**Different Mozarts: the incomplete, the misunderstood, the disputed, and the radical**

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART  Fantasia in D minor, K. 397/385*g*

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART  Piano Concerto No. 27 in B flat, K. 595

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART  Divertimento No. 5 in F for three basset-horns, K. 439b

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART  Symphony in G minor, K. 550

**Incompletion and imagination**

Most likely composed in 1782, alongside the similarly incomplete C minor Fantasia, K 396/385*f*, Mozart’s Fantasia in D minor for solo piano offers, or so we imagine, a sense of Mozart the improviser. His D minor daemon is well known to us from the later piano concerto in the same key, from *Don Giovanni*, and of course the unfinished Requiem. Here, Mozart takes us on a journey from his reinvented Baroque in the opening *Andante* bars, to a D major *Allegretto* conclusion that has something of Haydn to its spirit – except, that, as usually heard today, it is brought to a conclusion with a coda by someone else, probably August Eberhard Müller, Cantor of Bach’s own Thomaskirche, then at work on an edition of vocal scores for Mozart’s operas. At its heart, however, lies a noble, operatic *Adagio* lament, punctuated by angry *Presto* interpolations, which, like much of Mozart’s fantasia writing, bears the imprint of CPE Bach’s *empfindsamer Stil* in melody, ornamentation, ‘sighing’ figures, and chromaticism. As John Irving has written, it is quite possible that, ‘had Mozart completed the fantasia himself, he would have engineered a more substantial return to the opening *Affekt*, as in the more famous C minor Fantasia, K 475.’ It is even possible that the piece might have been intended as an introduction to a fugue or, like that later C minor work, to a sonata. We seem unlikely ever to know – yet such uncertainty proves less a frustration than a stimulus to our imagination.

**Late or not-so-late style**

The last in Mozart’s great series – surely the greatest by any composer – of piano concertos dates from 1791, his final year. This B-flat major work, whether we like it or no – many, far from unreasonably, consider such an outlook hopelessly sentimental and indeed downright unhistorical – seems destined to remain an exemplar of Mozart’s ‘late style’. The spareness and simplicity, the cutting down to essentials, the complicated relationship between apparent fragility and inner formal strength: these and many more characteristics suggest the world of the composer’s two final operas, *La clemenza di Tito* and *Die Zauberflöte*, the Clarinet Concerto, and various other works from that year. And yet, uncertainties and worse persist. I say ‘dates from 1791’: it was on 5 January that Mozart entered it into his thematic catalogue; at the very least some of the composition does not. Moreover, some scholars have suggested a far earlier date for much of the composition (1788 for the first two movements?) As well as backdating features of the composer’s ‘late style’, that also presents us with the possibility that this work, like the Clarinet Concerto, might readily have remained a fragment awaiting completion by another, posthumous hand.

Mozart did not, of course, know that this would be his final piano concerto. We can hardly miss what seems to us to betoken resignation, even a turning inwards from the more brilliant display of its predecessors, whether recent (nos 25 and 26, these three the only piano concertos from his final six years) or earlier (no fewer than fourteen from the four years previously). In practice, however, what we are really hearing is experimentation with new forms, new textures, new tonal progressions: essentially, new horizons, new moods and emotions. The first movement opens in curious harmonic stasis, all string lines save for the first violins repeating themselves throughout the first four bars; cellos and basses play but a single note, the tonic, B-flat, until the long-awaited dominant F at the beginning of the fifth bar. Soon, however, it is the rapidity of Mozart’s modulations to distant keys that strikes us, the tonal universe both expanding in almost Newtonian fashion and yet on the Romantic verge of shrinking, of turning within itself. (Beyond Beethoven lie Wagner and Schoenberg.) If this is inwardness, it is an inwardness that finds a host of new ways to express itself. Indeed, the development – which opens, startlingly, in distant B minor, the surprise somehow enhanced by the orchestral harmonic preparation for that turn – brings well-nigh miraculous reconciliation between what, in Beethoven, might have remained overtly dialectical opposites: a tendency, on the one hand, towards disjuncture that is both melodic and harmonic; on the other, towards ever more tightly binding together, not least from within the woodwind band, a reinvention of Mozart’s ‘traditional’, quasi-operatic intertwining of instrumental lines. The recapitulation, if we may call it that, continues to develop, ever more subtly: listen for the indissoluble union of new territory in instrumentation and harmony. Art conceals art; to do so, it must constantly recreate itself.

The second movement is in ternary form (ABA), yet displays a not dissimilar relationship between simplicity and complexity. The textural richness of the A sections is to a certain extent offset by the spareness of the central material, which may be understood to take its place in the ‘Romanze’ tradition of, say, the D minor Piano Concerto. Which tendency is ‘late’? Both lay a claim, as does the interaction between the two. The ability of the solo instrument to lure the orchestra, Pied Piper-like, into distant tonal reaches may be recalled from the first movement. The sonata-rondo finale surely lays the strongest claim, both historically and stylistically, to ‘lateness’. Its myriad melodic and harmonic subtleties take wing from an opening theme that suggests a fledgling – or perhaps distilled – ‘hunting’ rondo. The orchestra proves more insistent, yet times do seem to have changed: not finality, perhaps, but new vistas that perhaps point as much to Schubert as to Beethoven. It would take a sterner heart than that of the present writer not to sense Mozart’s longstanding major-mode practice of smiling through tears brought nearer to its conclusion.

