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The Composer's Voice: Mozart



An astonished Haydn exclaimed to Leopold Mozart, “Before God and as an honest man I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me in person or by name. He has taste, and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition.”¹ This pronouncement is another in the long line of famous benedictions from one generation of composers to the next, some of which we have already seen. Accounts of such blessings, even if entirely fictional, nonetheless serve a crucial role in helping to construct and perpetuate a lineage of master composers. As Haydn blessed Mozart, so Mozart does Beethoven, and Beethoven Schubert, and so forth through time.

Posterity has turned Mozart (Fig. 14-1) into an “icon”—the “image of music,” tinged with an aura of holiness—for many reasons. One is his phenomenal precociousness and productivity; another is his heartbreakingly premature death at age thirty-five; yet another is his musical universality and the staggering range of his gifts, both as performer and as composer. His earliest surviving composition, a small harpsichord keyboard piece written in the notebook of his sister Maria Anna (“Nannerl”), was apparently composed just after his fifth birthday. His last was a Requiem Mass, on which he was working at the time of his death. During his brief life Mozart managed to compose such a vast quantity of music that it takes a book of a thousand pages, Ludwig von Köchel’s frequently revised chronological catalogue first published in 1862, just to list it adequately and to provide the “K. numbers” used to identify his works. The quantity of music is of such a quality that the best of it has long served as a standard of musical perfection within the Western tradition.

The composer was baptized Joannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart on 28 January 1756. Theophilus in Greek means “love of God,” as do the other language alternatives that Mozart occasionally used: Gottlieb, Amadeus, and Amadeo. Beginning in his early twenties he most often signed his name Wolfgang Amadè Mozart. He was born in Salzburg, where his formidable father, Leopold Mozart (1719–87), served as deputy music director in the court of the Prince-Archbishop, who ruled this important city-state near the Bavarian border. By 1762, when the prodigy was six years old, his father relinquished most of his duties and gave up his own composing career so that he could see properly to his son’s musical education. He also began to display Mozart’s amazing gifts to the courts and musical centers of Europe on a grand tour that lasted more than three years. Mozart’s formative years were thus spent abroad, providing him less with a conventional formal education than with an experiential one. Mozart would later emphasize the importance of “seeing the world,” especially as it allowed him to leave his native Salzburg, a city he came to detest. In his early twenties he wrote to his father: “I assure you that people who do not travel (I mean those who cultivate the arts and learning) are indeed miserable creatures.”²

By the age of ten the boy (Fig. 14-2) was famous, having performed at courts throughout the German Catholic territories, the Netherlands, and Paris. He stayed for more than a year in London, where he was fêted at the court of King George III, became friendly with Johann Christian Bach, and underwent a series of scientific tests at the Royal Society, a prestigious scientific association, to prove that he truly was an extraordinary, gifted child and not a musically accomplished dwarf.

Leopold, a devout Catholic with little sympathy for some aspects of the Enlightenment “Age of Reason,” remarked in a letter to a family friend that people were astounded by his son: “I owe this act to Almighty God, otherwise I should be the most thankless creature. *And if it is ever to be my duty to convince the world of this miracle, it is so now, when people are ridiculing whatever is called a miracle and denying all miracles.* Therefore they must be convinced. And was it not a great joy and a tremendous victory for me to hear a Voltairian say to me in amazement: ‘*Now for once in my life I have seen a miracle; and this is the first!*’”³ It is largely because of his uncanny gifts and his famously complicated relations with his father that Mozart has been such a frequent subject of fiction, dramatization, psychobiography, and sheer rumor, including the persistent tall tale of his death by poisoning at the hand of Antonio Salieri (1750–1825), who held the coveted official position of Court Kapellmeister at the Habsburg Court in Vienna.

Mozart’s iconic status is also due to his singular skill in moving audiences. His success at evoking emotional sympathy kindled interest in his own personality to an extent that was unprecedented at that time in the history of European music.



Figure 14-1 Wolfgang Amadè Mozart.

TIMELINE

- 1756** Birth of Wolfgang Amadè Mozart
- 1762** Mozart begins a European tour as a musical prodigy
- 1769** Mozart's first opera, *La finta semplice*
- 1776** American Declaration of Independence
- 1779–80** Mozart, *Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola*, K. 364
- 1781** Mozart, *Idomeneo*
- 1781** Mozart moves to Vienna
- 1781** Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*
- 1782** Death of Metastasio
- 1782** Joseph II appoints Lorenzo Da Ponte as poet to the court theater

His compositions, in practically every genre he cultivated (and he cultivated all of them), have been maintained in an unbroken performing tradition from his time to ours. His works are the foundation of the current classical music repertoire in both the concert hall and the opera house and have been so ever since there has been such a repertoire, that is, since the period immediately following his death. Except for Handel's oratorios, nothing earlier has lasted in this way. Haydn, Mozart's greatest contemporary, has survived only in part. Bach, as we know, returned to full active duty only after a long time underground.

Mozart's broad and lengthy travels with his father and Nannerl, a talented musician and sometimes composer herself, extended beyond France and England to Italy, Germany (where he heard the famed orchestra in Mannheim), and elsewhere. An important consequence of these years of wandering was his acquisition of new languages, both linguistic and musical. Mozart's abundant letters are revealing, delightful, often playful and sometimes lewd (toilet humor being favored, especially in flirtatious exchanges with his pretty young cousin and later with his wife). A passage he wrote in his sister's diary offers a veritable Babel of languages—Italian, German, French, and Latin—all freely mixed together from one word to the next: “post prandium la sig'ra Catherine chés uns. wir habemus joués colle carte di Tarock. À sept heur siamo andati spatzieren in den horto aulico. faceva la plus pulchra tempestat von der Welt.” (This might be translated as: “After lunch Mrs. Catherine came to our house. We played with the tarot cards. At seven o'clock we went for a walk in the garden. We saw the most beautiful storm in the world.”)⁴ Mozart did something comparable in his music, not only by writing operas in Latin, German, and Italian (as well as other vocal works in French and English) but also by adopting and adapting the musical styles he encountered in England, France, Italy, and Germany. By his own admission he could “more or less adopt or imitate any kind and any style of composition.”⁵

Perhaps most remarkable was Mozart's ability to create masterpieces in every genre of music current in his time, writing modest to supremely complex works, sacred and secular, instrumental and vocal, intimate and extravagant, pieces intended for the home, court, concert hall, church, and opera house. No composer before or after him has been so widely successful in the domains both of dramatic and instrumental music. Rossini, Verdi, Wagner, Puccini—a whole list of great opera composers we will meet in later chapters—wrote little besides opera, while composers such as Bach, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, and Mahler either shunned music for the theater entirely or produced very little.

Mozart's successes in the dramatic and instrumental realms were mutually reinforcing. He learned from his own music. Part of the richness of Mozart operas comes from his writing symphonies, concertos, and chamber and religious music. The orchestration of his operas can be unusually elaborate, which sometimes led to the charge that instruments were distracting attention away from the voices. Mozart also used formal procedures, such as sonata form, in his operas. At the same time, the vocal, lyric, and dramatic elements associated with his operas fundamentally informed his instrumental music. We shall begin our consideration



Figure 14-2 Mozart as a boy, in Salzburg court uniform.

of Mozart with his operas before turning to the other genres with which they so fruitfully interacted.

The Early Operas

Mozart's operas have not only survived where Haydn's have perished, but a half dozen of them, roughly a third of his output in the genre, now form the bedrock of the standard repertory and are the earliest operas familiar today to general theatergoers. They sum up and synthesize all the varieties of musical drama current in the eighteenth century, and they have served as a model to opera composers ever since.

At age eleven Mozart wrote his first dramatic work, an intermezzo called *Apollo et Hyacinthus*, to a libretto in Latin for performance at Salzburg University. (He used a melody from it in the second movement of a symphony composed a few months later.) Within a couple of years he was equipped to turn out works of fully professional caliber in the principal theatrical genres then current. In 1769, the thirteen-year-old's first opera buffa, called *La finta semplice* (The Pretended Simpleton), set to a libretto by Carlo Goldoni, was performed in Salzburg. It was followed in late 1770 by his first opera seria, called *Mitridate, rè di Ponto* (Mithridates, King of Pontus), to a libretto based on a tragedy by Racine. In between came another early success, *Bastien und Bastienne*, a **Singspiel**, namely a German comic opera with spoken dialogue replacing the recitatives. These three genres—Italian opera both tragic and comic and German vernacular comedy—were the ones Mozart would cultivate for the rest of his career. What the early triumphs demonstrated above all was his absolute command of the conventions associated with all three, a mastery that enabled him eventually to achieve an unprecedented directness of communication that still moves audiences long after the conventions themselves became outmoded.

