

Konrad Küster

Mozart: eine musikalische Biographie

An Introduction to the book, by Bruce Cooper Clarke

I.

Last year, in the course of a perceptive review of Volkmar Braunbehrens's recent biographical work, "Mozart in Vienna 1781-1791," in its English translation, Anthony Burgess noted parenthetically that he once had been "asked to write a brief opera in rococo style with Mozart as the leading character." After investigation, Burgess said he had to conclude: "This cannot be done. He did nothing but write music." This is close enough to the literal truth to illustrate a problem faced by all would-be Mozart biographers: given that much of his relatively brief life of not quite 36 years was spent in the composition of a prodigious amount of music, how much or how little discussion of Mozart's composing and his compositions as such should the biographer get into?

One biographical approach to the life of a composer is to concentrate on a mainly chronological account of the stages in the composer's daily existence – his family, his friends, his professional and artistic activities and acquaintances, his social milieu, the intellectual culture of his times, with rather incidental attention to what compositions emerged at what points. To do this with sensitivity and perception, all the while establishing the facts and getting them straight, is in itself no small task. Fancy, fable, myth and legend attach themselves quickly to the memory of a dead composer whose fame the world is beginning to discover. "For fame is, after all, only the sum of all the misunderstandings that gather around a new name," as Rainer Maria Rilke put it.

In his biography of Mozart's last ten years (first published in German in 1986), Braunbehrens opted for a broad historical approach with meticulous research aimed at dealing factually and dispassionately with "the sum of all the misunderstandings" that had accumulated around Mozart in almost two centuries of biographical writings by authors many of whom were more ready to serve up a pound of rhetorical flourish than an ounce of historical accuracy. In the foreword to his book, Braunbehrens declared his intention to focus on communicating a sense of who Mozart was and the life he led and deliberately to refrain from undertaking a concurrent "aesthetic-analytical" assessment of his musical works. In doing so, Braunbehrens was placing himself in the tradition of the early Beethoven biographer, Alexander Wheelock Thayer. In explaining his concept in 1865, Thayer had written:

"I have resisted the temptation to discuss the character of his (Beethoven's) works and to make such a discussion the foundation of historical speculation. . . It appears to me that Beethoven the composer is amply known through his works and in this assumption the long and wearisome labors of so many years were devoted to Beethoven the man."

Author's note: This Introduction was written in April 1991, shortly after the book was first published in 1990 by Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart (ISBN 3-421-06572-1). The book was subsequently published in English in 1996 by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, with the title, "Mozart: A Musical Biography" (ISBN 0-19-816339-8), in a translation by Mary Whittall.

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Even so eminent a musicologist-turned-biographer as H. C. Robbins Landon, when faced with the problem in a biographical work spanning but a single year's time, could decide on such an approach: "In this book I have been obliged, given the nature of the project, to treat the music somewhat fleetingly. . ." (Preface to "1791, Mozart's Last Year").

There is another approach and that is to place the music at the center of the biographical story.

One of the most comprehensive efforts of this nature was the multi-volume work of the French musicologists, Theodore de Wyzewa and Georges St. Foix, "*W.A. Mozart, sa vie musicale et son oeuvre, de l'enfance à la pleine maturité*," which began to appear in 1912.

Their work influenced that of Alfred Einstein, the German (and later American) musicologist responsible for preparing the third edition of the Köchel catalog of Mozart's works. After he had completed that assignment in 1937, Einstein wrote what is probably the single most influential book on Mozart published in the 20th century, "Mozart, his character - his work," which first came out in English in 1945. The book is not, strictly speaking, a "vie musicale" - the biographical section of the book comes at the beginning and takes only some hundred pages in a 500-page volume. Then comes the discussion of the music, arranged by category (instrumental works, vocal works, opera), rather than chronologically as Mozart composed them. While the result is a musical biography of sorts, the main value of the book was as a guide for the debutant to the universe of Mozart's music. (If books, like canned vegetables, carried "do-not-consume-after" dates, then we would have to take Einstein's book - valuable as it once was - off the shelves. Einstein did little original research on the biographical aspects of his book and they were already dated when it was first published; and music research since 1945 has produced a substantially more accurate picture of Mozart's composing methods and the order of his compositions than was known to Einstein, with inevitable effects on many of his musical judgments.)

Just as there is no final answer to the question of how the life an artist lives relates to his works (and vice versa), so there is no final solution to how best to integrate the discussion of artistic endeavor and accomplishment with the chronicle of life's events. Konrad Küster, a German musicologist and music-historian, offers his approach to the age-old problem in a book published by the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt in Stuttgart in 1990. Here is the rationale for his "musical biography," excerpted from the foreword to his book:

. . . People today frequently have their first encounter with Mozart in childhood, whether with the mawkish, often biographically dubious portraits of the Wunderkind or when, in the course of first piano lessons, the new pianist is presented with a greeting from the "young Mozart" in the form of Mozart piano works with single digit Köchel numbers. Mozart is one of those few composers who enjoy a leading position in concert programming as well as in the standard opera repertory and in recordings. And Mozart is one of the few composers whose works appeal to music lovers of the most diverse interests -- not only to those deeply engaged in so-called "classical" music but also to those who just happen to stumble on his compositions, say, in the music found in award-winning films such as "Out of Africa" (with its use of the clarinet concerto) or "Amadeus" (and the "little" G minor symphony). You never know where you will run into Mozart; Mozart is literally everywhere.

