

Mozart's Oboe Concerto in C Major, K.271k/285d/314

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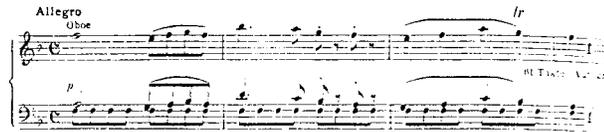
The operatic, symphonic and chamber music of Mozart tells us immediately that he possessed a deep appreciation of the acoustic possibilities of wind timbres in ensemble, and a special fondness for the wide range of blends and contrasts that can be produced by winds in conjunction with voices and strings. It therefore seems remarkable that he produced so few concerti for winds. Indeed, the only highly regarded major work in this category is the *cheval de bataille* of every clarinetist: the great concerto in A major, K.622, composed a few weeks before his death.

Far outnumbering and outdistancing Mozart's solo works for winds are, of course, the incomparable keyboard concerti where, incidentally, Mozart's handling of wind accompaniment is especially telling. The principal reason for this imbalance is obvious: Mozart was a keyboard virtuoso, not a wind player, and wrote his finest concerti for his own performances whereas he composed most of his wind pieces as favors (the clarinet concerto was a gift to his close friend Anton Stadler) or on commission as sources of income. Another factor, less evident, is often mentioned. In a letter from Mannheim to his father on 14 February 1778, he says in apology for slowness in producing flute pieces on commission for the Dutch flautist deJean, "as you know, I am reluctant (gleich stuff) if I have to compose steadily for a single instrument that I cannot stand," suggesting a strong dislike for the sound of a solo flute.

Musicologists find it difficult to take this remark seriously; Stanley Sadie for example regards Mozart's flute writing as far too "professional and idiomatic" to betray any touch of distaste for the instrument. I agree. More probably, Mozart's overriding distaste was for the chore of working under pressure on a single commission in order to make money when he would have preferred to spend time on ideas that sprang more easily from his inner drive. His flute writing in that period was in fact superb, whatever his impatience with it.

As for the oboe, it appears from the same letter that Mozart had already completed a concerto for Giuseppe Ferlendis, oboist in Salzburg, and that it had become popular from several

performances in Mannheim: "... for the fifth time, Ramm has played my Ferlendis concerto here and it made a great noise (Lärm)." Mozart also told his father that he had completed two flute concerti and three flute quartets for deJean, receiving only 96 of the promised 200 florins; the commission had called for three "easy" concerti and "a few" quartets. Scores of the flute concerti — one in G major, the other in D major — survived, but for a long time the Ferlendis/Ramm oboe concerto was thought to be lost. In his first catalog (1862) Köchel played with the idea that it might be a



Example 1.

concerto in F major of which only 61 measures had been found, beginning as quoted in Example 1, to which he assigned the number 293 on the assumption that it had been written in the summer of 1777. There was no reason to change this assignment in the second edition (1905).

When Alfred Einstein took on research for the third edition (1937) the situation had changed. For a variety of textural and musical reasons he identified this piece with a commission that Mozart undertook in February or March of 1783 for the oboist of Prince Esterhazy; he assigned it the number 416f. In writing to his father from Vienna at this time, Mozart asked for the book in which he had written out parts for the Ferlendis concerto; Esterhazy had offered him three ducats for a copy. Einstein compiled, and included another fragment of an F-major oboe concerto of similar character, numbered as 416g on the assumption that it was a second attempt at something to sell Esterhazy. Example 2 quotes the point at which the solo enters.



Example 2.

In returning to the question of the Ferlendis concerto of 1777 Einstein quotes the most unlikely possibility shown in Example 3.

Example 3.

But he immediately argues strongly against its authenticity, suggesting instead that it was composed by Ferlendis himself. At the same time he mentions the idea of linking K.271k with the second of the deJean flute concerti, implying that Mozart may have been so pressed for time in meeting his deadline (deJean was soon to leave for Paris) that he threw that concerto together as a reworking of a breakthrough. In 1920, while working through archives in Salzburg, Bernhard Paumgartner discovered a set of parts, in 18th century manuscript, carrying the title "Concerto in C / Oboe Principale / 2 Violine / 2 Oboi / 2 corni / Viola / e Basso / del Singre W.A. Mozart,"² excerpted in Example 4, which is almost identical with the Flute Concerto, K. 285 in D major.

Example 4.

Although we need no further proof of the fact that one piece is a transcription of the other, it's

interesting to pursue the question of which came first. We might simply argue from common sense: Mozart was presumably in no hurry to compose for Ferlendis and under considerable pressure to produce music for deJean in fulfillment of his commission. Hence the impulse to recycle an oboe piece which, with a few significant alterations and change of key, would become a relatively easy concerto for flute.