Mozart's first operatic masterpiece was *Idomeneo, rè di Creta* (Idomeneus, King of Crete), an opera seria written in 1780, premiered in Munich in 1781, and revised five years later for performance in Vienna. Setting an Italian translation of an old French libretto, Mozart cast it in the severe style of Gluck's neoclassical reform dramas, two of which, based on the myth of Iphigenia, had also treated the painful subject of a father sworn to sacrifice his child. By modeling his opera on Gluck's, Mozart completed his assimilation of all the theatrical idioms to which he was heir. At this time mastery was more highly prized than originality, which would only become an overriding concern in the nineteenth century. The successful appropriation of Gluck's ideals and methods, in a manner that vividly illustrates the eighteenth century's outlook on artistic creativity, transcended his predecessor's achievement and at the same time also went a long way toward transforming the reformer's innovations into conventions.

In the summer of 1781, having quarreled with the archbishop of Salzburg and having requested and ungraciously received release from his position ("with a kick in the ass," he wrote to his horrified father on 9 June), the twenty-five-year-old Mozart moved to Vienna to set up shop as a freelance musician. Serious mythological dramas like *Idomeneo* were becoming unfashionable in Vienna. While sociopolitical reforms were Emperor Joseph II's principal interest, he also paid attention to what was being performed on the court stages. He had an aversion to serious opera, ostensibly because of its costliness. Music historians have tended to despise him a bit, mainly because of his failure to give proper recognition to Mozart. In late 1787

- 1782** Mozart, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Symphony No. 35 ("Haffner")
- 1782** Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions*
- 1783** Mozart, Symphony No. 36 ("Linz")
- 1784** Mozart, Piano Concerto in G Major, K. 453
- 1785** Mozart, Symphony No. 38 ("Prague")
- 1786** Mozart, *The Marriage of Figaro*
- 1787** Mozart, *Don Giovanni*
- 1788** Mozart, Symphonies No. 39, No. 40, and No. 41 ("Jupiter")
- 1788** Constitution of the United States
- 1789** Beginning of the French Revolution
- 1791** Mozart, *La clemenza di Tito*, *The Magic Flute*, and Requiem
- 1791** Death of Mozart

Joseph appointed him Court *Kammermusicus* (chamber musician) at a salary about which Mozart supposedly remarked: “too much for what I do, too little for what I could do.”⁶

The 1780s—the decade of Joseph II’s reign that overlapped with Mozart’s time in Vienna—saw the composer’s great run of comic opera, a genre he utterly transformed. First to appear was a Singspiel, composed in response to Joseph’s patronage of vernacular comedies, for which the emperor had established a special German troupe at the Vienna Burgtheater (Court Theater, Fig. 14-3). It was there that *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (The Abduction from the Harem) premiered on 16 July 1782, and it was in connection with this production that Joseph allegedly told Mozart: “Too beautiful for our ears, my dear Mozart, and vastly too many notes.”⁷ To which Mozart is famously said to have responded: “Just as many as are necessary, your Majesty.”

Although written in German and performed in the court theater, the opera has an exotic rather than a national subject. There had long been a great Viennese vogue for “Oriental,” specifically “Turkish,” subject matter in the wake of the unsuccessful siege of the city by the Ottoman Turks in 1683. Making fun of the former enemy was a kind of national sport, and the Turkish military (or “**Janissary**”) percussion instruments that had once struck fear in the hearts of European soldiers were now appropriated by orchestras. The raucous jangling of the Janissary band (also imitated in the Piano Sonata in A Major, K. 331, with its famous rondo “Alla Turca”) is a special effect in the merry overture to *Die Entführung*, whose orchestra includes timpani, bass drum, cymbals, and triangle.

While at work in Vienna on *Die Entführung*, Mozart kept up a lively correspondence with his father back home in Salzburg. One of his letters, dated 26 September

Figure 14-3 The Vienna Burgtheater in 1783. Engraving by Carl Schuetz (1745–1800).



1781, offers a revealing description of the arias he was writing. About the frenzied finale of one for the bass role of Osmin, the ridiculous guardian of the harem, he wrote:

Just when the aria seems to be over, there comes the *allegro assai*, which is in a totally different meter and in a different key; this is bound to be very effective. For just as a man in such a towering rage oversteps all the bounds of order, moderation and propriety, and completely forgets himself, so must the music too forget itself. But as passions, whether violent or not, must never be expressed in such a way as to excite disgust, and as music, even in the most terrible situations, must never offend the ear, but must please the listener, or in other words must never cease to be *music*, I have gone from F (the key in which the aria is written), not into a remote key, but into a related one, not, however, into its nearest relative D minor, but into the more remote A minor.⁸

This sentiment has been justly taken as a sort of emblem of “Enlightened” attitudes about art and its relationship to its audience. Bach, operating before the Enlightenment, would have heartily disagreed; but so too would many composers after it. (On occasion, even Mozart himself would cross the line—in this letter he may have been telling his father what he thought he wanted to hear.) Mozart continues with a description of an aria for the hero, Belmonte, who seeks to rescue his beloved Constanze:

Let me now turn to Belmonte’s aria in A major, “O wie ängstlich, o wie feurig” [O how anxiously, O how ardently]. Would you like to know how I have expressed it—and even indicated his throbbing heart? By the two violins playing octaves. This is the favorite aria of all those who have heard it, and it is mine also . . . You see the trembling—the faltering—you see how his throbbing breast begins to swell; this I have expressed by a *crescendo*. You hear the whispering and the sighing—which I have indicated by the first violins with mutes and a flute playing in unison.⁹

While not exactly a new technique, Mozart’s mastery of musical portraiture set a benchmark in subtle expressivity as well as in refinement of orchestration, a skill he had learned in part from his experiences writing instrumental pieces. Mozart’s arias offered a new area in which to explore emotions and what it meant to be human. This is one reason for the unprecedented human interest in Mozart as a person. His musical portraits of certain characters have been read, persistently, though of course unverifiably, as self-portraits.

Biographical interpretations have been advanced, for example, to explain Mozart’s composing, in swift succession, exemplary works in two such contrasting genres as serious opera (*Idomeneo*) and Singpiel (*Die Entführung*). With another composer, adept powers of assimilation and command of convention might suffice to explain it. With Mozart, mere mastery of convention does not seem sufficient to account for such immediacy and versatility of expression. And so the grim *Idomeneo* may be associated with Mozart’s unhappy courtship of the soprano Aloysia Weber. The jovial *Entführung*, on the other hand, may be associated with Mozart’s marriage, a couple of weeks after its premiere, to Aloysia’s younger sister (Fig. 14-4), whose name happened to coincide with that of the leading feminine role in the opera, Constanze.

Are such explanations necessary? Perhaps not, and they can very often be misleading, but they are certainly understandable. Mozart’s uncanny human portraits in sound seem to resonate with the reality of a concrete personality. They also inspire

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Figure 14-4 Constanze Mozart, wife of Wolfgang Amadè Mozart.

empathy—and this was his other breakthrough. One might respond to a work by Mozart not only by thinking “it’s about him” but also by thinking that, somehow, “it’s about me.” The bond of kinship thus established between the composer’s subjectivity and the listener’s—a human bond of empathy seemingly capable of transcending differences in age, class, gender, nation, time, or indeed any other barrier—is supremely in the optimistic spirit of the Enlightenment. When the feat is duplicated in the wordless realm of instrumental music, as we shall soon see, instrumental music becomes invested with a sense of importance—indeed, of virtual holiness—it had rarely known before. We can begin to understand why Mozart could be worshiped, particularly in the nineteenth century, as a kind of musical god who worked a beneficent, miraculous influence in the world.

The “Da Ponte” Operas

After *Die Entführung*, Mozart did not complete another opera for four years. Part of the reason for the gap had to do with his growing career in Vienna as a freelancer, which meant giving a lot of concerts, which in turn meant writing a lot of instrumental music, particularly piano concertos. But it was also due to Joseph II’s unexpected disbanding of the national Singspiel company and its replacement by an Italian opera buffa troupe whose regular composers, Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816), Vicente Martín y Soler (1754–1806), and Antonio Salieri—Italians all (Martín being a naturalized Spaniard)—had a proprietary interest in freezing out a German rival, especially one as formidable as Mozart.