This is why Mozart's music has historically been the subject of on-going research, effort that in the 35 years since the 1956 bicentenary of Mozart's birth has succeeded in bringing important new knowledge and understanding to light. A major factor in this result has been the new accessibility of the compositions themselves provided by the New Mozart Edition (Neue Mozart-Ausgabe) that began appearing in 1954. With this detailed work on the musical sources, a broad foundation for new interpretative analysis has been laid; the deeper we have gone into the sources, the more they have revealed new and fascinating details. Our understanding of the music has been furthered by concomitant documentary research; the publication of a new edition of the collected surviving letters of the Mozart family and of a collection of all available relevant documents from Mozart's lifetime has facilitated our ability to draw connections between Mozart's compositions and the facts of his life. In addition, the appearance of the New Mozart Edition has furnished the basis for analysis and interpretation rooted in the compositions themselves.

And so we come full circle: the sheer ubiquity of Mozart's music owes much in turn to the recent advances in our knowledge as well as to modern technical developments. By the same token, these have fundamentally affected the requirements of a biographical approach to Mozart. A "biography of the composer" can no longer preoccupy itself chiefly with the daily life of its subject but must, in increasing measure, deal with the details of the works themselves. Now that all of Mozart's music – to the farthest reaches of the Köchel catalog – is readily available to every owner of a phonograph player, it properly demands to be taken into account as a new "source" for Mozart biography.

Accordingly, this book will seek to place the works of Mozart in the foreground of a "musical biography": it will follow Mozart's path through life as illuminated by chosen works. In contrast to "pure" biography which usually is able to cast only an occasional glance at a few individual pieces in the course of presenting a detailed picture of the composer's progress through life, this book will take another tack. Here, "biography" means above all "creative activity" and its relationship to Mozart's "life": in other words, Mozart's artistic development, which is inseparable from his life itself. This may seem a harder road than that taken by more conventional biographies, but a composer like Mozart whose music is so admired challenges us to travel this route. . .

Each biographer is forced ultimately to devote greater attention to some periods in his subject's life than to others. The situation is in no way different when one attempts to approach Mozart through his works. In doing so, many beloved Mozart compositions can only be mentioned in passing. In looking through the Table of Contents, many works appearing there may at first seem of marginal interest, and yet as a rule an overview of an important station in Mozart's life lies behind them and perhaps a particularly salient musical detail as well or the possibility of encountering a personality who apparently was important for Mozart to meet. At the same time, one confronts a certain difficulty: the "Mozart" who occupies such a lofty place in posterity's consciousness is not one fashioned by works drawn equally from all periods of his creativity; the traditional picture of him bases itself essentially on a few compositions by the Wunderkind, plus scattered works from his adolescent years in Salzburg and – most important – a substantial group of works out of Mozart's last ten years in Vienna. The distribution is highly irregular, and yet the biographer has no choice but to involve himself even in periods of creativity which yielded almost no work that has come to be called "famous." This odd situation merits a chapter of its own; suffice it

to say that the bulk of the book's attention lies inevitably with the later works.

Many of Mozart's works would require an entire book for a comprehensive analysis. This is true particularly of the "seven great operas" – not only because of their length but because of the wealth of their implied and indirect references. In this regard, of course, they pose a knotty problem for the music lover who is not conversant with Italian or German. There are textual problems to be overcome both in the original and with translations – for in the latter the true substance of the libretto has all too often fallen victim to the need to make the number of syllables match the number of notes. . . . Here, we will survey the operas as such only in a general way. Attention will be directed at details of special note, at places where Mozart himself was instrumental in the dramatic conception, sometimes over and beyond the work of the librettist. This may serve to cast new light on developments within a given opera.

It was sometime after 1800 that an anonymous poem, "Mozart's Death," appeared which contained these lines:

“. . . The strings' melody, that sounds so pure
And echoes through the clouds to heaven,
Mozart wrote by the Danube's banks.
Moved, Zeus sent a divine messenger
On fleeting wings to earth,
To bring this mortal to Olympus;
With soft, fluttering strokes, he approached,
But as the Master's harmonies began to sound,
Back he rushed to the deities' throne
And declared: Lord, from the music heard there,
He is a god. . . .”

"He is a god" – for decades, such an attitude has marked the approach to Mozart, to his life as well as to his works. But these four words stand in stark contrast to those Sarastro used to turn aside objections to Prince Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*: "He is a man." A question of attitude, then: is it not likely that we will come to prize Mozart's work even more when we are able to see it as the fascinating play of an artist with the possibilities of his art? Much of what we are accustomed to admiring as "heavenly" in Mozart's music appears in fact to be so consciously conceived and so keenly calculated that its genius must be deliberate and not merely accidental or serendipitous. This basic biographical concept has set the angle of vision brought to the forty episodes, to the forty periods in time, through which this book hopes to bring us closer to Mozart's life as man and musician.

II.

