

In 1992, Prof. Dr. Ulrich Konrad's monumental study of the existing body of working manuscripts, sketches, and drafts from Mozart's hand, Mozarts Schaffensweise (Mozart's Compositional Process), was published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht of Göttingen (ISBN number 3-525-82588-9).

The book consists of four extensive, detailed chapters. The first chapter is historical and general in its discussion of the research problems involved in coming to an understanding of the way Mozart went about composing. The second provides a detailed catalog of the extant Mozart sketches and drafts. The third examines their external characteristics, particularly those of the sketches. And the fourth chapter organizes the corpus of sketches by type and analyzes them individually.

At the end of this long, meticulously prepared scholarly work, Prof. Konrad offers a brief overview of his methodology and his conclusions. This is a translation of that overview.

Ulrich Konrad

How Mozart went about Composing: A New View

The explicit objective of the foregoing analysis was to clear the way for a better understanding of the process that Mozart followed in composing. Now that historical considerations and implications relevant to such an understanding have been presented, the nature and extent of the sources examined, the various aspects of traditional views looked at and evaluated, and significant musical products from Mozart's workshop analyzed, it is time to draw together what we have learned. In so doing, we must, of course, forego numerous details drawn from study of the individual sources and limit ourselves to essentials. In the nature of things, some conclusions so expressed may not seem fully applicable to individual problem cases. I hope, however, that the comments and observations offered regarding many of the works, including those well known and much studied, may facilitate future involvement with these compositions.

The first step in the investigative effort undertook to examine the clichés surrounding the traditional view of the composing Mozart and found them to be historically indefensible exaggerations resulting from a desire to produce a "popular," romanticized picture of the composer as genius. Three basic claims lie at the core of these clichés:

- that Mozart composed mostly in his head with no need of any aids;
- that his works took form and grew in his imagination until they were fully realized; and
- that the compositions which thus came about could then be captured simply through the mechanical act of writing them down.

The footnotes are found on page 4; the INDEX, on page 5.

Not a single one of these claims will survive critical, factual examination. By its very nature, Mozart's complex compositional process shows the fallacy of such simplistic ideas. Indeed such clichés deliberately ignore the complexity of the process in favor of a sham interpretation that, in the last analysis, is wrong in every essential.¹ Moreover, such an interpretation gives the erroneous impression that we can complacently regard Mozart's compositional process as a question that has largely been answered to the extent possible. But in fact, to be able even to start to answer this question, we must jettison fantasy-laden legends. We need to know the musical sources themselves and the evidence that they can provide.

The second step carried the logic of this analysis forward: it defined and organized the source materials and cataloged them in a reference work. Obviously, the totality of the musical works in Mozart's handwriting, with emphasis on actual working manuscripts such as sketches and drafts, constituted the primary documents for further study. It is in particular the sketches -- those initial outlines of a musical structure in written form -- with their content set down in the "private" hand of the composer and intended solely for his own information and use that accord us a direct glimpse into Mozart's compositional process.

The number of sketches and drafts that have come down to us amount to about 320 individual items. Compared with the total number that must once have existed, this sum is but an indefinable fraction of the working notes Mozart must have made. We can reasonably assume that the composer himself used to destroy such materials. And we know for certain that the persons who first undertook to sort out his manuscripts after he died did so. The fragmentary nature of the record naturally places severe limits on what it is possible to research and analyze and what objectives are attainable. All the more reason, therefore, to treat the sketches and drafts not merely as so many disparate objects but first and foremost as components in a complex compositional process with characteristic features and functions.

In the third stage, the analytical approach was extended by examining and describing the external characteristics of Mozart's manuscripts, with special attention to the sketches. The autographs clearly evidence separable functions: we can distinguish between those that are finished scores (*ausgefertigte Partituren*), draft scores (*Entwurfs-Partituren*), and sketches or working manuscripts (*Skizzenmanuskripte*). Moreover, the hand in which they are written varies: we observe the rather careful, formal handwriting of a fair copy ("*öffentliche*" *Reinschrift*) and Mozart's normal handwriting (*Gebrauchsschrift*) in contrast to the very personal handwriting ("*private*" *Skizzenschrift*) of a sketch. The different functions and handwritings give each manuscript its characteristic appearance. This, in turn, allows us to draw meaningful conclusions concerning the nature of a written document and possibly concerning a work's origin as well. In addition, the particular features of the inks and paper types Mozart used, together with the way he went about correcting mistakes, lend further insight into his process of composing.