Mozart’s letters testify to his additional frustration in searching for appropriate stories to set. At one point, in May 1783, he tells his father, “I have looked through at least a hundred librettos and more, but I have not found a single one with which I am satisfied.”¹⁰ He goes on to relate his difficulty in gaining access to Lorenzo Da Ponte (1749–1838), the newly appointed poet to the court theater (Fig. 14-5). Given Joseph II’s preferences it is not surprising that he chose Da Ponte, a specialist in opera buffa, to replace the aged Metastasio, the paragon of the opera seria, who died in 1782 at the age of eighty-four.

“These Italian gentlemen are very civil to your face,” Mozart complained to his father in 1783. “Enough—we know them! If he [Da Ponte] is in league with Salieri, I shall never get anything out of him.”¹¹ It was such letters, and the intrigues that they exposed, that led to all the gossip about Salieri’s nefarious role in causing Mozart’s early death, and all the dubious fiction that gossip later inspired. Beethoven discussed the rumors in the 1820s. In 1830 the celebrated Russian writer Aleksandr Pushkin wrote a verse drama called *Mozart and Salieri*, which Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov turned into an opera in 1897. The battle between the two was subsequently adapted for Broadway in Peter Shaffer’s play *Amadeus* (1979), which was later adapted for Milos Forman’s Academy Award-winning film (1984). Most accounts from the time, however, portray Salieri, who was the teacher of Beethoven, Schubert, Liszt, and many other composers, as a generous man and a talented musician. There were rivalries, to be sure, but fortunately no murders.

Mozart’s wish to compete directly with “these Italian gentlemen” is revealed in another passage from the same letter to his father. He describes the kind of two-act realistic comedy he wanted to write, and it was precisely the kind of libretto that Da Ponte, a converted Venetian Jew, had adapted from the traditions he had learned

during his early years in Italy and brought to perfection. In this he was continuing the buffa tradition of Goldoni, which sported a highly differentiated cast of characters and lengthy but speedy action finales at the conclusion of each act. Mozart was especially firm that the “whole story should be really *comic*, and, if possible, should include *two equally good female parts*, one of them *seria*, the other *mezzo carattere*, but both parts equal in importance and excellence. The third female character, however, may be entirely buffa, and so may all the male ones.”¹² This mixture ensured great variety in musical style: A *seria* role for a woman implied all the old formulas (coloratura, extended forms, and accompanied recitatives); buffa implied rapid patter and *secco* (dry) recitatives; “medium character” implied lyricism. Da Ponte’s special gift was that of assembling this virtual smorgasbord of idioms into a vivid dramatic shape.

Mozart finally managed to collaborate with Da Ponte in the fall of 1785. The project was all but surefire: an Italian adaptation of the French play *La folle journée, ou le mariage de Figaro* (The Madcap Day; or, The Marriage of Figaro), one of the most popular comedies of the day, but a play banned at the time in Vienna. It was the second part of a trilogy by the great French playwright Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732–99). The first installment, *Le barbier de Séville* (The Barber of Seville), had already been turned into a hugely successful opera by Paisiello and premiered in St. Petersburg in 1782. These plays were the epitome of that old standby, the servant-outsmarts-master routine, familiar on every operatic stage since the earliest intermezzos, preeminently Pergolesi’s *La serva padrona*. In the spirit of the late eighteenth century, the old joke became much more pointed and bolder than before as well as more overtly political: Issues of class structure, gender relations, sexual politics, and marriage are explored in depth. Both master and servant are now portrayed as rounded and basically likeable human beings rather than caricatures; they are ultimately united in “enlightened” sympathy.

In *Le nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro), acting on behalf of the Countess Almaviva, the valet Figaro (formerly a barber), together with his fiancée, Susanna, outwits and humiliates the Count Almaviva. The Count attempts to cheat on his wife with Susanna according to the old “*droit du seigneur*,” a legal right with dubious historical legitimacy (although with provocative fictional potential) that guaranteed noblemen sexual access to any virgin in their household. All three—Figaro, Susanna, and the Countess—are vindicated at the Count’s expense. But the Count, in his discomfiture and apology, is rendered human and redeemed, a moment made unforgettable by Mozart’s music. The gesture of mercy, central to most of Mozart’s operas, thus concludes this great comedy as well. On the way to that denouement there is a wealth of hilarious moments with some memorable minor characters, including the adolescent pageboy Cherubino, played by a mezzo-soprano *en travesti* (“in trousers”), who desires the Countess (and every other woman in sight, young or old), and an elderly pair of stock comic types, a ludicrous doctor and his housekeeper, who turn out to be Figaro’s long-lost parents.

Mozart reflects on the equality among characters in various musical ways, on occasion giving accompanied recitatives, for example, to servants and at one point literally exchanging the vocal parts for the original singers who created the roles of the Countess and Susanna. He thus creates a musical democracy of sorts. In contrast to earlier operas, the action is propelled forward not just through recitative but through brilliant ensembles. The work begins, unusually, with two duets for the same two characters, Figaro and Susanna. Mozart’s own favorite moment in the opera was



Figure 14-5 Lorenzo Da Ponte. Engraving by Michele Pekenino after a painting by Nathaniel Rogers.

the third-act sextet, in which Figaro learns the surprising identity of his parents. Perhaps most remarkable is the second-act finale, which begins as a duet and systematically adds characters to become a septet by the end. This finale happens over an expanse of more than twenty minutes of uninterrupted, carefully structured music, a timeframe more characteristic of instrumental music and thus yet another instance of Mozart's learning from his experience composing other kinds of pieces.

Mozart and Da Ponte had such a success with *The Marriage of Figaro* that their names are now inseparably linked in the history of opera. This led to two more collaborations. *Don Giovanni* is a retelling of an old story, long a staple of popular legend, theatrical farce, plays, ballets, and operas, about the fabled Spanish seducer Don Juan, his exploits, and his downfall. The opera's first performance took place on 29 October 1787 in Prague, the capital of the Austrian province of Bohemia (now the Czech Republic), where Mozart was especially popular and where *Figaro* had been especially well received (Fig. 14-6). After *Don Giovanni* played in Vienna the next year, its success was gradual, but by the time he came to write his memoirs in the 1820s, Da Ponte (who died in New York, where he worked as a teacher of Italian literature, eventually at Columbia University) could boast that it was recognized as "the best opera in the world."¹³

Anthology 2-13
Full CD III, 25–31
Concise CD II, 15–16

Mozart's mixture in *Don Giovanni* of gravity and comedy, of terror and jest, is evident from the very opening of the work. Unlike most previous opera overtures, which had little or no musical relationship to the dramatic work they preceded, the first shattering sounds set a demonic mood and anticipate the spine-tingling finale of the opera. The dire prognosis having been given at the very start, the key shifts over to the parallel major for a typically effervescent comic *allegro* that blends seamlessly, without a final cadence, into the opening scene of the action proper. The first vocal number initially belongs to the title character's grumpy manservant, Leporello, a stock comic type always sung by a bass, who complains of his lot in life: being overworked and underpaid. The music suddenly turns dark and serious as Don Giovanni rushes on stage pursued by the enraged Donna Anna, a lady whom he has been trying to seduce—or perhaps rape: The libretto is open to interpretation by singers, stage directors, subtitle translators, and audiences alike. The Commendatore, her father, appears and challenges Don Giovanni to a duel during which the older man is mortally wounded. Thus we encounter, within only six minutes, action through ensemble, careful tonal and structural planning of a scene, and a masterful mixture of excitement and class-conscious comedy with intense drama and seriousness.

Mozart and Da Ponte had such a success with The Marriage of Figaro that their names are now inseparably linked in the history of opera.

Another moment in the opera is worth special mention because of its combination of ambitious musical ingenuity with penetrating social commentary. Taking his cue from the three dances (minuet, folia, and allemande) named in what is known as Don Giovanni's "Champagne Aria," Mozart in the first-act finale superimposes them. The dances are played by three suborchestras at various positions on the stage and represent the three social classes invited to a masked ball Don Giovanni has concocted. At his signal, a small stage orchestra strikes up a noble minuet, in a stately triple meter. Superimposed with it is a rustic **contredanse**, or "country dance," which is wittily introduced by some suitable tuning-up noises from the second orchestra. Its duple meter contradicts that of the dance already in progress, three measures of contredanse equaling two of minuet. Finally, the third group of musicians strikes up a boisterous German peasant dance. One of its fast triple

measures equals a single beat of the concurrent minuet and contredanse. The simultaneous orchestras playing three varieties of dances present a compositional tour de force as well as a symbolic representation of a stratified society divided into upper, middle, and lower classes but working harmoniously together.