Before we turn to excerpts from the book, a few words about the book itself. As noted above, Küster's "musical biography" of Mozart is presented in "forty periods in time," forty chapters, covering some 450 pages. The first chapter starts with the schooling Leopold Mozart developed for the musical education of the astonishingly precocious child, leading to his first efforts at composition; the last chapter is, inevitably, given over to Mozart's final days and the Requiem. In between, each chapter proceeds chronologically to detail the developments and events in the lives of the Mozarts – father, mother, daughter, son and, later, wife Constanze – as associated with or highlighted by a particular work or constellation of works. Chapter 5, to take one example, finds Mozart back in Salzburg after the third (and last) Italian trip and beginning to turn his attention in a major way for the first time to the potentialities of the concerto form; the chapter, "Breakthrough as a 'concerto'-master," begins with the

varied concerto works of 1773 and 1774 before taking up the four violin concertos of 1775 in detail. Chapter 21, "Farewell to an old routine," is an example of a chapter focussed on a single work; it discusses the biographical circumstances of the violin sonata K.454 and then the sonata itself (this chapter is given in its entirety below). In addition, the book has a section on footnotes, a bibliographic section, the indispensable list of Mozart's compositions mentioned in the text, and an index.

A comment regarding the book's substance: although written in German and published in Germany, Küster has by no means limited himself to German-language sources in preparing the book. There is much recent Mozart research that is not yet available in German-language translation; Dr. Küster's work reflects his complete familiarity with these other sources. Special mention should be made of the work of the British musicologist Alan Tyson who, working with original sources (principally Mozart's autograph scores), has made fundamental and far-reaching contributions to our understanding of the when and how of Mozart's composing. Küster has drawn fully on Tyson's work and his book is one of the first to begin comprehensively to integrate the biographical implications of the revised datings.

At first glance, it might seem that a shortcoming of the book would be its admittedly episodic nature. I think this is more apparent than real. Every biography of Mozart is necessarily episodic. We simply do not know from day to day what he was doing and how he used his time. Even in periods relatively well covered by the exchange of letters between father and son (the early Vienna years, for example), there are often spells of weeks running into months when our certain knowledge of what Mozart was up to is almost nil. Küster's book – like the Pompidou Centre – wears its supporting architecture on the outside, unlike more conventional biographical works which tend to hide the inevitable biographical disjoints behind a smooth facade of words.

A final comment: as the author mentioned in his foreword, the bulk of his book – the last 25 out of 40 chapters – occupies itself with Mozart's life and compositions from 16 March 1781 on, that is, when he arrived in Vienna at Archbishop Colloredo's orders and where he was to reside for the ten-plus years left to him. This is precisely the period covered in Volkmar Braunbehrens's satisfying biography mentioned at the outset. Now that the Braunbehrens book is available in English, it would be an imaginative bit of publishing for the English-language translation of Küster's book (and I am sure there will be one in due course) to contain a concordance facilitating the reading of the two books in tandem. I have read back and forth between them in German and find them remarkably complementary and supplementary of each other.

III.

Küster's first seven chapters bring Mozart to that fateful year, 1777, when he has reached his majority and is still in Salzburg with no prospects in sight. Family council. . .what next?. . .decision: back to Paris to try one's luck. The effort to get the Archbishop's agreement for father and son to go off on the trip together almost succeeds in getting them both fired. Prudence requires that father Leopold (and sister Nannerl) remain in Salzburg while Mozart sets off to find his fortune with his mother in tow. It would be some 17 months before Mozart returns to Salzburg (alone, for his mother sickened and died in Paris in mid-1778). And just who was this young man, Wolfgang Mozart? If it had been he who had died in Paris shortly after the first performance of his "Paris" symphony, would the world still be observing a Mozart Year in 1991? Or would "Wolfgang Mozart" be but a footnote in music's pre-Beethoven history?

In the first of the four extended excerpts by which I hope to give you some (admittedly limited) idea of Küster's "musical biography," we are in Chapter 8 where the author suggests it is important to keep the developments at this stage in the young composer's life in perspective:

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. . . There obviously was a large number of his own compositions in the travel luggage of the 21-year-old Mozart. From the correspondence between father and son – in other words, from Mozart's reports of his performances at particular places and from his father's letters with performance suggestions – we can fairly well make out just which pieces were in the trunk. In the wake of Mozart's dismissal from his duties in Salzburg, these contents now took on special meaning: they were, in effect, Mozart's artistic visiting-cards with which he must somehow try to put forward his personal skill as a composer and thus "seek his fortune" (as the Archbishop's notice of release put it). How did he see himself, and how did he want others to see him; which pieces were best suited for presenting him to the audiences at the places along the way to Paris? If we are to look for answers to these questions, then it is important that we first picture to ourselves exactly what the composer Mozart had actually accomplished up to 1777.

At that point, not one of the "seven great operas" (as Aloys Greither calls them in the title to his book) had yet been written, nor a single one of the "ten famous string quartets" (as they are invariably referred to in the titles to the scores and in countless record releases). So far only five of the (ultimately) 23 piano concertos had been composed; one of these was to suffer the verdict of Alfred Einstein as being "below the highest level" (the concerto for three pianos K.242), and only the last of the five – the piano concerto in E-flat (K.271) written in early 1777 – would be cited by Charles Rosen as "his first large-scale masterpiece in any form." Out of the 54 works listed under the category of "symphonies" in the New Mozart Edition, a full 43 had by then been composed; in this connection, however, we read in Eric Blom's Mozart biography that the gradual development of Mozart as a symphonic composer displayed in the works up to this time is really "more interesting for the author and his colleagues than for most of his readers," the only exceptions being the symphonies in G minor K.183 and in A major K.201.

