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Reflections on Beethoven and Mozart

On 6 February 1826, Beethoven was writing to Abbé Maximilian Stadler:

*„allzeit habe ich mich zu den Größten Verehrern Mozarts gerechnet,
u. werde es bis zum letzten Lebenstauch“*

*„I've always regarded myself as one of Mozart's greatest admirers,
and will do so to the last breath of my life.“*

WITHOUT A DOUBT, Elector Maximilian Franz, Maria Theresa's youngest son, belonged to the most ardent Mozart-enthusiasts of his time, with the result that the court in Bonn went to great lengths to obtain the latest and most important works of Mozart: performances of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Le nozze di Figaro* can be documented. In a letter of 17 November 1781, Mozart spoke of the Elector's high regard for his music, and in 1785 the Elector may even have tried to engage Mozart as his *Kapellmeister*.

Thus, Beethoven was able to become acquainted with the music of Mozart at an early age – and, on the other hand, as soon as his outstanding talents as pianist and later also as composer began to show themselves, he found himself constantly being compared with Mozart. The comment of Christian Gottlob Neefe in *Cramer's Magazin der Musik* of 2 March 1783 provides the earliest example of this: “This young genius deserves support to enable him to travel. If he continues as he has begun, he will almost certainly become another Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.”

It is clear from the works Beethoven composed in Bonn that Mozart was his foremost model in matters of composition: so, for example, he fashioned his first major chamber music works, the three piano quartets WoO 36 from the year 1785, after the later violin sonatas of Mozart (G major K.379; E-flat major K.380; C major K.296), to be precise, in the formal structure of the movements and their character, in the thematic layout and the disposition of keys as well as the tempo and meter signatures, and, moreover, in the manner of handling the strings, which do not just accompany in a subordinate role but dialog independently with the piano as well.

Beethoven was not yet seventeen when he undertook the first major journey of his life, a trip to Vienna with expenses paid by the Elector. It had one basic objective: to study with Mozart. As fate would have it, however, his mother fell

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ill and Beethoven had to leave Vienna only a few weeks after arriving, having had at best only brief encounters with Mozart. There was certainly no time for a serious and prolonged exchange of ideas, to say nothing of substantial periods of instruction. – And Mozart died on 5 December 1791, before Beethoven could return and pay him another visit.

Haydn – Mozart – Beethoven as the classical triumvirate

AS BEETHOVEN was leaving on his second Vienna trip in 1792 to study with Haydn, the words that Count Ferdinand Waldstein wrote in the young man's album seem almost prophetic: "Through constant effort you shall receive *Mozart's spirit from the hands of Haydn*." And in fact, once he had arrived in Vienna, Beethoven soon came to be looked upon by his contemporaries as the inheritor of Mozart's and Haydn's musical art, bringing it to perfection: thus was born the topos of the three Viennese classical composers.

This can be illustrated by citing passages from letters that Beethoven received in his later years. In February 1824, for example, the composer could read the following in an "Address from Viennese Lovers of the Arts": "The feeling of its [Austria's] citizens for the great and the eternal which *Mozart* and *Haydn*, in the bosom of their homeland, brought into being for all time to come has not yet died away, and with joyous pride do they recognize that the holy *Trinity*, in which their names and *yours* shine forth as symbols of the ultimate in the realm of music, has risen out of the Fatherland's very soil."

Some weeks before, he had read something comparable of a more personal nature in a letter (dated 29 November 1823) written in French by Count Nikolaus Galitzin, who had commissioned three of his late string quartets: "Too young to have known the celebrated Mozart and having only experienced Haydn - whom I only caught glimpses of during my childhood in Vienna - in his final years, I consider myself fortunate to be the contemporary of the third hero of music, whose equal can be found only in the other two."

A comparison – of quite another kind, of course – was made by the copyist Ferdinand Wolanek in a letter of March 1825 after he had been forced to stop working for Beethoven following a row: "My only consolation is the firm conviction that had *Mozart* and *Haydn*, those celebrated musicians, been working for you in the role of copyist, they too would have suffered the same fate dealt to me." – And Beethoven in the draft of his reply: "Scribble-scrabblor! Stupid fellow! [...] Already yesterday and even earlier it had been decided that you would no longer work for me. Do Mozart and Haydn the honor of not mentioning them [underlined seven times]."

