

Concerto KV. 242 „Lodron” by W. A. Mozart Two or three pianos?

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Abstract: *Starting from a common stage experience, the two authors analyze in parallel the two versions of the "Lodron" Concerto, looking for differences that can determine the option for one or the other. A historical framework, interpretive suggestions and aesthetic preferences complete the analysis, which reaches a personal, but not obligatory, conclusion reflecting the spirit of musical interpretation that pursues a balance between the objective and subjective components. We believe that the balance is tipped towards the two-piano version, not only for musical reasons, but also for logistical ones, sometimes being difficult to find two quality pianos in a concert hall, three even more complicated. After all, Mozart himself composed for three pianos especially for the Countess Lodron and her daughters, the later version for two pianos being for himself and his sister; therefore, it is a composition conceived in accordance with the recipients and the first interpreters of the work, this being almost a rule at that time. Thus, in the current era, both versions are valid, the authors preferring the one for two pianos, suitable for a piano duo, as the authors of this article consider themselves.*

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1. Introduction

In 2023, we played together at the Braşov and Craiova Philharmonics the “Lodron” Concerto by Mozart in the version for two pianos in the composer's arrangement, in “tandem” with the Concerto for 4 hands by Koželuch, two rarely performed works and, due to the success achieved and personal satisfaction, we will repeat the experience in 2025 with the Radio Chamber Orchestra.

Although at the beginning at least one of us (CS) had some reluctance regarding the repertoire, during the deepening of the works, we remained fully convinced, we could even say delighted. We did not know Alfred Einstein's

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assessment "*the least of Mozart's Concertos*" undoubtedly exaggerated, but we agree with the epithet "*purely gallant*" of the same author.

The gallant style was a somewhat violent reaction to the complexity of the Baroque, which can be exemplified through the Oedipal prism in the case of the Bach family. But simplicity is a quality, especially when it comes to geniuses, and it appears to a greater or lesser degree in all styles and eras of music history. As for musical interpretation, it can be a specific test to highlight the great artists who can win you over with a *Haiku*, among many others who need a lot of sound material to express themselves. We have little doubt about the characteristics of the gallant style, whose composers "did not hesitate to eliminate the slow parts, being considered too serious" (Tranchefort 1986, 535), and in our case, the 2nd part is an *Adagio* that conquers with expressive cantability and delicate lyricism, which pleads in favor of Mozart's genius, even in less representative works.

As far as we are concerned, the small reluctance probably existed due to the inevitable comparison with the Concerto for two pianos KV 365, which we had played two years before, a much more complex work with a far-reaching concert spirit.

2. The Mozartian instrumental concert

In the works of Mozart, the greatest virtuoso of his era, the concerto for one or more instruments and orchestra occupies a special place. Starting from the Latin term „concertare” (to compete), the term „concerto” appropriated by Italian culture, refers to „...a composition written for one or more soloists, accompanied by a symphony or chamber orchestra” (Bughici 1978, 71).

Mozart, the extraordinary virtuoso of the piano (harpsichord), but also of the violin and the organ, cultivates the concert genre with passion, dedicating a long series of concertos to the piano in which both the crystal clarity of the form and the musical substance stand out. „Taken as a whole, Mozart's concertos adopt the tripartite architectural formula (fast-slow-fast), but in this unfolding taken from tradition, Mozart's imagination reveals its unceasing genius through new solutions in form and language, as well as in the relationship between soloist and orchestra. The concertos for piano and orchestra dominate with authority, constituting the answer that the composer gave to the pianist Mozart...” (Ștefănescu 1996, 192).

„Mozart's supremacy as a composer is nowhere more evident than in his concertos”, states Susan Kagan in her Introduction to Piano Concertos Nos. 7 - 10 (Kagan, 2000, VII). His evolution in composition is clearly reflected from the first Salzburger KV 175 concerto to the great Viennese Concertos, as in Beethoven's work is reflected in the Piano Sonatas.