As for Mozart's early efforts as a composer of piano sonatas, it is hard to make a judgment; many of the early works apparently have been lost (and not just the sonatas K. 33d-33g, which are known to us only from their incipits). Of his known piano sonatas, only the six in the set K.279-284 had emerged (presumably around 1775) by this time; more than twice this number were still to come. By contrast, a large number of Mozart's total works for the church had originated in the Salzburg years leading up to 1777, but again, not that series of works so beloved today which only began to appear after Mozart's return from this very journey to Paris, a series that reaches from the "Coronation" mass K.317 to the Vespers settings K.321 and K.339 and, finally, to Ave verum corpus K.618 and the Requiem K.626. Only one discrete group of works that includes compositions well known today was fully finished before the trip to Paris began: the violin concertos.

A review like this probably tells us more about the picture of Mozart passed down by tradition than it does about the quality of these early works. But if we are to understand what came out of this trip and why Mozart's reception along the way was often lukewarm at best, we must free ourselves from the traditional view. For even though Mozart had by now left his days as a Wunderkind behind, his talents as a musician and his compositions were not yet fully recognized, not

even those early works (to say nothing of the later ones!) so little appreciated by later generations. In Munich, the Elector Maximilian III coolly suggested he ought to go to Italy and write operas there; Mozart's response – that he had already been to Italy three times and had composed three operas for Italian theaters – fell on deaf ears.

Three operas: that refers only to the dramatic works actually undertaken for Italy, that is, Mitridate K.87, the "Serenata" Ascanio K.111, and Lucio Silla K.135. Of these, Mozart had taken only Lucio Silla with him on his Paris trip; later, in Mannheim, he would use arias from this opera to coach the 17-year-old singer Aloysia Weber, Mozart's first flame (and whose younger sister Constanze he would later marry). But this was not the only opera he had with him, for he had also brought along Il Rè pastore K.208, first performed in Salzburg in 1775. In Munich he lent the score to the Bohemian composer Joseph Myslivecek, an acquaintance from Italy in 1770; at the time, Myslivecek was one of the best known composers of Italian opera and celebrated as the "divino Boemo." The overture from this work was heard in one of Mozart's concerts in Mannheim, at which Aloysia Weber also sang arias from Lucio Silla. It was these two operas, then, that Mozart offered as testimony to his skill as an opera composer; one, the last opera to be premiered in Italy, the other, his most recent product. Both fall in the category of "opera seria." Mozart, whose creations in the realm of "opera buffa" (with texts by Lorenzo Da Ponte) were to bring him lasting fame, had brought neither La finta semplice K.51 nor La finta giardiniera K.196 with him, two "buffa" operas from the years 1768 and 1774/75.

It was in the aforementioned concert in Mannheim on 13 February 1778 that Mozart presented what, so far as we can tell, was the broadest cross-section of his compositions to date. The only number not by Mozart was the program opener: a symphony by Christian Cannabich, the director of the Mannheim orchestra. His daughter Rose, a piano student of Mozart's, played the concerto in B-flat K. 238; "then (for a change) Herr Ramm played my oboe concerto for the 5th time. . ." Following an aria from Lucio Silla sung by Aloysia Weber, Mozart himself played his piano concerto in D major K.175, which he called "my old concerto in D" – although hardly four years old, Mozart's development had obviously progressed since, but Mozart played it anyways "because they really like it here." And: "then I improvised for half an hour, and afterwards Mlle. Weber sang the aria, Parto, m'affretto [from Lucio Silla]. . .to great applause. And at the end was my symphony from Re Pastore."

In other concerts, Mozart was content to offer a somewhat narrower choice from his works. For example, the following report from Munich on 6 October 1777: "Day before yesterday, that is, Saturday the 4th. . .we gave a little concert: it began at 3:30 and ended at 8. . .to start off we played (Michael) Haydn's 2 quintets. . .then I played the concertos in C, in B-flat and in E-flat (K.246, 238, and 271), and then my trio (piano trio K.254). . .and at the very end I played my last cassation in B-flat (the Lodron Nachtmusik K.287). That really made them sit up and take notice. I played as though I was the greatest violinist in all Europe."

In Augsburg, Mozart performed again on the violin (playing what he termed the "Strassburger" concerto, probably a reference to the G major concerto K.216), as well as playing a concerto on the piano too: here, and again in Mannheim, that concerto for three pianos so little esteemed by Alfred Einstein had a hearing. In Augsburg, Mozart played it together with the cathedral organist Johann Michael Demmler and the piano-maker Johann Andreas Stein; in Mannheim, the solo parts were performed by Mozart's pupil Rose Cannabich, Aloysia Weber, and Therese Pierron.