That Beethoven also readily put himself in the ranks of Haydn and Mozart (in other words, had obviously taken the bespoke topos to heart) emerges clearly from his own letters. This comes through somewhat in the very first mention of Mozart to appear in those Beethoven letters that have been preserved (13 July 1802 to Breitkopf & Härtel): "I firmly maintain that only *Mozart* was capable of arranging his piano compositions for other instruments, and it's the same with *Haydn* – and without wanting to place myself in the company of those two great men, I assert that I alone can do it with *my piano sonatas* [...]" In later years, Beethoven occasionally modified the topos by adding one or another of the composers that he particularly esteemed to the classical trio; for example, in his

letter (17 July 1812) to the youthful Emilie M. in Hamburg (according to Thayer, a young piano player who had written Beethoven expressing her admiration), but with a gesture of modesty: "Do not strip their laurel wreaths from Händel, Haydn, Mozart; they belong to them still, but not yet to me." In his public performances too, Beethoven was at pains to put himself forward as a successor or kindred spirit to Mozart and Haydn: In his first major *Akademie* on 2 April 1800, he presented exclusively works from Mozart (a symphony) and Haydn (two excerpts from *Die Schöpfung*) in addition to his own works (among them, the premiere performance of his first symphony).

Mozart's music – for study and as a source of inspiration

FOR BEETHOVEN, playing Mozart's works, either privately or in public performance, both as conductor and especially as pianist soloist, was naturally an important way of coming to know them intimately. We know, for example, of Beethoven's having played a Mozart piano concerto in the intermission of a performance of *La clemenza di Tito* put on by Constanze Mozart on 31 March 1795. He wrote two cadences for Mozart's D minor piano concerto (K.466) for his student Ferdinand Ries some time in the first decade of the 19th century, thus conveying to us some idea of how he himself would improvise cadences to the Mozart piano concertos.

A good example of Beethoven's enduring interest in Mozart's compositions, one that lasted well beyond his early years in Bonn, is served by the piano quartets WoO 36, mentioned above, modelled after Mozart violin sonatas. They enjoyed a continuing existence in compositions written in Vienna, namely, in the piano sonatas op. 2/1 and op. 2/3 as well as in the piano trio op. 1/3. These are works that do not merely belong to the early experimental period but that represent, from Beethoven's point of view, mature and demanding works of art.

His frequent turning to Mozart themes in composing variations is a further example of a different kind. Altogether Beethoven wrote four sets of variations on themes of Mozart, more than on themes of any other composer, with the first – on "Lá ci darem la mano" from *Don Giovanni* – coming already in Bonn (the work, WoO 28, 1795, remained unpublished, probably because of its unusual instrumentation, a pair of oboes and an English horn). Two variations belong to the early Vienna period: those for violin and piano on "Se vuol ballare" from *Le nozze di Figaro* (WoO 40, 1792/93) as well as the variations for piano and cello on "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen" from *Die Zauberflöte* (op. 66, 1796). Later, on the threshold of his "heroic" phase, he composed the variations for piano and cello on "Bei Männern welche Liebe fühlen," also from *Die Zauberflöte* (WoO 46, ca. 1801). In this context, it is especially noteworthy that Beethoven incorporated into the 22d variation of his *Diabelli*-variations op. 120, written as late as around 1820, the aria "Notte e giorno faticar" from *Don Giovanni*.

From Mozart's compositions Beethoven "learned" a great deal. Here it must suffice to offer but a few recognized and often analyzed references from his Vienna period as examples: Beethoven's string trio op. 3 (before 1794) carries the title "Gran Trio", as did Mozart's K.563 and, like it, consists of six movements. The quintet for piano and winds op. 16 (1796) can be regarded as Beethoven's counterpart to Mozart's quintet for piano and winds K.452. With his string quartet op.18/5 (1798-1800) Beethoven is reacting to Mozart's string quartet K.464. The first movement of his symphony no. 1 op. 21 (1800) was

modelled on that of the Jupiter symphony K.551 in its general harmonic layout and the part-writing, just as the slow introduction to his symphony no. 2 op. 36 (1801/02) had that of the Prague symphony K.504 as a model. In Beethoven's middle period, the obvious parallels appear less frequently but they do not stop: the first movement of Mozart's piano concerto in C minor K.491 has the same beginning as Beethoven's C minor piano concerto no. 3 op. 37 – *unisono*, each *piano*, then *forte*; and each movement closes with a coda in which the piano plays a prominent role. Beethoven's string quartet op. 59/3 was obviously inspired by Mozart's K.565. And even in the late works one continuously finds echoes of Mozart (so, for example, between the two string quartets, Beethoven's op. 132 and Mozart's K.464).

Because of Beethoven's fundamentally different approach in the later works, it is of course much more difficult to isolate and identify such "borrowings" than it is with the works of earlier times. All the more welcome, then, is another kind of evidence, one that came increasingly to the fore from 1800 on, showing how earnestly Beethoven continued to study Mozart and learn from his works: copies of Mozart's works in his own hand – and surely the ones that have been preserved represent only a small portion of those that once existed.

