Andante in C, thought to be an easier version of the second movement of the G Major concerto. However, he can not finish the commission and remains only paid in half.

Mozart wrote the concerto in April 1778, during his seven-month sojourn in Paris. It was commissioned by Adrien-Louis de Bonnières, duc de Guînes (1735–1806), a flutist, for his use and for that of his older daughter, Marie-Louise-Philippine (1759–1796), a harpist, who was taking composition lessons from the composer, at the duke's home, the Hôtel de Castries. Mozart stated

in a letter to his father that he thought the duke played the flute "extremely well" and that Marie's playing of the harp was "magnifique". As a composition student, however, Mozart found Marie thoroughly inept. The duke (until 1776, the comte de Guines), an aristocrat Mozart came to despise, never in fact paid the composer for this work, and Mozart instead was offered only half the expected fee for the lessons, through de Guines' housekeeper. But he refused it. (For his tutoring, Mozart was owed six Louis d'or.) And it is not at all certain whether the duc de Guines and his daughter Marie ever actually played this concerto.^{[2][3]}

Of course, in Mozart's circumstances in Salzburg - even though 4 flutists were appointed there during Mozart's childhood, mostly the oboists would swap over to the flute in certain slow movements. Hence the oboes are often paired with the horns, there are many examples where Mozart writes for the flute in favorable keys of horns. In order to play the repertoire properly, the flute makers had to come up with solutions. These solutions were added keys; The number varies from 4-8 keys. Not trills and difficult passages can be evenly executed.

In the letters, we find, that Mozart ordered a few oboes, bassoons and flutes from the Dresden flute maker Grenser via his publisher Breitkopf in Leipzig. Though the delivery is very late and not quite satisfactory for Leopold, he knows of the high value of Grenser's flute. Nowadays there are many traverso makers who make these copies and playing them at A=430 has become the standard practice. The difference between period instruments and modern instruments is such, that on period instruments, the sound always starts with a sensation of weight or noise, whereas with modern instruments the aim is a sound, that can be evenly held in all registers. This can be easily observed hearing the difference between a Karl August Grenser (1720-1807) one key flute from Dresden and a Heinrich Grenser (1764-1813) 8 key flute. The 8 key flute corrects weak notes and adds depth to the tone. The tone colour becomes quite consistent throughout the range, whereas the one key flute shows a great variety of tone colour in different keys.

3. About playing Mozart on the flute...

When playing Mozart's music it is important to keep the baroque heritage of the music in mind. Most of Mozart's movements for flute still carry the characteristics of baroque dance metres. When we observe this practice, the music seems to carry itself through long phrases. However, if we approach the music from our modern background, we have to work hard to make the music "breathe" on its own. An example for this is the second movement of the D Major concerto. When we play the movement with the memory of a baroque Menuett, with its six steps and two bar phrases, the dissonances become obvious. This way, also the one keyed flute can be a worthy vessel for this music. In comparison, with the 8 keyed flute, I could already use more vibrato, and carry the phrases through with a stronger emphasis of air direction, than dance style. Of course, questions of tempo are very important in this quest.

When thinking about Mozart's music and Mozart's life it is important to keep the historical and social background of his time in mind. As a child, Mozart became a prodigy to the Archbishop in Salzburg. Of course, a prodigy can only have been a gift of god and the music he wrote is often perceived as directly being dictated to him from god. In the catholic surroundings in Salzburg, this thought makes perfect sense. The amount of work, the composer put in from a very early age, the amount of inner drive and passion gets easily overlooked.

Mozart was not only a musician; he was in a way a political thinker of his time. Joseph the II was an enlightened emperor, who wanted equality amongst his subjects and without these ideas, Mozart would certainly not have been allowed to write operas like "The Marriage of Figaro", where in the end the count has to apologise to his subjects or the Magic Flute, in which the simple man, Papageno gets such an important role, even singing the lover's duet with Pamina.

In Mozart's epic search for employment around Europe this was a deciding factor. He simply did not believe in nobility of the upper class but rather in nobility of the heart. He truly believed, his music made him a noble man and naturally was repeatedly turned down by Europe's elite. As a

musician, the change in society came to his aid. Cities became increasingly important centres of culture as opposed to the European courts. The new wealthy class of the bourgeoisie becomes a rich cultural ground. The concert venues became the Concert Spirituel in Paris, the Bach Abel Society in London, the Tonkünstler Society in Vienna or the Collegium Musicum in Leipzig.

If society was a musical bar, at this time it would still have been characterised by the baroque hierarchy of emphasised notes in the bar. But Mozart seems to be obsessed with syncopations in his scores. Well hidden at times, clearly screaming out at other times but, when you look closer you can find them everywhere. As a freemason Mozart believed in a better world and a changed world order. I believe, his musical style reflects this in every note. The syncopations have to always be taken into account when it comes to deciding, where the phrases are leading to. An example is the first movement of the G Major Concerto. The upbeat becomes a little revolution in the Allegro Maestoso titled movement. In the development section, the long notes form again a greater / hidden syncopation and it reoccurs throughout the movement.

Variation of motives. In the figaro overture we can see how Mozart plays with variation. Also he uses thematically material in different context, for example phrases from the first string quartet in the G major concerto, phrases from the D major concerto in the magic flute and so on.

Recently, the benefits of Mozarts music for general wellbeing have been collected under the term the "Mozart Effect". A team in Salzburg has found that the specialty in Mozart's music is ever changing of calming and energising quality, a factor that seems to have also health benefits on people. Maybe when we play Mozart, this is exactly the point where to focus our attention. Mozart loved to play. He was foremost an opera composer and the quick and subtle changes in sound, mood, feeling in every phrase must be observed. It is certainly a highly active music and we are inspired to do it justice.