

Style and interpretation in Mozart's piano and violin sonatas

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Abstract: *From Mozart's immense creation, the chamber music and especially the works for the duo piano-violin is revealed as being the subtlest and the most refined of all genres. It is a music of intimacy, of those things one "whispers". Mozart's music is meant for pure listening and delight, combining the serious and the light, the harmonic refinement with the charm of the melody, the technical difficulty with the playable expressiveness. Mozart's composing style has evolved during the different stages of his private life, as the 26 sonatas for piano and violin follow the track of his three creation periods: the youth period, the middle period and the maturity period.*

Keywords: *Mozart, sonatas, piano, violin*

1. Introduction

„These works contain the spirit and craftsmanship of one of the greatest minds in the history of Western music (and perhaps in the history of Western art, of whatever avenue). They are technically difficult, but not so difficult that they are beyond the reach of the persevering amateur. At the same time, they offer endless challenge to both the amateur and the hardened professional: to capture in performance the niceties of the Mozartian musical vocabulary; and, beyond that, to explore the range of Mozart's musical temperament, with the gratifying certainty that one can never reach the limits of that range.

Mozart was a virtuoso performer, certainly at the keyboard, and- by his father's expert testimony- on the violin almost as well. He knew both instruments intimately (as, for that matter, he knew every sounding device in his writing, including above all the human voice). He does not write to make life easy for the performer, but his demands are always in terms of the instrument's innate character and abilities. The notes lie well under the hand and under the bow.

Both players will find themselves thoroughly employed in the large and intricate sonatas of the later years.”³

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2. Style and performing aspects in Mozart

Traditionally, the instrumentalist's role consists in conveying the composer's intentions regarding the music features and especially the music style with fidelity, but at the same time with the performer's personal contribution. „The 18th century witnessed the culmination of the doctrine of the affections, the ultimate aim of which was the musical expression of specific human emotions, characterized by certain musical `devices` which are to some extent standardized and identifiable”.⁴

2.1. The cells formed of 2 Sounds united through an Expression Legato

These cells formed of 2 sounds united through an expression legato are the Mozartian emblem which make the composer's style recognisable depending on the manner in which they are being performed:

- vibrato on the first of the 2 sounds in the connection
- higher bow speed on the first sound and lower speed on the second one
- the first sound in the connection is ALWAYS longer, more important, more

In the piano technique, performing the two connected sounds is done with the same movement: the player enters the piano keys on the first sound, then the finger “leaves” the key on the second sound. The enter-exit movement also conveys a certain laying of weight on the first sound, and the second sound completes the fine and delicate legato.

2.2. Perfect coordination of the Left-Hand impulses with the Vibrato

Short and very stung impulses, on the dotted notes, will be associated with a vibrato of the “doorbell” type, rather a brief impulse which the left hand superposes perfectly over the bow impulse.

- The very brief impulses will determine the use of a very short bow length, with maintaining the bow as close to the string as possible to be controlled as well as possible.
- The bow length used on the sections with high virtuosity (brief values) is very short, which determines a very good control of the right hand;

³ **Abram Loft**, *Violin and Keyboard: The Duo Repertoire*, p. 228. Amadeus Press, Portland, Oregon, 1991.

⁴ **Robin, Stowel**, *Performance Practice*, p. 372. „The Mozart Compendium”, H.C. Robbins Landon General Editor. Thames and Hudson, London, 1996.

2.3. The clarity of Mozart's composing style

Mozart's Composing style requires "cleanliness" when being played, so a sure manner can be extracted, which leads to a clear understanding of the composer's message:

Good articulation – Clarity – Simplicity – Understanding the message

A good articulation of the musical text leads to clear sections and may even convey the impression of a tempo faster than it actually is. It seems that if a fast music is performed very well articulated, the impression it conveys to the audience is that the tempo is much faster than the metronome shows. The homogeneity given by the performing manner leads to clarity when playing, and playing "with spirit" implies a tempo without "rushes".

An essential element for obtaining clarity is given by the need to perfectly synchronise the ornaments, durations, pauses, and breaths during performance. At the same time, the two performers must reach the higher level of "feeling" the motifs and phrases in the same manner to be able to imprint flexibility and fluency to the musical discourse.

Mozart's simplicity is evident from the lack of emphasis, of exaggerations; the two instrumentalists must control the movements of their arms/ bodies to be limited, their gestures to be in accordance with the feature of the music performed. Likewise, the intensity ratio between the two performers is a real challenge; if other classical composers of sonatas for piano and violin place the piano in the sphere of accompaniment, Mozart initially subordinates the violin to the piano, and later the two instruments have a "dialogue" at an equal level. Thus, the intensity ratio piano-violin needs to be thought and rethought again and again so as not to come out of the framework of simplicity and coherence of sound, required by this manner.

The clarity of the composing style can be rendered, but also of the message conveyed. As everything is crystal clear, the style does not seem so complicated anymore, and the Mozartian feature of the piece appears much simpler to achieve.

Thus, touching upon the three essential elements (articulation, clarity, and simplicity), the clear feature of Mozart's style will automatically reveal itself, a style that stands out through refinement, clarity, balance, air in leading the phrases, purity.

2.4. The constancy of moving the Bow on the String

When achieving a continuous sound which should not undergo changes in dynamics and without "twitches" and false accents, the bow must have continuity regarding the movement speed and the pressure made on the string.

For achieving Mozart's style, leading the bow is one of the primordial elements, as the Mozartian sound is very difficult to achieve. Since the impulses required for this particular musical style are of many types, we will highlight the most important manners used by violinists to achieve a performance of the Austrian

composer's music as true to the original as possible.

For a pianist, constancy is required when we talk about performing the long trills: over its entire length, the trill requires identical rhythmical unfolding, the dynamics needs to be pursued so that stressed sounds do not emerge and get out of context. A trill played constantly also amazes in performance through its brilliance, balance, and refinement.

2.4.1. The fast sections in sixteenths

The fast section in sixteenths are performed differently, according to the dynamics required:

- Spiccato with the bow jumped very close to the string for very good control of the right hand, and for precise and exact achievement of the clarity of the sections.
- Detached with a large bow, but controlled and with clear impulses which separate each feature from the following one.

The succession of sixteenths in the version of 2 connected, 2 separated, requires special attention when laying the bow with all its weight on the connection, so that, from this point of support, the separated sixteenths, performed with a very small and light bow, should be able to be distinguished clearly and equally.

3. Acknowledgements

The approach of the sonatas for piano and violin by Mozart is not easily achieved. Not only because of countless problems that arise from the simple collaboration of two different minds and ways of feeling, but especially because of the entirely special feature of Mozart's music: it is the music hardest to play, as it cannot be forced. Any exaggeration in the performance creates mixed sound timbres that have nothing to do with Mozart.

On the other hand, to perform these pieces timidly, flattening their dynamics and limiting the flexibility of their rhythm out of the wish not to fail, all these errors lead towards a negative a result.

4. References

- Loft, A. 1991. *Violin and Keyboard: The Duo Repertoire*. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press.
- Stowel, R. 1996. „Performance Practice”. In *The Mozart Compendium*, 372. London: H.C. Robbins Landon General Editor. Thames and Hudson.