The third Mozart–Da Ponte collaboration was *Così fan tutte* (Women All Act the Same; 1790), Mozart's last opera buffa. The plot concerns a wager between a jaded “old philosopher” and two young officers. The old man bets that, if they disguised themselves, each officer could woo and win the other's betrothed, so fickle are women. The officers' easy success, much to their own and their lovers' consternation, has made the opera controversial throughout its history. The tensions within it—at all levels, whether of plot, dramaturgy, musical content, or implication—between the seductions of beauty and cruel reality are so deeply embedded as to make *Così fan tutte*, in its teasing ambiguity, one of the most philosophical of operas and an emblematic art work of the Enlightenment.

Mozart's Two Last Operas

Mozart's last two operas, *La clemenza di Tito* (The Clemency of Titus) and *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute), were both first performed in September 1791, less than three months before the composer's untimely death. In them Mozart reverted to the two genres, opera seria and Singspiel, in which he had excelled before his collaboration with Da Ponte. He had not quite finished *The Magic Flute* when he accepted a commission to write *La clemenza di Tito*, a setting of one of Metastasio's most frequently used librettos. The precipitating occasion was the coronation of Joseph II's younger brother, Leopold II, as King of Bohemia. *La clemenza di Tito* was fated to be the last masterpiece of the venerable genre of eighteenth-century opera seria.

The Magic Flute could not be more different. The Singspiel was commissioned by an old friend, Emanuel Schikaneder, who ran the Theater auf der Wieden, one of Vienna's suburban playhouses that catered to a far less elite audience than attended the official court theaters in the inner city. Mozart had worked with his troupe before and knew what they could do. Schikaneder wrote the libretto, probably with some assistance from others, and also played the part of the bird-catcher Papageno, the work's principal lower-class comic character (Fig. 14-7).

Along with its at-times folksy manner and its riotously colorful goings-on that reflect the vogue at the time for fairy-tale operas with magical themes, *The Magic*

Freitag den 15ten Juni, um 7 Uhr Anfang der Oper: IL DISSOLUTO PUNITO, o sia: IL D. GIOVANNI. Der gestraefte Ausschweifende, von: D. JEAN. Ein großes mit Chören ausgeführtes Singspiel in zwey Aufzügen. Die Oper ist vom Hrn da Ponte, und die Musik hat der berühmte Kapellmeister, Hr. Mozart, selbstständig beygebracht.

Mit gnädigster Erlaubnis
wird heute, Donnerstage den 15. Juni 1788.
von der Guardasonischen Gesellschaft
Italiänischer Opervirtuosen
auf dem Theater am Kärnthner Thore
aufgeführt:

IL DISSOLUTO PUNITO,
o sia:
IL D. GIOVANNI
Der gestraefte Ausschweifende,
Oper:
D. JEAN.

Ein großes Singspiel, mit Chören, wein, Comedianten und heroischem Gedichte.
in zwey Aufzügen.
Die Oper ist vom Hrn da Ponte, und die Musik hat der berühmte Kapellmeister, Hr. Mozart, selbstständig beygebracht.

Personen:

D. Giovanni, . . . Don Juan.	D. Ottavio, . . . Don Ottavio.
D. Don. . . Don. Donizetti.	Zerlina, . . . Don. Zerlina.
D. Cherubino, . . . Don. Cherubino.	Motina, . . . Don. Motina.
Comedianten, . . . Don. Comedianten.	

Die Oper wird, in zwey Aufzügen, alle Abende um 7 Uhr, gebracht zu sehen.
Die Musik ist vom Hrn da Ponte, und die Musik hat der berühmte Kapellmeister, Hr. Mozart, selbstständig beygebracht.

Wegen Überfüllung der Oper sind nur geringe Quittungen um geringe Entlohnung zu geben.
Nur mit der größten Geduld um diese Oper zu sehen, welche nicht anders als durch die Geduld der Zuschauer zu sehen ist.

Die Preise sind folgende:

Logen des ersten Rangst. 12 Sch.	Logen des zweiten Rangst. 8 Sch.	Logen des dritten Rangst. 4 Sch.
Die Logen des ersten Rangst. 12 Sch.	Die Logen des zweiten Rangst. 8 Sch.	Die Logen des dritten Rangst. 4 Sch.
Die Logen des ersten Rangst. 12 Sch.	Die Logen des zweiten Rangst. 8 Sch.	Die Logen des dritten Rangst. 4 Sch.

Die Plätze sind am Tage der Vorstellung im Theater zu bekommen von früh 9 bis 12 Uhr, bei Nachnahme von 3 Uhr bis zur Eröffnung des Theaters: sind aber nicht weiter als höchsten Tag gültig.

Der Anfang ist präcise halb 6 Uhr. Das Ende um 8 Uhr.

Figure 14-6 Poster announcing the first performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in Vienna, 1788.



Figure 14-7 Emanuel Schikaneder in the role of Papageno in *The Magic Flute*.

Flute interweaves more serious themes emblematic of Enlightenment thought. There are also various allusions to Freemasonry, a secret fraternal organization that counted Mozart and Schikaneder among its members. The plot concerns the efforts of Tamino, a Japanese prince, and Pamina, his beloved, to gain admission to the temple of Isis (the earth-goddess of ancient Egypt), presided over by Sarastro, the priest of the sun (Fig. 14-8). Tamino is accompanied by his sidekick, Papageno, who in his cowardice and ignorance cannot gain admittance to the mysteries of the temple but is rewarded nonetheless for his simple-hearted goodness with an appealing wife. The chief opposition to the deep and slow music of Sarastro comes from the fast and furious singing of Pamina's mother, the Queen of the Night, and from Monostatos, a dark-skinned guardian of the temple. The opera affirms an enlightened belief in equality of class (as represented by Tamino and Papageno) and gender (as represented by Tamino and Pamina) within reason's domain. Even Monostatos's humanity is partially recognized, suggesting at least a tentative belief in the equality of races. On seeing him, Papageno reflects, after an initial fright, that if there can be black birds, why not black men?

The range of styles encompassed by the music in *The Magic Flute* is enormous—wider than Mozart had ever attempted elsewhere—and reflects oppositions found in the story between light and dark, day and night, sound and silence, master and servant, masculine and feminine, and elevated and popular. The juxtaposition of high and low musical styles begins with the overture. Mozart opens with intensely solemn music, three chords in E^b major that will return later in the overture as well as at crucial moments in the opera. The presence of trombones further adds to the initial seriousness. But this mood does not last long. An *allegro*,

which brilliantly commences as a fugue, carries the music into a jubilant realm. The stylistic diversity continues throughout the opera. At one extreme is the folk song idiom of Papageno, the child of nature always in pursuit of pleasure. At the other are the musical manifestations of the two opposing supernatural beings—the forces, respectively, of darkness (the Queen of the Night) and light (Sarastro)—both represented by opera seria idioms, altogether outlandish in a *Singspiel*. In Act II, the queen, seeing her efforts to thwart the noble pair coming to naught, gets to sing the rage aria to end all rage arias: “Der Hölle Rache” (“The vengeance of Hell”). Its repeated ascents to high F are a legendary test for coloratura sopranos to this day.

The Magic Flute marked Mozart's final synthesis and reconciliation of various musical, aesthetic, and intellectual threads that emerged in different ways over the course of his career. One of its ultimate themes, as in the Orpheus settings that gave birth to opera 200 years earlier, is the power of music. Pamina and Tamino (magic



Figure 14-8 Sarastro arrives on his chariot in Act I of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Engraving published in an illustrated monthly in 1795 in Brünn (Brno, Czech Republic).

flute in hand) state when they begin their trials: “Trust in the power of Music to lead us safely through this dark night of death.”

Art for Art's Sake?— Mozart's Symphonies

Opera was not the only genre Mozart cultivated consistently throughout his career. He wrote his Symphony No. 1 in E \flat Major, K. 16, for example, at the age of eight. If he had been asked at the end of his life just how many symphonies he actually had written, the answer might well have been far off the mark—as with Haydn, the numbers by which they are identified today were given long after his death. The standard Köchel catalogue lists forty-one symphonies, yet Mozart did not actually compose seven of the ones included in that count. Other symphonies have surfaced since the tally was made, and twenty additional pieces probably should also have been counted but were not because they adapted earlier works, most often overtures. By some reckonings, therefore, either forty-eight or sixty-eight symphonies survive.