**Obscurity and rarity**

What’s in a name? In the case of a divertimento, not so much. Mozart, for instance, used the word for his gravely serious string trio in E-flat major, K 563, anything but a ‘mere’ diversion. Nevertheless, its typical connotation of a lighter work for small(ish) ensemble was more usual for him. The five divertimenti, K Anh.229/439*b*, may have been written in 1781, when the Stadler brothers were trying to make some money playing basset horn trios, or perhaps later during the 1780s when two other brothers, the Springers, were attempting to find work in Vienna. We *think* they were written by Mozart; they may or may not be the ‘still unknown trios for basset horn’ of which his widow Constanze wrote to the publisher Johann Anton André in 1800, alleging both loss and theft.

At any rate, this the fifth in the set, is unusual with respect to the expectations set up by its predecessors. It is the only one to open with a slow movement, and boasts a similarly unique lilting Polonaise. All five movements, however, beguile, charm, and, in many ways, intrigue. The composer’s mastery of three-part writing cannot be gainsaid and the more expected inner movements also exude character of their own. There is nothing generic to the bubbly minuet with earthier trio, to the closing *Romanze*, nor to the stately second *Adagio*, which perhaps stands closest of all to the Masonic Lodge.

**A (second) canonical masterpiece**

The G minor Symphony, K 550, is certainly no fragment or rarity; nor is there any controversy concerning its authorship, although there remains a good deal that is historically unclear. Moreover, even in this case, the conductor must decide whether to use the version with or without clarinets. It may well be that this 1788 work is a kinsman to the B-flat major Piano Concerto, or at least (as the reader will recall) to its first two movements. Certainly, consideration of the works’ first movements together sheds interesting light on the tendency towards harmonic disjuncture, more often remarked upon in the symphony, on account of its greater violence. (A minor key probably helps in that respect.) A disorienting wrench, suggestive of wholesale harmonic dissolution, at the opening of that development to F-sharp minor is mirrored and yet questioned by the aforementioned B minor modulation in the concerto. In his 1801 *Bemerkungen über die Ausbildung der Tonkunst in Deutschland im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, Johann Karl Friedrich Triest wrote of Mozart’s having drowned out the voice of criticism of ‘bizarre ideas’ by dint of ‘striking modulations, etc.’ The relationship between these two movements, whenever they were written, attests to what Simon P. Keefe has called ‘intergeneric cross-fertilization in Mozart’s concertos and symphonies’; indeed, they are two particular witnesses on whom he calls.

Here, for the only occasion in this concert, we hear Mozart the tragedian (not that ‘comedies’, be they operatic or concertante, need be any less profound in his case). As the East German musicologist, Georg Knepler argued, the work ‘clings relentlessly to the minor mode’, its shadows ever present even in the deeply chromatic, contrapuntally involved *Andante* in E-flat major. We may no longer be able to subscribe to Albert Einstein’s Romantic view of the work as an ‘appeal to posterity’, yet how can we not count, with ETA Hoffmann, Mozart as a Romantic when subjected to the dramatic tension of a work which, if so inclined, we might trace back to its very opening semitonal fall. Schoenberg’s interest in the work is far from a coincidence, his *Harmonielehre* analysis making a bold, convincing claim for Mozart the progressive. ‘Mozart, the most modern of all!’ he once remarked.

Driving cross rhythms in the Minuet make it abundantly clear that this is no ballroom dance; it is as serious as any Beethoven Scherzo. Even the relative relaxation of the Trio seeming strongly dependent on still greater musical complexity elsewhere. In his analysis of this movement, Leonard P. Meyer rightly pointed to the phenomenon of ‘relational richness,’ arguing that ‘such richness (or complexity) is in no way incompatible with simplicity of musical vocabulary and grammar’. In Mozart, they will more often than not prove to be two sides of the same coin. As in so much of this programme, woodwind play a crucial sinuous role, both in consoling and in potentialities of harmonic dissolution.

The finale again shows Mozart at his most harmonically radical yet formally assured, again not unlike its counterpart in the B-flat major Piano Concerto. From the opening ‘Mannheim rocket’ phrase, G minor is both insisted upon and lain open to contrary, dissolving tendencies. One passage in the development of breathtaking chromatic and rhythmic disjuncture delineates a sequence of eleven out of the twelve pitches in the chromatic scale, omitting only the tonic G. The omission is anything but accidental, for it only serves to heighten the necessity, the tragic inevitability, of return. Sonata forms are, for the moment, reinforced, by such extremity. It is not in this work, for all its radicalism, that Mozart elects to play with genre.