Mozart chose this way, then, to put himself forward primarily as a composer of concertos and as the virtuoso performer of concertos on both the

violin and the piano. The violinist Mozart could also dazzle with the concerto movements from the divertimentos, and the piano virtuoso Mozart with solo piano compositions as well, not just with improvisations, but with his six piano sonatas K.279-284 and especially with two piano sonatas for four hands (probably K.358 and 381) sent to him in Mannheim. Mozart says little specifically about performances of his symphonies; the emphasis would appear to have been on his divertimentos for it is clear from his letters that he had taken the two Lodron divertimentos (K.247 and 287) as well as the Haffner serenade K.250 with him (others could have gone along for the journey too, and later Leopold Mozart sent on dances, two separate movements for solo violin, and the Antretter-Finalmusik K.185 besides). As for Mozart's chamber music, it apparently was thinly represented: apart from the performance of his trio in Munich, Mozart only speaks of having provided copies of his first string quartet K.80 and his (at that time only) string quintet K.174 to the Palatinate minister Count Sickingen. His supply of sacred music appears to have been similarly limited: in the letters to his father, only the *missa brevis* in F K.192, the Spatzenmesse K.220, and the offertory Misericordias Domini K.222, which Mozart had copied in Augsburg, are mentioned.

Taken all in all, the impression is strong that Mozart wanted to be seen, first and foremost, as a composer of virtuosic music: of operas, concertos (in the broadest sense), and technically demanding music for solo piano.

IV.

The next sample from Küster's "musical biography" comes near the beginning of Chapter 15 as Mozart lands in Vienna and engineers his escape from his service for Archbishop Colloredo. Prospects looked good, he told the apprehensive father fretting away in Salzburg. There is money to be made – from publishing sonatas, from writing operas, from giving concerts. And from teaching students too: he could have as many as he wanted, but he didn't want too many, and he planned to charge more than other piano teachers. But Mozart the teacher was also Mozart the student. Throughout his life he was remarkably receptive and open to learning. And this was no less true now as Mozart stood at the threshold of the ten Vienna years.

. . .Of course, in his early Vienna days, Mozart was not only a teacher (of Josepha Auernhammer, discussed earlier in the chapter -- trans. note) but he – Wolfgang Amadé Mozart, the widely travelled, cosmopolitan 25-year-old musician – was to a large degree himself a student. At the beginning of 1778, some three years before the move to Vienna, Mozart had written his father from Mannheim (7 February): "I can, as you know, more or less take over and imitate every art and style of composition." That may sound like boasting – but even at 22, Mozart had seen enough to know he could justify it. He who had grown to maturity in the traditions of Salzburg, with its leading position in the Catholic, southern Germanic lands both as an archdiocese and a university center, who was equally at home in Vienna and Mannheim, then the German-speaking lands' two most important centers of music (together with their function as melting pots for outside influences: in Mannheim, those from Bohemia; in Vienna, those out of the farthest reaches of south-eastern Europe as well), who moreover had sought (and found) a fruitful meeting with the modern music of Italy from Milan to Naples, who had experienced England's reception of Italian music at first-hand, and who recently had taken himself to Paris to sound out the possibilities of a musical life there: he could with justice claim to have both a theoretical and a practical grasp of musical life throughout Europe. It was not something he had just heard about; he had been in those places and had composed there and had tried out his own approaches to local musical circumstances.

What of central Europe in the 1770s and 1780s could he have missed? Possibly Dresden; but the heyday of Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783) in Dresden as the major practitioner of opera in the Neapolitan style had passed and, besides, Mozart already knew the style. He had also come into contact with other, more native northern German musical influences, such as the music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788) of Hamburg, as we know from a sonata movement that Mozart worked into the final movement of his piano concerto in D major K.40.

And still more: by his visits to the Sistine Chapel in Rome and to Padre Martini in Bologna, he had gained a sense of history from hearing the music – a conservative, polyphonic "sacred" style ("Kirchenstil") – performed there. Whether Mozart in fact recognized it as such is hard to say: he experienced the Miserere of Gregorio Allegri (1582-1652) in Rome as a relic of antiquity, of course, but still as part of a living repertory. Similarly in Bologna: although Padre Martini was immersed in writing a "history of music" (the printed edition never went beyond the music of the antiquity in its discussion and it remained unfinished), Mozart may have looked on the examination in baroque counterpoint that he had to pass to enter the Accademia Filarmonica simply as an exercise in a remote but nevertheless customary musical style (one that he was not fully able to master: his youth also played a role in his admission). The point is that Mozart had come to have a certain feel for this stylistic nuance in contemporary musical creativity, in its historical and practical aspects, so to speak (and not just its historicity or reception).

Strange to say, however, Mozart, did indeed come upon music new to him in Vienna, certainly in his first contacts with the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and probably too in a renewed and more intensive involvement with the music of Georg Friedrich Händel (some of whose works he had played in London in 1764). In parts of Europe in 1781, Bach fugues and Händel oratorios were still part of the current musical scene. England's enthusiasm for Händel continued without letup and in 1784, a grand memorial celebration was held to mark the one hundredth anniversary of his birth (although Händel would only have been 99 at that point). And Bach's students had carried on elaborating the composing techniques of their master straight through to Mozart's time – not only his sons such as Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710-1784), whose fugues Mozart now came to know, but Bach students such as Johann Ludwig Krebs (1713-1780). Some months after Mozart's arrival in Vienna, the young Beethoven in Bonn was beginning to study Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" and in Hamburg, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach was performing cantata movements by his father; in addition, both he and his brother Wilhelm Friedemann were assisting the musical director of the university at Göttingen, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, in his efforts to prepare a biography of J. S. Bach. All this was going on just at the time Mozart was moving to Vienna. In other words, his interest in the music of Bach and Händel was not simply or mainly historical but was an interest that took in all aspects of the contemporary, everyday musical scene. And Mozart's response is characteristic: he is inspired anew in his own composing. And it certainly appears that his engagement with Bach and Händel was far more productive than the exposure to the sacred styles of Rome and Bologna.