None of Mozart's symphonies except for his last ones established themselves in the standard repertoire until the twentieth century. The earliest to achieve regular performances was the Symphony in G Minor, K. 183, now known as Symphony No. 25, completed in Salzburg in October 1773. Mozart had recently returned from more than two months in Vienna, where he had gotten to know Haydn's most recent efforts, which included some symphonies in minor keys. (Mozart composed only one other in a minor key, No. 40 in G Minor, K. 550.) A further influence, similarly connected with the young composer's travels, was his third and final sojourn in Italy earlier that year. In Milan he had enjoyed a successful run of his opera *Lucio Silla*, and something of the drama of that opera seria permeates the youthful G Minor Symphony.

Another notable early symphony was connected with performances in Paris in June 1778, a trip Mozart made this time with his mother, who died while they were in the French capital. After the premiere of the Symphony No. 31 in D Major, K. 297, before the most sophisticated paying public in Europe, Mozart wrote home exultantly:

Just in the middle of the first *Allegro* there was a passage I was sure would please. All the listeners went into raptures over it—and there was a tremendous burst of applause. But as I knew, when I wrote it, what effect it would surely produce, I had introduced the passage again toward the end—when there were shouts of “da capo.” . . . I had heard that final *Allegros*, here, must begin in the same way as the first ones, all the instruments playing together, mostly in unison. I began mine with only the first and second violins playing softly for the first eight bars—then there is a sudden *forte*. The audience, as I anticipated, went “Sh!” in the soft beginning, and when they heard the sudden *forte*, began at once to clap their hands.¹⁴

Such behavior would be inconceivable today at a concert where Mozart's music is played. And yet in his time it was considered normal, as this letter confirms. He expected the audience's spontaneous response and predicted it—or, rather, knowing that it would be the sign of his success, he angled for it. It is mainly pop performers who do that now. Such reactions and such angling in classical music are today now regarded as uncouth. The story of how that change came about is one of the most important stories in the history of nineteenth-century music, and it will be told in the following chapters.

Mozart's instrumental style underwent an appreciable deepening after his move to Vienna in 1781 to start a risky new life as a freelance artist. In the years following his unceremonious boot from Salzburg, he lived what was by comparison with Haydn or even with his own father a much more precarious existence, enjoying a love-hate relationship with a fickle public and its novel institutions of collective patronage. For his livelihood he relied primarily on something Haydn did not have: extraordinary performance skills.

Until the mid-1780s, the symphony remained for Mozart primarily a light entertainment genre. One of his best known, Symphony No. 35 in D Major, K. 385, subtitled “Haffner,” was initially composed as a serenade to entertain a party celebrating the ennoblement of a family friend, and it became a concert symphony by losing its introductory march and its second minuet. The identification of his next ones continued to be connected with travels: for Linz in 1783 (No. 36 in C Major, K. 425) and for Prague three years later (No. 38 in D Major, K. 504). (No. 37 is one of the symphonies Mozart did not write, or, rather was written primarily by Michael Haydn; Mozart contributed only the slow introduction to its opening movement.)

Then, in the summer of 1788, he composed the three symphonies that turned out to be his last, greatest, and most often performed: No. 39 in E \flat Major, K. 543 (finished 26 June); No. 40 in G Minor, K. 550 (finished 25 July); No. 41 in C Major, K. 551 (finished 10 August). They are not known to have been commissioned for any occasion, although Mozart surely hoped to make money from them, either by programming them himself on subscription concerts or by selling them to a publisher. This independent initiative was not

In the summer of 1788, Mozart composed the three symphonies that turned out to be his last, greatest, and most often performed.

typical for composers at the time and points to the emerging idea of writing “art for art’s sake” that would bloom in the nineteenth century.

We can hear this new seriousness in the virtually operatic first movement of the Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, with its atmosphere of pathos, so unlike the traditional affect of what was still regarded in Vienna as festive music. That operatic atmosphere is conjured up by two highly contrasted, lyrical themes, a wealth of melting chromaticism, and a high level of rhythmic agitation. In contrast to Haydn’s extraordinary concision, Mozart’s lyrical profusion is perhaps his most conspicuous feature. And yet it would be a pity to overlook the high technical craft with which a motive derived from the first three notes of the first theme is made to pervade the whole musical fabric, turning up in all kinds of shrewd variations and contrapuntal combinations. It is the balance between ingenious calculation and seemingly ingenious spontaneity and the way in which the former serves to engineer the latter that can so astonish listeners to Mozart’s instrumental music (Ex. 14-1).

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Full CD III, 32

Example 14-1 W. A. Mozart, Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, K. 550, I, mm. 1–9

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, K. 550, measures 1 through 9. The score is written for two violins and two violas. The first violin part (top staff) begins with a melodic line in G minor, marked 'Molto Allegro'. The second violin part (second staff) provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The first three measures (mm. 1-3) introduce the main theme, characterized by a descending chromatic scale. The subsequent six measures (mm. 4-9) show the development of this theme, with the first violin part playing a more active role and the second violin part providing a steady accompaniment. The score is presented in a clear, black-and-white format, with the first three measures of the first violin part highlighted in a light blue color.

Mozart was keenly aware of the relationship in his work between calculation and spontaneity of effect and the special knack he had for pleasing the connoisseurs without diminishing the emotional impact of his music on the crowd. His letters to his father are full of comments to the effect that (to quote one from 1782): “there are passages here and there from which only the connoisseur [*Kenner*] can derive satisfaction; but these passages are written in such a way that the less learned [*Nicht-Kenner*] cannot fail to be pleased, though without knowing why.”¹⁵ Leopold, for his part, constantly worried that Mozart liked to show off too much, thereby challenging, and in the process sometimes losing, his listeners. (“Too many notes, my dear Mozart,” as Emperor Joseph II had supposedly complained.)

A prominent music encyclopedia from 1790 stated of Mozart that the “great master had from his early acquaintance with harmony become so deeply and inwardly intimate with it, that it is hard for an unskilled ear to follow his works. Even the skilled must hear his things several times.”¹⁶ This is a telling observation, and one we will encounter with ever-greater frequency in the nineteenth century—the idea that works can only be truly appreciated over time and with proper study. Entertainment and the beautiful gave way to subjective expression and the sublime.

Perhaps Mozart’s most astounding technical achievement is the last movement of his last symphony, No. 41 in C Major, which is surely the most contrapuntally complex music written since J. S. Bach. The movement builds on five brief musical motives. In contrast to the lyrical profusion typical of Mozart, here he uses short, unremarkable musical tags, some formulaic. The first, which appears in the violins in the opening measures, seems to derive from an old chant that Mozart had already used in a good many works, dating as far back as the second movement of his Symphony No. 1 (K. 16). The movement unfolds in sonata form, with an impressive five-voice fugal passage in the middle of the exposition.

Mozart extensively exploits the diverse motivic material—he inverts the motives (plays them upside down), plays a theme backwards (mm. 222–30), and systematically explores a wide range of keys, both major and minor. This all builds to an astounding conclusion. After a few moments of relaxation as the strings play sustained whole notes in canon, another fugal passage begins that leads to a passage when all five themes are heard simultaneously in a five-layer cake of towering contrapuntal virtuosity (Ex. 14-2). Mozart may indeed be showing off, but he does so, as usual, in a way that never loses sight of musical expression as the ultimate goal. The difficulty of Mozart’s instrumental style in the dazzling fugal finale to his final symphony creates the same sort of awe that godly or ghostly apparitions created in opera, which is why the symphony was nicknamed “Jupiter” in the English-speaking world. Such masterful displays from the thirty-two-year-old composer understandably earned the praise of Haydn, who stated in a letter soon after his young friend’s death that “posterity will not again see such talent for a hundred years.”¹⁷

Mozart’s own contemporaries recognized that his instrumental music was unusually rich in “inner portraiture.” It was Mozart above all who prompted Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773–98), an early theorist of Romanticism, to formulate the influential idea that “music reveals all the thousandfold transitional motions of our soul,” and that symphonies, in particular, “present dramas such as no playwright can make,” because they deal with the inner impulses that we can subjectively experience but that we cannot paraphrase in words.¹⁸ It was because

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Full CD III, 33
Concise CD II, 17

***“Posterity will not again
see such talent for a
hundred years.”
—Franz Joseph Haydn***

of this new art of subjective expression that symphonies achieved an aesthetic status far beyond anything they had formerly known. The instrumental medium could now rival and even surpass the vocal medium as an embodiment of human feeling.