Insofar as it is possible to discern a given period when a particular copy originated, it can almost always be associated with a specific compositional project. For example, sometime around 1800 Beethoven made copies of Mozart's string quartets K.387 and K.464 – and in doing so was preparing himself for his ambitious (and long overdue) project of bringing a half dozen string quartets into readiness for publication. Some years later, as he contemplated the problem posed by composing his first opera, he made copies of excerpts from *Don Giovanni* and *Die Zauberflöte*: of particular interest in this case is that his musical notation was devoted almost exclusively to ensemble numbers in vocal score (without the instrumental parts) – evidently because he expected to learn something from Mozart regarding voice leading and declamation, whereas he had instrumental writing firmly in hand.

It is also striking that Beethoven copied several excerpts from Mozart fugues or works with fugal passages, so, for example, parts of the development in the last movement of the G minor symphony K.550 or the closing of the C minor fugue for two pianos K.426. Some of this copying came in Beethoven's final creative years, a time when he was intensively sounding out contrapuntal writing and, for this, clearly wanted to see what Mozart had to teach him. This also applies to one of his last large-scale works, the *Missa solemnis*: in the course of its composition, Beethoven took time to study the Kyrie from Mozart's *Requiem*, analyzing it in his own terminology (taking particular note of the sequence of the voice entries, the use of double counterpoint, as well as the theme's place in the compound meter), and obtaining an overview of the course of the fugue with an abbreviated copy. Drawing on these observations, he creatively conceived the great choral fugues of the Gloria and the Credo of the *Missa*. -- Little wonder, then, at his reaction to Gottfried Weber's critique, "Concerning the authenticity of the Mozart Requiem," that appeared in the August 1825 issue of *Cäcilia*: Beethoven, with his high regard for Mozart's *Requiem*, felt impelled to comment: "O you double ass."

"Beethoven ipse"

HIS WHOLE LIFE LONG Beethoven learned from Mozart – and his whole life long, he kept him at a distance. In connection with Beethoven's piano trio op. 1, an anonymous reviewer from the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung Leipzig* (1829, Sp. 86f.) formulated the matter so: "As we once again performed this work in this new edition with and for friends, it gave us great pleasure: first, as is readily understandable, because of its depth and quality altogether; [...] then too, despite one's awareness of models served by the Mozart piano quartets, still Beethoven's highly personal characteristics and his individuality shine forth and send a shower of stirring, flickering sparks in all directions."

The sketches that have been preserved are a veritable treasure trove showing how, at the outset of a new work, Beethoven would sometimes elect to distance himself little by little from an idea that on second glance seemed too "Mozartish." Here are two examples that Lewis Lockwood has graphically illustrated: in Sketchbook Landsberg 6 of the summer of 1803, Beethoven notated a draft of the main theme of the first movement of the *Eroica* symphony, a theme closely related to the theme of the last movement of Mozart's piano concerto K.595. As the composition was developed further, Beethoven successively took the similarities away, with the result that, in the symphony's final gestalt, the original source of his inspiration can at best only be imagined.

Another example is to be found in the so-called *Kafka sketch miscellany* (London, British Museum, Add. 29801): In this case, Beethoven wrote some measures in C minor in short score with the note at the top, "this whole passage was stolen from Mozart's symphony in G minor where the Andante is in 6/8 notes [...]"; directly below he notated his own version of the passage and signed it "Beethoven ipse." This example – which comes, significantly, out of the early years in Bonn – makes it emphatically clear that even in his earliest compositions Beethoven never simply imitated Mozart but rather engaged with him creatively and sought to integrate that which he learned and the stimulus he received into his own way of composing. Accordingly, attempts to differentiate Beethoven's relationship to Mozart chronologically seem to me of lesser importance. It is far more significant to appreciate that at every stage of his life (and not only in the early years), Beethoven studied Mozart's music, and that he did this constantly (and not only in the later years) in his own highly individual way. To be sure, we find it easier to recognize his dependence in the earlier compositions that are stylistically closer to Mozart than in the later works, but that should hardly surprise us.

The traditional biographical approach to Beethoven, one that stresses the heroic and his special genius, has thrust into the background the fact that throughout his life, Beethoven studied and drew inspiration from the works of other admired composers, among them (as documented in his copies) Giovanni da Palestrina, Johann Sebastian Bach and his sons Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel, as well as Georg Friedrich Händel, Gottlieb Muffat, Joseph Haydn, Antonio Salieri, and Luigi Cherubini. *It is clear: the focal points of Beethoven's interests would shift from time to time; his love for Mozart remained constant -- all his life.*

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Translation: Bruce Cooper Clarke