The „Lodron” concerto perfectly illustrates what Mozart wrote in one of his letters to his father: „The Concertos, the average between too hard and too easy, are very brilliant, pleasing to the ear. Naturally, without being too superficial, here

and there they can satisfy experts, but in such a way that even the uninitiated are satisfied with them without knowing why” (Mozart 1968, 184).

The work shows us „the consummate composer in the process of creating and perfecting the Classical Piano Concerto” (Kagan 2000, VII).

3. Concerto in F Major KV 242 „Lodron”

It was composed in 1776 to be played by Countess Maria Antonia Lodron and her daughters Aloysia and Giuseppa. So three solo pianos accompanied by string orchestra plus two oboes and two horns. The evolution of Mozart's Piano Concertos was also expressed by the increase in the composition of the orchestra: in Concerto KV 365, composed three years later, two bassoons are added, and in KV 453 (1784) the flute appears; Concerto KV 466 (1785) introduces trumpets and timpani, clarinets appear only in KV 482 written in the same year as KV 466. There are exceptions, the first concertos having a *sui-generis* orchestral composition, and in the great final concertos we find examples where the composer does not use the whole complex of the winds.

Returning to the KV 242 Concerto, the orchestration is generally discreet, and the winds even more so. The oboes, alone or together with the horns, timbrally enrich the orchestral texture, doubling the violins an octave higher or one of the pianos; there are rarely independent motives, melodic in the oboes and rhythmic in the horns, the latter also maintaining more or less long chords in accordance with the respective harmony.

Due to the lesser musical qualities of one of the daughters, the third piano part is much less technically demanding. Thus, in the cadenzas, in the 1st part it plays almost nothing, in the 2nd part he has some imitative motifs, and in the Cadences from the 3rd part it could rest, the first being for piano I, the second for piano II and the third for the two together.

It is worth noting that during this creative period, Mozart notes precisely all the cadenzas (even the shortest ones) that the performers had to perform, even if these, according to the customs of the time, were optional.

Regarding the third *Cadenza*, we have a performance suggestion that can facilitate the accurate reproduction of the sound material. As can be seen in Example 1, there are two lines in unison (octave apart) played with the right hand by pianos I and II (identical in both versions); the rhythmic variety and values (fourths, eighths, sixteenths, thirtieths) to which rests and fermatas are added overlap the necessary freedom characteristic of a recitative, which makes synchronization difficult, especially in the case of the pianos facing each other, the pianists not being able to see the hands of the partner.

Thus, we suggest the execution by piano I with both hands of the two lines, the first fragment up to the first fermata, the discourse being taken over by piano II between the first and third fermata, also both lines with both hands, the first piano ending the passage in the same way, from the third and last fermata to the return of the main theme. We are not supporters of arrangements to facilitate the execution of certain passages, but in this case, we prefer to achieve a sound result as close as possible to the original idea of the composer, especially respecting the indispensable improvisational character, at the expense of taking a risk that is not beneficial to the musical substance in question (Figure 1).

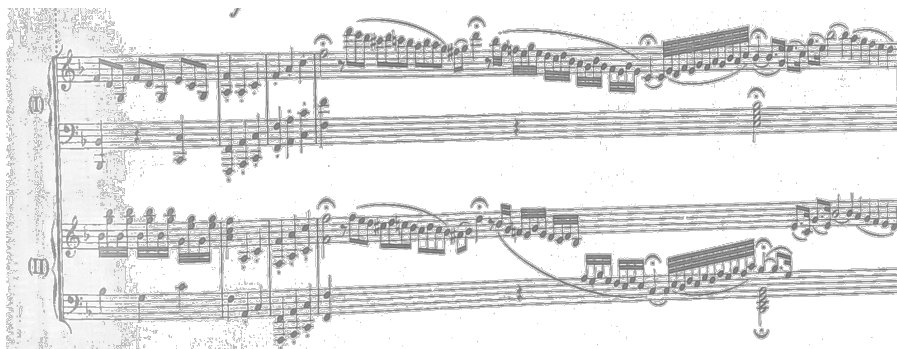


Fig. 1. W. A. Mozart– Concerto KV 242, p3, bars 189-192

4. Two or three pianos?

Four years later, Mozart wrote a variation for two pianos, probably to play with his sister Nannerl. This was also the version in which Mozart performed the concerto for the last time in 1780, in Salzburg. Between the two versions, which would be preferable, both listening and playing?