Example 14-2 W. A. Mozart, *Symphony No. 41 in C Major, K. 551, IV*, mm. 383–87; the five themes (labeled a, b, c, d, e) contrapuntally combined in the coda

It is tempting to speculate that the novel perception of enhanced subjectivity in Mozart’s instrumental music had something to do with his own novel, relatively uncertain, and stressful personal situation and that he registered aspects of this in his music. Such an artist is inclined to create “art for art’s sake,” as Mozart may have done in the case of his last three symphonies. And yet, of course, it was a change in the social and economic structures mediating the production and dissemination of art that gave artists such an idea of themselves. Mozart was the first great musician to have tried to make a career within these new market structures. We shall see their effects most clearly by turning now to the works he composed for himself to perform, particularly his concertos.

The “Symphonic” Concerto Is Born

Despite Haydn’s unprecedented achievements with instrumental music, his catalogue contains a notable gap: The output of concertos is relatively insignificant. Mozart’s concertos, on the other hand, were more numerous and proved central both to the unfolding of his career and to the power of his legacy. His standing as a concerto composer is comparable to Haydn’s in the realm of the symphony: He completely transformed the genre and provided the model on which all future concerto writing depended. And that is largely because Mozart, as celebrated a performing virtuoso as he was a creative artist, was his own intended soloist—for most of more than twenty piano concertos as well as for his half-dozen violin concertos.

Mozart composed his earliest concertos in Salzburg for use as display pieces in his preteen tours. They are not entirely original works but, rather, arrangements for harpsichord and small orchestra (oboes, horns, and strings) of sonata movements by several established composers, including C. P. E. Bach. A few years later, when he was sixteen, Mozart made similar arrangements of three sonatas by J. C. Bach, whom he had met in London in 1765. He wrote his first entirely original piano concerto

(now known as No. 5, K. 175) back home in Salzburg in December 1773, shortly before his eighteenth birthday.

For the next two years, however, Mozart concentrated on the violin. “You yourself do not know how well you play the violin; if you will only *do yourself credit and play with energy, with your whole heart and mind, yes, just as if you were the first violinist in all Europe.*”¹⁹ This counsel came from a leading expert on the instrument, author of *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (Treatise on the Fundamentals of Violin Playing, 1756), an authoritative and influential guide. Its author happened to be Mozart’s father, the estimable Leopold. Mozart was already astounding contemporaries with his fiddling skills at age seven, and by thirteen he was the concertmaster of the court orchestra in Salzburg. He frequently performed violin concertos, both those by others and his own; while on tour he always knew he could substitute a violin concerto if the available keyboard instrument proved unsatisfactory.

In his violin concertos Mozart combined the older ritornello form inherited from the concerto grosso with the highly contrasted thematic dramaturgy of the contemporary symphony, itself heavily indebted for its variety to comic opera. Out of this eclectic mixture came the concerto style that Mozart made his trademark. Most of his early concertos are light and witty works in the serenade or divertimento mold. The Violin Concerto No. 5 in A Major, K. 219, carries the comic opera effect to an extreme. The outer sections of its finale embody a gracious dancelike refrain in $\frac{3}{4}$ time marked *Tempo di menuetto*, while the middle of the movement consists of a riotous march in the parallel minor, cast unexpectedly in the Turkish style we have already encountered in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.

Mozart composed all his violin concertos before his twenty-first birthday and subsequently concentrated on writing ones for piano or for various wind instruments (flute, bassoon, oboe, horn, and clarinet). His only other string concerto is the Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola in E^b Major, K. 364. The title indicates the intent: to combine elements of the symphony and concerto. Part symphony, part concerto (more the latter), a **sinfonia concertante** usually features two, three, four, or more soloists who interact more with one another than with the larger ensemble. The prominence and interdependence of the soloists are important. Mozart attempted several of these hybrids, not all of them completed, but the most prominent is the one for violin and viola, probably written in the latter half of 1779.

Mozart in the Marketplace: The Piano Concertos

By adding an element of overarching tonal drama to the form, Mozart’s concertos dramatize the relationship between the soloist and the ensemble. This is best seen in the seventeen piano concertos he wrote during his last decade, when he was living in Vienna and trying to succeed as a freelancer. The professional conditions in the capital that had so favored Haydn’s development and nurtured his gifts were drying up, forcing Mozart to find other means to support himself and his growing family.²⁰ He relied on a mixture of teaching, publications, patronage, and performances. He took on a limited number of elite female students and planned his teaching strategy carefully, charging for multiple lessons in advance so that he would be sure to be paid even if one had to be cancelled. In May 1781 he informed his father: “I could have

as many [students] as I want, but I do not choose to take many. I intend to be better paid than others.”²¹ Some months later he told his father of other ways to make money: “I can write, it is true, at least one opera a year, give a concert annually and have things engraved and published by subscription. There are other concerts too where one can make money, particularly if one has been living in a place for a long time and has a good reputation.”²²

Piano concertos were Mozart’s primary performing vehicles at concerts and aristocratic soirées. Those he composed in the Vienna years began with three in 1782–83 (now known as Nos. 11–13, K. 413, 414, 415) and extend to Concerto No. 27 in B \flat Major, K. 595, completed on 5 January 1791. Yet his concertos were not evenly spread out over time, and their chronology, in fact, is something of an index of Mozart’s fortunes in the musical marketplace. At first, as a novel presence in Vienna, he was considered fashionable and was much sought after. Between 1782 and 1786 he was allowed to rent the court theater every year for a gala concert; he gave frequent, well-attended subscription concerts; and he often received invitations to perform at aristocratic salons. He lived well during this period, in an ample apartment, and had various trappings of status, including a horse, a carriage, and servants (Fig. 14-9).

At the pinnacle of his early success he proudly sent his father a list of his engagements during the Lenten season of 1784. Lent, when theaters were banned by law from presenting operas and plays, was always the busiest time of year for concerts, and Mozart had some twenty engagements over five weeks, most of them aristocratic soirées. These occasions included concerto performances, and so Mozart completed no fewer than six concertos during that golden year of 1784, with three following in 1785 and another three in 1786. But then, for a variety of reasons, including inflation, Austria’s war with the Ottoman Turks, and perhaps overexposure, his fortunes declined. By 1789 he could no longer present concerts that were profitable. “I circulated a subscription list for fourteen days,” he complained in a letter to a



Figure 14-9 A Mozart family portrait, ca. 1780, by Johann Nepomuk della Croce. Mozart and his sister Maria Anna (“Nannerl”) are at the keyboard; their father Leopold holds a violin; the portrait on the wall shows the composer’s mother, who had died in 1778 in Paris while accompanying him on tour.

friend, “and so far the only name on it is that of the Baron van Swieten!”²³ He had to move to a smaller apartment, lost his status possessions, and went into debt, so when he died his widow inherited liabilities that were only somewhat offset by the value of his clothing. This decline is also reflected in Mozart’s concerto output, with only two (K. 537 and 595) completed between late 1786 and his death in 1791.

The Piano Concerto in G Major, K. 453

Heinrich Christoph Koch (1749–1816), the most encyclopedic music theorist and critic of the late eighteenth century, described the contemporary concerto in terms of its relationship to the symphony and noted that if one considers “Mozart’s masterpieces in this category of art works, one has an exact description of the characteristics of a good concerto.”²⁴ According to the pianist and composer Carl Czerny, a pupil of Beethoven, Mozart established the form of the solo concerto expressly as a vehicle for representing the same kind of intense subjective feeling we have already observed in his operas and symphonies.²⁵ Like all the other genres of the late eighteenth century, the concerto was formally transformed in order to serve new social purposes and meet new expressive demands.

Although it is no easier to select a single representative Mozart concerto than it would be to select a single representative Haydn symphony, the Piano Concerto No. 17 in G Major, K. 453, is a plausible candidate for the role. It was completed on 12 April 1784, immediately after the fabulous Lenten season mentioned earlier, during Mozart’s most productive concerto year. He wrote it ostensibly not to perform himself but, rather, for his pupil Barbara Ployer, and for this reason it has an unusually complete score. The notated score of a typical Mozart concerto, however, is by no means a reliable guide to its realization in performance. When he played the G-Major Concerto himself, which he often did, he surely embellished the rather modest solo part. As we know from accounts of actual performances, the soloist also participated in an unobtrusive supporting role in all the *tuttis*, although that is rarely notated in the score.