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V.

What did Mozart compose and when did he compose it? History's preoccupation with these two questions began as the 5th of December 1791 dawned and continues unbroken to today. As mentioned above (in Section II), recent decades have seen important progress in providing a more systematic and scientific basis for the chronological ordering of Mozart's compositions begun,

most notably, by Ludwig von Köchel with his Verzeichnis in 1862. Küster's book, with its intense interweaving of biography and composition, makes full use of the current state of our understanding for the chronology of Mozart's works.

Consider, for example, his comment on the plight of the German author, Wolfgang Hildesheimer, writing in the 1970s, who erected a towering edifice of psychological speculation on what turned out to be a foundation of non-fact. These are the opening paragraphs of Chapter 30:

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June 1787: Mozart's father had recently died (on 28 May). The opera Don Giovanni stood at the center of the things he was composing. On the side, he completed two works, divertimentos to which he gave specific titles when he entered them in his catalog: Ein musikalischer Spass with a date of 14 June and Eine kleine Nachtmusik, dated 10 August. Ever since, people have inclined to view these separate events as somehow related, sometimes just some of them, other times all four together. Specifically with the two divertimentos in mind, Horst Seeger made the pronouncement in the Mozart-Year of 1956 that "Mozart's entire artistic credo is summed up in this contrast!" And in his provocative book from 1977, Wolfgang Hildesheimer threw out another idea:

"The autograph manuscript (of Ein musikalischer Spass) was completed two weeks after the news of his father's death. . . Naturally we cannot say whether the inspiration for a musical joke after his father's death was a coincidence or not. It does seem certain that the death of Leopold Mozart, for years such a dominant figure in his son's life, must have released some unconscious response, and it also seems probable that it was a feeling of liberation. Can this have been conscious? Might he have expressed it? It is possible that Ein musikalischer Spass was self-therapy, either to conquer his grief or else to laugh off his guilt feelings at his lack of sympathy. We cannot plumb the depths and shallows of Mozart's inner motivations. What occurred to Mozart when his father died? Apparently the ludicrous incompetence of his colleagues and pupils. Absurd, but not unthinkable. It is more probable, however, that nothing conscious occurred to him at all on his father's death, but all the more occurred to him for Don Giovanni, instead. He must have been following some inner need when writing the Spass, for he cannot have had a commission for it. Time pressure stimulated him, a behavioral response he had in common with many artists. It is improbable that the Spass was ever performed during Mozart's time. It was simply something for his own enjoyment." (Translation by Marion Faber)

Now, what is "improbable" are the details contained in the statements of these two authors. In the first place, it is highly questionable whether Mozart himself viewed (or would have wanted to view) the two divertimentos as having some inner relationship, as Seeger claims, or indeed whether in a matter of musical composition "an entire artistic credo" can legitimately be inferred from just two works. Second: it is not in the least "improbable" that "the Spass was ever performed during Mozart's time," for in fact Mozart himself wrote out instrumental parts for use in performing it. "Something simply for his own enjoyment" that did not also include being performed would have come down to us only as a score exactly as it was composed. Third: thanks to the autograph studies of Alan Tyson, we know now that the first movement of the Spass is at least a year and a half older than the rest of the work; it could even have been written some time in 1784, three years before the remainder. And: the first movement could also have been performed at the time, for the extant parts for the first violin and the "basso" are written on a paper type that is otherwise found only in Mozart compositions from 1784 to the end of 1785 (the other instrumental parts for the first movement are written on a paper type whose use extends from

1784 to the end of 1786, but these too almost certainly were written down contemporaneously with the first violin and "basso" parts).

Mozart ultimately extended this first movement, which obviously has no relation whatsoever to the death of his father, into a four-movement work at the time he was also working on Don Giovanni. And this "completed" version too probably received a performance, for a new part for the second violin, which contains the first movement in a somewhat reworked form and was written into the space left empty by the first violin in the score containing the second and third movements, dates from 1787. The performance parts for the other instruments for the last three movements have been lost, but given the existence of the parts for the two violins, we can assume they too used to exist. By the same token, the score of the first movement in its original form (from 1784/85) is also lost; perhaps this was the musical score once owned by Franz Schubert and later presented to his friend Anselm Hüttenbrenner. In short, the sources of Ein musikalischer Spass convey an unusually colorful picture of its history; it is a composition whose music has been completely preserved despite the variety of original sources.

VI.

In this Introduction, I can do little more than suggest by means of a few translated excerpts the range, diversity, and authenticity of this informative music-centered Mozart biography.