Finally, it is possible to categorize the sketch leaves themselves into different groups:

Sammelblätter -- pages containing a variety of apparently related sketches for possible later use;

Werkblätter -- pages with sketches for a single identifiable work in progress;

Zufallsblätter -- pages with diverse and apparently unrelated sketches not connected with identifiable work in progress or a specific finished work;

Skizzenpartituren -- more or less completed scores but written in Mozart's "private" hand.

The different kinds of sketches are revealing with respect to Mozart's working habits when he was writing down his compositions, habits intimately connected with the specific objectives he had in mind as he sketched.

With this knowledge gained, we were able to proceed to the fourth stage. Here it could be shown that there is a close correlation between the specific compositional problem posed and the form of sketch Mozart selects. There were basically two: one, a continuity sketch (*Verlaufsskizze*), the other, a partial sketch (*Ausschnittskizze*). Moreover, his choice between them is not haphazard or random but, rather, comes after careful consideration of the problem to be solved. And that required a keen sense for the level of the compositional challenge not only for the work as a whole but also for its constituent parts.

In the process of composing, Mozart was thinking about the work as an entity only to the degree that he had a general idea of his ultimate goal (*Werkidee*) or it had taken tangible shape in his mind. The path leading to a fully realized work, however, is made up of individual sections. These, in turn, fulfill their intended musical functions in relation to their place in the overall structure, thus bringing their own compositional demands. The nature of these demands is naturally quite varied and Mozart's resort to sketching obviously only begins at the point where he becomes conscious that the difficulty of the problem has reached a certain qualitative level.

The sketches show the composer's immense concentration as he goes at the essential aspects of the difficulties he has identified. As a rule, Mozart does not come to the final solution while sketching but only reaches a certain plateau; thinking through the problem from this level yet again ultimately brings him to his compositional objective. In other words, the sketches can be looked on as points of transition in the creative process. They represent stages in his thinking, stages whose meaning for others can only be discerned retrospectively from the context in which they are found. But for Mozart, they represented the first written outlines of those musical figures and forms whose totality would come to constitute the finished work.

The realm of Mozart's artistic creativity is incredibly multifaceted. As to the play between his conscious and unconscious powers, we are unable to speak. But we can be certain that the degree of conscious intellectual effort involved in Mozart's compositional process was great indeed; our examination has made that amply apparent. Goethe's vividly expressed conviction that, in composing *Don Giovanni*, Mozart was in no way proceeding arbitrarily with his work by bits and pieces, but rather was driven by the demonical spirit of his genius to do what it commanded of him 2/ -- this view we cannot, soberly considered, share without reservation. Not even the demons themselves were able to relieve the composer of all need for reflection, for trial and error, for discard and hard work. Nor does this in the slightest diminish Mozart's genius and, as Jacob Burckhardt put it, his "*Reichlichkeit*" (the "prodigious abundance" of his talent, so to speak). Reflecting, seeking, toiling -- genius is exempt from none of these. They are, rather, its obvious ingredients, just as is the personal certainty of finding and succeeding.

Even after this glimpse into Mozart's workshop brought about by an analytically founded appreciation of his compositional process, Goethe's oft-cited remark still applies: a phenomenon like Mozart is and remains a miracle beyond all explaining. I would like to express it more concretely in this way: those committed to knowledge rationally arrived at and a musicology similarly conceived can never succeed in explaining the inexplicable nature of artistic creativity. But it is their obligation to identify the inexplicable and to make it discernible. They can do no more, but they should attempt no less. For all that lies beyond this obligation, however, it is also true that, in music, not everything must be explained to be understood.

Footnotes

1. The comment having recently been made that it is difficult to imagine that "musical compositions could originate anywhere else except in the head" (*Die Musikforschung*, Kassel 1991/44, page 362), once again it seems Mozart must be defended against the question raised. To be sure, no one seriously doubts that musical thoughts have their origin in the mind and are processed there. The circumstance, however, that, for the artist pictured as one "who composes in his head," composing is held to be merely a kind of mindless, involuntary, and in any event chiefly reactive improvisation, a process essentially excluding all mental reflection and professional skill, and that mental reflection and professional skill are things Mozart could not have done without (as has been amply demonstrated), this circumstance, I submit, effectively renders rational consideration of such clichés impossible.

2. "How can you say, Mozart composed his 'Don Juan'! -- composing -- as though it were a kind of cake or muffin that you stirred together out of flour, eggs and sugar! It is a creation of the spirit, every detail at one with the whole, possessed of perfection and pervaded by the breath of life, such that he who created it in no way proceeded arbitrarily by bits and pieces, but rather that the demonical spirit of his genius held him in its power, so that he was compelled to do what it commanded." -- Goethe: *Gespräche mit Eckermann*, 20 June 1831, p.655.

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