Like most solo concertos, still reflecting the Vivaldian legacy, the work is cast in three movements, of which the first is a “symphonized” or “sonatified” *ritornello* form. Although pioneered by C. P. E. Bach and J. C. Bach, the technique was used so consistently and varied so imaginatively by Mozart that ever since the end of the eighteenth century it has been thought of as the foundation of the Mozartean concerto style. In addition to formal innovations, Mozart contributed his extraordinary sensitivity to orchestration, so apparent in his operas and symphonies, especially his penchant for giving greater prominence to woodwind instruments. Far from distracting attention from the soloist, this offered greater opportunities for dialogue and interaction.

In the first movement of a Mozartean concerto the exposition is deployed rather differently than in a symphony, in which the entire section is usually meant to be repeated. As in the older *ritornello* form, in a concerto exposition the orchestra plays throughout the first time without any solo contribution from the pianist and without making the intensifying modulation to the dominant required in a proper symphonic form. The pianist enters for what is a kind of second exposition based on the same thematic material but this time eventually modulating to the dominant. With the soloist now on board, the themes are often supplemented by passages and, occasionally, by entirely new themes reserved for the solo part.

Anthology 2-16
Full CD III, 34–36
Concise CD II, 18

In the G-Major Concerto, after the orchestra initially presents two principal themes, both in the tonic, the piano enters with a little written-out *Eingang* (entrance), a lead-in preceding the first theme. It appears that the soloist takes over all the early thematic material this second time around—or, rather, the piano replaces the strings in dialogue with the wind instruments. When the crucial modulation to the dominant finally takes place, the piano in the G-Major Concerto gets to announce the new key with an unaccompanied solo that contains a theme that was not part of the first orchestral ritornello. When the second theme, characteristically Mozartean in its operatic lyricism, eventually arrives in the dominant, the pianist again replaces the strings in dialogue with the winds. The exposition (and later the entire movement) ends with the orchestral ritornello.

The *Eingang*, or lead-in, is just one element of a typical Mozart piano concerto that points to its performance-centered origins. Another is the *cadenza*, a direct inheritance from the da capo aria, literally an embellishment of the soloist's final cadence, or trill, preceding the last ritornello. At the hands of successive generations of virtuosos it kept on growing until Koch, writing in 1793, had forgotten the etymological link that defined the *cadenza*'s initially rather modest cadential function. Calling the traditional term a misconception, he defined the *cadenza* instead as being in reality "either a free fantasy or a *capriccio*"—that is, a fairly lengthy piece within a piece to be improvised by the soloist on the spot.²⁶ According to the terms by which Koch designated it, the *cadenza* in his day was a piece in which the usual forms and rules of composition were in abeyance (as suggested by *capriccio*, "caprice") and in which the soloist could concentrate entirely on pursuing an unrestricted train of individual musical thought (*fantasia*, "free imagination," as we may remember from the *empfindsamer Stil* compositions of C. P. E. Bach, the genre's pioneer).

It is hard to tell just what these descriptions had to do with what Mozart himself might have played at the point marked "*cadenza*" in his concerto scores, since like all true virtuosos in his day he was an expert improviser and played on the spot with the same mastery as when he played prepared compositions. He was famous for his ability to improvise free fantasias and even sonatas and fugues. "Indeed," wrote an awestruck member of one of the largest audiences Mozart ever played to (in Prague, on 19 January 1787),

we did not know what to admire the more—the extraordinary composition, or the extraordinary playing; both together made a total impression on our souls that could only be compared to sweet enchantment! But at the end of the concert, when Mozart extemporized alone for more than half an hour at the fortepiano, raising our delight to the highest degree, our enchantment dissolved into loud, overwhelming applause. And indeed, this extemporization exceeded anything normally understood by fortepiano playing, as the highest excellence in the art of composition was combined with the most perfect accomplishment in execution.²⁷

From accounts like this, we may conclude that for Mozart the acts of composing and performing were not nearly as separate as they have since become in classical music. They are more reminiscent of the relationship that the two phases of musical creation have in the realms of jazz and pop music today. So is the brisk interaction Mozart enjoyed with his audiences.

For Mozart the acts of composing and performing were not nearly as separate as they have since become.

Performing fully notated works and improvising, in any case, were not completely separate. When playing a previously composed piece from memory, Mozart felt free to re-embroider or even rewrite it on the spot. When he composed concertos for others to perform, as in the G-Major Concerto, he wrote out the solo part in full, but otherwise many of the existing manuscripts contain sections of sketchy notations that served as a blueprint for extemporaneous realization. Nowadays such passages are usually rendered literally by pianists who have been trained to play only what is laid out in front of them in the sacred score. At a premiere Mozart might improvise the whole piano part from blank staves or from just a bass line, playing it, that is, half spontaneously, half from memory. This can be seen, for example, in the second movement of his Piano Concerto No. 26 in D Major (K. 537), for which Mozart only sketched out the solo piano part at the beginning (Figs. 14-10 and 14-11).

When writing concertos for others to perform, Mozart did occasionally provide music in advance, especially for Nannerl. In a letter to his father he requested that lead-ins and cadenzas be sent “to my dear sister at the first opportunity. I have not yet altered the lead-ins in the rondo, for whenever I play this concerto, I always play whatever occurs to me at the moment.”²⁸ With the G-Major Concerto, composed for Ployer but also sent to Nannerl, he wrote two different cadenzas for the first movement and, rather unusually, for the second movement as well. Such written cadenzas usually took the form of short fantasias based more or less consistently on themes from the exposition. For many of his concertos, however, no cadenzas were written, and therefore later performers and composers, including Beethoven and Brahms, supplied them. (The potential stylistic gulf that can result when a composer living much later than Mozart writes a cadenza for one of his concertos raises interesting compositional issues.)

The lengthy second movement of K. 453 begins with delicate strings leading to a woodwind passage. Thus Mozart provides a leisurely introduction, just as he did to various solemn arias in his operas, before the soloist enters. Second movements

Figure 14-10 Autograph page from Mozart, Concerto No. 26 in D, K. 537.



The image displays a page of a musical score for Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 26 in D, K. 537. The tempo is marked 'Larghetto'. The score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes parts for Flute, Oboe, Bassoon, Clarinet B, Piano Forte, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Bass. The piano part is highly detailed with many ornaments and slurs. The second system continues the piano part and includes parts for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Bass. The tempo 'Larghetto' is also indicated at the bottom of the second system.

Figure 14-11 The same passage from Mozart, Concerto No. 26 in D, K. 537, that was shown in Fig. 14-10, as posthumously edited and printed.

of concertos are usually slow, as this one is, but here the form is unusual in being a true sonata-form shape that is complemented by a striking ritornello idea. Even more than in the first movement, in this *Andante* the tensions between soloist and orchestra create emotional engagement.

The finale of the Concerto in G Major, like most of Mozart's concerto finales, is cast in the joyous, conciliatory spirit of an opera buffa finale. For his theme, he was evidently inspired by his pet bird. "That was lovely!" he wrote in his expense book on 27 May 1784, after notating a tune his starling sang. That catchy melody bears some resemblance to the music Mozart would later write for the character of the bird catcher Papageno in *The Magic Flute* (Ex. 14-3). While the rondo form remained the most popular framework for concerto finales, a significant minority, including this one, used the theme-and-variation technique. In either case, the object was the same: to put a fetchingly contrasted cast of characters on stage and finally

submerge their differences in good cheer. Mozart's stock of variational characters is replete, on the happy end, with jig rhythms for the piano and gossipy contrapuntal conversation for the winds; and, on the gloomy end, with mysterious syncopations in the parallel minor, all awaiting reconciliation in the coda.

Example 14-3 W. A. Mozart, Concerto No. 17 in G Major, K. 453, III, mm. 1–8

That coda, when it comes, is even more buffa-like than most, thanks to its length and headlong momentum. With its bristling new *presto* tempo, it is similar to the ever-faster ending of an operatic act, which Da Ponte said, “always closes in an uproar,” with every character cavorting on stage. Here all is given up to fanfares and madcap arpeggios (as Da Ponte would put it, “noise, noise, noise!”), the texture teeming with rapid antiphonal exchanges and with muttered comic asides like the strange minor-mode string ostinato in whole notes that frames the frenetic last statement of the theme. As we have already seen with Mozart’s mature symphonies, his Vienna piano concertos likewise offer a kind of emotional diary in sound, this time enhanced by the interpretative possibilities suggested when pitting a soloist (or individual) against an ensemble (or society at large).