Let me close by giving you one complete chapter, the 21st, which comes after Küster's chapter on the great series of Vienna piano concertos and before the chapter on the string quartets dedicated to Joseph Haydn. Sandwiched in between his account of these two mighty musical achievements, we find Küster's sympathetic presentation of a single violin sonata. But what a sonata! In this age when we tend to devote our listening attention primarily to massed symphonic sound, it is worth being reminded of the vitality and beauty to be found when Mozart was writing for just the two voices of one violin and a piano. But of course there is more to the story than that:

Farewell to an old routine

-- The violin sonata K.454 for Regina Strinasacchi --

When you look at Mozart's early Vienna years, it is striking that, despite the extent of his known contacts with other musicians (in the course of participating in their concerts, for example), he created new works for relatively few of them; it was not only that he had not yet fully discovered composing for himself as an artist appearing in these concerts. The path leading to such ideas appears to have led by way of the piano lessons he was giving Barbara Ployer; the instruction he had earlier given Josepha Auernhammer did not seem to have such an effect. The number of artists he had composed for up to then is certainly small; only the horn-player Joseph Leutgeb, a friend of Mozart's out of his Salzburg days, received a solo concerto, and some separate arias were written for singers involved in the original production of Die Entführung.

Then, in 1784, a piano concerto appeared that was written for the blind pianist Maria Theresia von Paradis (1759-1824); this may have been the concerto in B-flat K.456, listed as completed on 30 September. And some time before, a sonata for piano and violin for the young Italian violinist Regina Strinasacchi (1764-1839) had emerged. It was the B-flat sonata K.454, which Mozart noted down as finished on 24 April 1784. Three days later, writing to his father, he

said: "Here now we have the famous lady from Mantua Strinasacchi, a very good violin player; she has lots of taste and feeling in her playing.--At this very moment [!] I am working on a sonata which we will play together at her concert in the theater on Thursday." That was on a Saturday; even so, five days later at the time of the concert, the sonata does not appear to have been as finished as Mozart's notation from Wednesday, eight days before, would imply. According to a subsequent comment by Constanze Mozart (which appears borne out by the autograph), at the concert Mozart played the piano part largely from memory; only later, it is said, did he finish writing it out, and that with an eye to publication of the piece, something that was advertised later, on 7 July.

Having to complete a violin sonata under time pressure was nothing new for Mozart and certainly nothing to worry about. In connection with one of his first concerts in Vienna in 1781, while still in the service of Archbishop Colloredo, Mozart had reported to his father (8 April 1781) : "Tonight we gave--for I am writing at 11 at night--a concert. In it, 3 pieces of mine were performed. All new, of course; --a rondo for a concerto for Brunetti--a sonata accompanied by violin, for me. --which I composed last night between 11 and 12--but, just to wind it up, I only wrote out the accompanying part for Brunetti, my part I carried in my head--and then, a rondo for Ceccarelli..."

Unlike the fate of the "Coronation" piano concerto K.537 for which Mozart, over long stretches, never wrote out more than the part for the right hand (despite his having performed it several times), this 1781 violin sonata (in G, K.379) was eventually brought to completion for the simple reason that it was to be published – in quite a different context from that of the B-flat sonata of 1784, to be sure. Sonatas for the piano and violin are an ever-present factor in Mozart's biography, and one that is particularly associated with financial considerations. This is something Mozart had learned in his earliest childhood when his very first printed works, sonatas K.6-9, were published in Paris (as a pair, Opus I and Opus II) in 1764; shortly thereafter came the six sonatas K.10-15 in London (1765, Opus III) and then six more, K.26-31 at The Hague (1766, Opus IV). Of these sixteen works, the first ten were described in their titles as "*Sonates pour le clavecin qui peuvent se jouer avec l'accompagnement de violon,*" that is, works where the violin "accompaniment" for the piano could be dropped. This applies especially to the London sonatas, where from the outset the part for the violin could also be performed on the flute and the ensemble could be further extended to include a cello. And the sonatas printed in Paris were in fact initially conceived for the piano alone, with Mozart only later turning them into sonatas for piano and violin.

Mozart was indeed alive to the possibilities of publishing violin sonatas: when he was in Mannheim in 1777/78 sounding out the prospects for employment, he composed six violin sonatas K.301-306 which he had engraved (as Opus I – for the second time!) in Paris in the summer and then presented to the Electress of the Palatinate, now moved from Mannheim to Munich, that winter on his way home. And after he moved to Vienna, the idea of publishing violin sonatas surfaced again: a further six works (as a second Opus II!) appeared in November 1781. To bring this off, Mozart even turned to some relatively older works; not only did the G major sonata which he had whipped up in April now appear before the public with this printing, but the C major sonata K.296 as well, composed in Mannheim in 1778 (the other four works in the set are K.376-378 and K.380).

Mozart could dedicate works like these to persons who, he hoped, might help him secure his livelihood wherever he happened to be; they were well suited to gaining people's attention, especially when they were written essentially as "sonatas for piano with violin accompaniment" and thus posed no unusual technical demands in their performance. Throughout his lifetime, Mozart kept this

type of sonata for (broadly speaking) piano with added violin in mind: the same steps in composing for the piano that led to the Paris sonata K.6 can be recognized in the sonata for piano and violin in F major K.547 of 1788.