The first step would be to analyze the third piano part and how Mozart transformed this material into the version for two pianos.

4.1. Analysis

As we stated earlier, from a technical point of view it is much easier than the others and the amount of sound material is also much less.

The various transformations of this material are:

- when piano III plays the same thing as the other two (e.g.: Theme 1 and the transition to Theme 2 from Part I), it simply disappears; the result is a decrease in sound intensity, but on today's pianos this loses its meaning;

- independent passages go to one of the other pianos, which had a break at that moment (there are many such cases) or go to piano II, its part being taken over by piano I (rarely);
- passages that only enriched the texture disappear - accompaniments, arpeggios;
- various motifs that had the role of „echo“ (the cadence of the 2nd part) or of playful comments (the development and cadence of the 1st part) disappear.

As Michael Morrison commented in ALLMUSIC „the work *loses little* in the transcription for two pianos“, adding in a sententious tone: „Mozart has here *crafted a full-blown, mature concerto*“.

4.2. Aesthetic preferences

We believe that the balance is tipped towards the two-piano version, not only for musical reasons, but also for logistical reasons, sometimes it is difficult to find two quality pianos in a concert hall, three even more complicated.

Since Mozart's time, we know of no record of the concerto in the version for three pianos being performed in Salzburg, where it was composed. But from Mozart's correspondence with his father, we learn about the presentation of the concerto at an Academy organized by Count Wolfegg in Augsburg on October 22, 1777: „What do you think was the first piece after the symphony?. The concerto for three pianos. Herr Demler took the first part, I the second, and Herr Stein the third“ (Mozart 2007, 83). Also from the composer's correspondence, we know about the performance of the concerto in a private Academy organized in the house of the Cannabich chapelmaster: „...there was another audition at Cannabich, where my concerto for 3 pianos was played. Miss Rose Cannabich played the first, Miss Weber the second, and Miss Pierron (Serarius, our domestic nymph) the third. I had done three rehearsals and it had gone very well“ (Mozart 1968, 52).

In the sense of the above, for commemorative moments or of great historiographical rigor, the version for three pianos would be preferable, devoting special attention to the pianist who will sacrifice himself for the most „ungrateful“ role, the third piano.

A happy solution was the concert performed by Andras Schiff, Daniel Barenboim and Sir Georg Solti with the *English Chamber Orchestra* in 1989, where the latter had a double role: piano III and conductor. It was amazing for us that, in the same concert, Solti displayed his pianistic virtues in the Concert for two pianos KV 365, together with Barenboim.

Another interesting interpretation is the one in which the protagonists were Marta Argerich, Rico and Paul Gulda (sons of the famous Friedrich) with Christian Arming as conductor. Surprisingly, Argerich „sacrificed“ herself, in the spirit of collaborating on stage with various colleagues and in various formulas, a fact that characterizes her especially in the second part of her career. Robert, Gaby and Jean Casadesus also recorded this Concerto with the *Philadelphia Orchestra* conducted by

Eugene Ormandy in 1963, here the family spirit recalling the original recipients of this work. Mozart has fascinated and attracted all the great performers over time. Beginning with the young Beethoven, almost all famous pianists put their mastery at the service of Mozartian music. Among them, among the most illustrious, are undoubtedly Radu Lupu and Murray Perraia. We think that their interpretative version of the „Lodron” Concerto for two pianos and orchestra, recorded in 1991 with the *English Chamber Orchestra*, is one of the most beautiful!

5. Conclusions

After all, Mozart himself composed for three pianos especially for the Countess Lodron and her daughters, the later version for two pianos being for himself and his sister; therefore, it is a composition conceived in accordance with the recipients and the first interpreters of the work, this being almost a rule at that time (good thing there were only two daughters!). Thus, in the current era, both versions are valid, the authors preferring the one for two pianos, suitable for a piano duo, as the authors of this article consider themselves.

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