Public and Private Genres

Our discussion of Mozart thus far has focused on the public dramatic and instrumental genres in which he excelled and that exerted the most immediate and lasting influence on later composers. His engagement with more intimate genres, including solo keyboard music, chamber works, and songs, shows yet other sides of the composer. Meeting Haydn and playing quartets with him—Haydn on violin, Mozart on viola—was one of the catalysts for his composing especially ambitious chamber works some years before the final symphonies.

Mozart wrote a set of six quartets—“the fruits of long and laborious endeavor,” as he referred to them—in direct response to Haydn’s Op. 33 (then his latest work). The set was published in 1785 with a title page announcing that it was *Dedicati al Signor Giuseppe Haydn, Maestro di Cappella di S. A. il Principe d’Esterhazy &c &c, Dal Suo Amico W. A. Mozart, Opera X* (Dedicated to Mr. Joseph Haydn, Music Director to His Highness the Prince of Esterhazy, etc. etc., by his friend W. A. Mozart, Op. 10). The features of texture and motivic saturation that so distinguished Haydn’s quartets were a powerful stimulus to Mozart’s imagination in these quartets, the pieces in fact that elicited Haydn’s benediction of Mozart that opened this chapter.

The difficulty of such chamber music, however, could lead to marketing problems because such pieces were almost exclusively designed to be played at home by nonprofessionals. The composer and publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister apparently requested a series of piano quartets and in 1785 released the first, the G Minor, K. 478. Mozart, busy writing *Figaro*, did not get around to the second quartet until somewhat later, by which time the publisher was less interested. A contemporary review tells of how poorly the G Minor Quartet fared in the hands of amateurs and what a revelation it was to hear the piece performed by professionals. Mozart nonetheless continued to write demanding pieces, among them four mature string quintets (with added viola, his favorite string instrument). The impetus to compose could also come from a performer. The appearance on Vienna’s musical scene of clarinetist Anton Stadler (1753–1812) inspired Mozart’s great late works for the instrument, including the Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K. 581, and the Clarinet Concerto, K. 622, the last important composition he completed.

Much of Mozart’s solo keyboard music was also meant for domestic use. Some of it was clearly connected with teaching, such as his Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545, which he designated “for beginners” in his personal catalogue of works. These sonatas tend to exhibit clearly balanced phrasing and Alberti bass or other simple accompanimental figures. Expanding the performing forces by one are his thirty-two violin sonatas. In the eighteenth century a duo chamber piece with a fully notated piano part was generally deemed to be amplified or “accompanied” piano sonata. What we call a violin sonata, for example, would have been called a piano sonata with violin.

Another area of Mozart’s lifelong engagement, one that returns us to the public sphere, is his religious music. Especially during his early Salzburg years, Mozart was required to produce a good amount of it, including more than a dozen complete Mass settings, litanies, motets, office settings, cantatas and oratorios, and various shorter works. Many moments in these pieces once again display Mozart’s dramatic inclinations. After moving to Vienna he wrote little sacred music. What are generally considered his two greatest sacred works remained unfinished: the Mass in C Minor, K. 427, and the Requiem, K. 626. The Mass, which also exists in an Italian oratorio adaptation called *Davidde penitente*, K. 469, provides a vivid instance of how religious music, even the mighty Mass, was moving from the church to the concert hall. A throwback to Bach’s Mass in B Minor, it is an assemblage of varied parts and styles, some quite operatic in character.

In the last summer of his life, while writing *The Magic Flute*, Mozart received a mysterious commission, stemming, it later turned out, from one Count Franz von Walsegg, who wanted a Requiem setting to honor his wife, who had died some months earlier at age twenty. Mozart was inundated with work at this time, for he was

Much of Mozart’s solo keyboard music was also meant for domestic use.

completing the prestigious commission to write *La clemenza di Tito* for the coronation of Leopold II in Prague. He resumed composition of the Requiem that fall, after the premiere of his last two operas, and was still working on it during his final days.

Legend has it that Mozart came to believe he was writing his own Requiem (and also that he was being poisoned). Though these legends are suspect, he did not live to complete the piece, which was finished by others, principally his student Franz Xaver Süssmayr (1766–1803). Count Walsegg copied the Requiem in his own hand and had it performed under his own name on 14 December 1793. The surviving sources and information concerning Mozart's final composition have led to some confusion about which sections Mozart wrote entirely himself, which parts he drafted, and which are entirely Süssmayr's own invention. The mysterious circumstances surrounding the Requiem, with its unusual genesis, composition, and public unveiling, seem fitting as a final reflection on a life and body of works so human that posterity remains fascinated.

Summary

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756–91) is known as the most influential composer of the Classical style, contributing to all the principal genres of his time. In his short life, he produced over 600 works, starting at the age of five.

Mozart achieved perhaps his greatest supremacy in opera. His earliest efforts were devoted to mastering the common operatic traditions: opera seria, opera buffa, and Singspiel, a comic opera in German with spoken dialogue. The serious and comic were beautifully fused in many of his mature operas, including the three based on librettos by Lorenzo Da Ponte, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Don Giovanni*, as well as the Singspiel *Die Zauberflöte*. Although these are comic operas, they explore serious issues such as marriage, good and evil, and the relationship between social classes. While Mozart often represents upper- and lower-class characters with the traditional contrasts in musical style, he also mixes the two styles to suggest moral equality among individuals of different classes. Much of the action in Mozart's operas is advanced through ensembles, and the plot is untangled in ensemble finales that were typical of opera buffa. Mozart's mixture of serious and comic is especially evident in the opening of *Don Giovanni*.

Of Mozart's roughly fifty symphonies, the best known were written after the mid-1780s, including No. 35 ("Haffner"), No. 36 ("Linz"), and No. 38 ("Prague"). His last three symphonies, Nos. 39, 40, and 41 ("Jupiter"), are especially important contributions to the genre. The symphony in the eighteenth century was often treated as light entertainment (see Chapter 13), and these works, following Haydn's example, bring a new seriousness to the genre. The first movement of Symphony No. 40, for example, has an atmosphere of pathos that is unusual for the symphonies of the time, and the last movement of No. 41 treats five different themes in intricate counterpoint, demonstrating Mozart's compositional mastery and his familiarity with older, Baroque music, especially works by J. S. Bach, which he encountered at the home of Viennese diplomat and amateur musician Baron Gottfried van Swieten.

Mozart's contributions to the concerto were fundamental. The seventeen piano concertos he wrote in Vienna are closely linked to his career as a virtuoso performer. Like many of their Baroque predecessors, Mozart's concertos are usually in three

movements. His first movements fuse the traditional ritornello form of the Baroque concerto with sonata form: The exposition is played once by the orchestra without modulation and then again by the soloist, who modulates to the dominant (see the first movement of the Piano Concerto in G Major, K. 453). The second movement is slow, and the third is fast, in rondo form, sonata form, or, less commonly, theme-and-variation form. In the eighteenth century, concerto performances involved a great deal of soloistic improvisation. Mozart rarely followed the score note for note in his own performances. We can see vestiges of this improvisatory tradition in his cadenzas and in the *Eingang*, the “lead-in” that marks the entrance of the soloist.

Mozart’s chamber and solo piano works were intended for private, domestic performance. A particularly important collection is the set of six quartets modeled on Haydn’s Op. 33 (1785). His best-known sacred works are the Mass in C Minor, K. 427, and Requiem, K. 626.

Study Questions

1. Describe Mozart’s contributions to the following genres: (a) opera seria, (b) opera buffa, (c) Singspiel.
2. Discuss the ways in which Mozart’s operas combine comic and serious elements. How do they reflect and comment on the social class structure of his time?
3. Describe the important features of Mozart’s last three symphonies. Why do you think he wrote them?
4. How did Mozart support himself at different points in his career? How did he aim to address different audiences?
5. Describe the contrapuntal techniques in the last movement of Mozart’s Symphony No. 41 in C.
6. Describe the first movement of a Mozart piano concerto, such as Concerto No. 17 in G Major. How does Mozart handle form? What relationships are suggested between the individual soloist and the larger ensemble?
7. How did a concerto performance in Mozart’s day differ from a modern performance?
8. Briefly describe Mozart’s contributions to chamber music and sacred music.
9. Why do you think Mozart is regarded with such veneration in Western musical culture?

Key Terms

cadenza

contredanse

Janissary

sinfonia concertante

Singspiel