As for the Strinasacchi sonata, the story seems at first to be the same, but only on the surface: that is, it too was eventually printed, together with two "usual" sonatas for solo piano (K.284 and K.333). But with this sonata, Mozart had taken a new course, in two respects: first, the printing of the work allowed Mozart to savour an earlier successful performance all the more; this can hardly have been a reason for publishing the earlier works. And second, this was a sonata that, from its inception, Mozart wrote "for himself" and a virtuoso violinist – and not primarily for the general musical public, the likely buyers of a printed edition; as a result, he could proceed to compose with musical considerations in mind entirely different from those for a sonata in which the violin's only function was to accompany the piano. It was this that led Leopold Mozart later to regard this sonata as being in quite a different category: as a "duetto." Of course the G major sonata K.379 of 1781 had originated under somewhat similar circumstances, but there Mozart had not allowed himself such free rein.

Out of the 22 sonatas for piano and violin that had appeared in print through 1778, ten of them contain only two movements (five of them in the so-called "second" Opus I – K. 301-306 – of 1778 alone). The sonata in C K.303 even anticipated somewhat the layout of that first Vienna sonata, in G K.379. Both are two-movement works, but in each case, the first allegro-movement opens with an adagio introduction. The third of the Mozart violin sonatas to have just such a slow introduction is the Strinasacchi sonata, although here the allegro movement that follows on the adagio introduction is itself followed by two more movements. For what is evidently the only work composed specifically for his concert appearance with the Italian violinist, Mozart must have visualized quite a different range of possibilities from those that attended the composition of the earlier G major sonata, which had been presented as one of three Mozart works (and the one meant to show him at his best) at the Viennese residence of Archbishop Colloredo's father in April 1781. Keep in mind also what Leopold Mozart wrote to his daughter in December 1785 after he too had finally heard Signora Strinasacchi play: "There is not a single note she does not play with feeling, even with the orchestra she played everything with expression, and no one can play an adagio with more feeling and more sensitively than she; she puts her heart and soul into the melody she is playing; and just as beautiful is her tone, and the power of her tone." Aren't there implications here for the sonata Mozart composed? And aren't there reasons for this beauty of tone that we might reasonably reconstruct?

Leopold's comments about "feeling" parallel those Mozart himself had written about Regina Strinasacchi's playing almost two years before. And Mozart must have had similar thoughts about her adagio playing too, which led to the largo introduction and the slow-tempoed middle movement (now *andante*, but originally marked *adagio*), with its long, sustained melodic periods, both being essential elements of the sonata's musical construction from the very beginning.

The middle movement is especially rich in its harmonic conception; the "development" – in a slow movement, often little more than a bridge from the dominant back to the tonic – provides a particularly clear picture of Mozart's aims. He chooses a path that is extremely complicated but highly effective, one that exhausts, indeed transcends, the harmonic possibilities of a development section in a special way. In a development section, a "theme" will often be treated sequentially; it may be modulated through the tonalities proceeding through the circle of fifths or the tones of a scale or it may be transposed in thirds.

Toward the middle of the movement Mozart turns for a short time from the dominant in B-flat major to B-flat minor; only then does he bring in the "theme" of the sequence and proceed by means of an extended cadential formula to raise it to a new level – but chromatically, in half-tone steps, in contrast to the "standard" approach to musical construction practiced by his contemporaries.

Thus he comes first to B minor (with the melody in the violin); then he comes to C minor (now the piano has the melody). C minor is the relative minor of the movement's tonic key of E-flat major, and from there it is a simple matter to return to the tonic.

It is this use of chromaticism – deliberately crossing what other composers then would have regarded as music's proper borders and what they almost certainly would not have chosen in place of simpler compositional techniques – that marks Mozart's later Vienna style: at an almost incidental technical spot, he breaks out of the old routine and leads performer and listener alike to exciting new heights; just as later in the piano concerto in B-flat K.595, he appears to break the musical flow in the transition from the middle tutti to the development so that for a moment its goal is obscured and only then does he lead the problem thus thrown up to its solution in a way that grips our attention, as a stereotyped, "classical" construction would not.

In speaking of the young violinist, Leopold Mozart gives singular praise to her tone – perhaps not entirely by chance. For it appears that Regina Strinasacchi played a Stradivarius violin (one said to have later been owned by Louis Spohr), although whether she owned it at this particular time is something we probably cannot establish. Nor was it yet considered self-evident in those days that Stradivarius violins were instruments of the highest distinction. In his treatise on the violin from 1774, the violinist George Simon Löhlein was still ranking the Stradivarius violins, with their "strong, penetrating, oboe-like but withal thin tone," behind the instruments made by the Tyroler Jakob Stainer and those of the Amati family. It was only in Paris in 1782 that the Stradivarius sound, in the hands of Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755-1824), began to win recognition as something extraordinary. And by then Viotti had already concertized in the place where Mozart later was to have another productive encounter with Stradivarius instruments: in Berlin, source of the impulse that Mozart took home with him to compose the Prussian quartets.

With this in mind, it seems reasonable to imagine that while writing his B-flat sonata for Strinasacchi, Mozart was reacting to the tone of Stradivarius instruments, the more so because he reacted similarly in Berlin and because even the renowned violin-theoretician Leopold Mozart had been moved to laud this "new" tone (at least new to him, obviously) that he discerned in the playing of the Mantua violinist – he clearly had not experienced it before. And all of this fits with the picture of the triumphal passage through the world that was then only beginning for the instruments of Antonio Stradivari.

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