But the music itself gives us harder evidence. Giegling³ reviews Paugartner's studies to point out that the D major flute concerto takes the instrument no higher than E above the staff, whereas the G-major concerto (K.285c/313) goes to G. Similarly, the accompanying strings never use their lowest open tones in the D-major piece, suggesting transcription once again. Also, the voicings of the orchestral oboes produce another clue in D major. Example 5 compares the openings of the two slow

Example 5.

movements. In order to avoid high E in first oboe — a thin sound for the oboes of his time — Mozart had to set the oboes in the middle register where

they fall below the violins in m.2, then play in unison with them in m.3-4. It's not a good sound in Mozart's style: the oboes lose their identity under the violins.

The C-major version is clearly superior, with the wide voicing far more characteristic of Mozart's careful use of winds.

Firmer evidence for the chronology comes from a contrapuntal passage in the third movement, beginning at m.152, where there appeared to be blunders in the string parts of the flute concerto as handed down from the time of Mozart. Brahms

Example 6.

and Rudorff, working from the complete edition of Mozart's works published in 1883, attempted to solve the problem of reconstruction with the dubious result shown in Example 6 where the doubling of flute and first violin is clumsy but seemingly inevitable for proper cadence. But when the oboe version was discovered the problem was seen to have been handled simply and elegantly by Mozart himself, as seen in Example 7.

Example 7.

But the trouble with this section has evidently not ended. The 1936 edition of the Flute Concerto was edited by Gerber⁴ who acknowledges Brahms and Rudorff but seems to be unaware of Paumgartner's discovery. His reconstruction from m. 156 onward appears in Example 8. He makes the error of assuming that the passage at 160 must begin with Violin I as before, an assumption that forces him to elide the part at 158, lose the counterpoint, and introduce awkward rests at 160 and 161. But in Example 9 we behold Mozart's smooth treatment of the episode, the master

understands that he must not repeat the order of entrance. How simple it seems!

It was this kind of evidence that Paumgartner thought most convincing in support of his claim that he had found the Ferlendis oboe concerto — which would imply, as Giegling points out, that the appropriate catalog number is a return to 271k

Example 8.

Example 9.

rather than the 314 which commonly identifies the piece.

Nevertheless, some puzzling details remain to be explained. For instance, in m. 173 of the oboe parts we find the forked crescendo marking which was not practiced in 1777; the flute version, supposed to be written later, retains the "cresc." marking. The oboist Ingo Goritzki⁵ makes much of this, and of other untypical aspects of the oboe score, in claiming that the piece cannot have been composed by Mozart. But then he would have to ignore the fact that there exists a short sketch of the solo line beginning at m.512 of the first movement, shown as (a) in Example 10 and clearly in Mozart's hand. Item (b) in the example is a rewriting of the manuscript, while (c) is the line used in the final version. So much for the myth that Mozart never had to work out his ideas.

Editors over the years have not agreed on tempo markings, the first movement, they all tell

us, is to be played as a broad (aperto) allegro. But for subsequent movements we find the following:

editor	solo	Mvt. II	Mvt. III
Paumgartner	oboe	adagio non troppo	rondo
Gerber	flute	andante ma non troppo	allegro
Giegling	oboe	adagio non troppo	rondo allegretto
Giegling	flute	adagio non troppo	rondeau allegro

whereas my own sense of the music suggests the markings to be simply andante (as was Mozart's custom) and rondo.

In transposing the Concerto for Flute, Mozart

frequently in the last decades of the Classical period. Its wide use in orchestration, usually in pairs against pairs of horns as in this concerto, gradually dwindled as flutes and clarinets tended to take over. All the more reason, then, to treasure this early work of Mozart, who wrote for the oboe with deep sympathy for its timbre and a full knowledge of its technical capabilities. Its

place in the repertoire of the virtuoso oboist is secure, despite the fact that modern improvements in the instrument have brought much greater facility within reach. ❖



(b)



(c)



Example 10.

made numerous small but significant changes to accommodate the instrument as fully as possible. He paid special attention to the first movement, with changes in 17 percent of its 188 bars. But he altered only 16 of the 278 bars of the rondo — less than six percent, and there is no change at all in the andante. Perhaps this indicates growing haste in his efforts to meet his deadline.

There are far fewer changes in the orchestra parts, naturally, some of which have only to do with the need to drop the first oboe register in the flute piece. But in the last measure of the allegro he improved the orchestration by doubling the oboes with horns rather than with Violin I as in the oboe version. And there is at least one important dynamic omission in the transcription: at measure 273 of the oboe parts Mozart calls for offbeat forte, a crucial marking missing from the flute piece. One final suggestion, perhaps, of a rush to the finish.

Solo pieces for oboe appeared less and less

Endnotes

- ¹ Sadie, Stanley. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 12 697 (1980).
- ² Paumgartner, Bernhard (ed.). "Mozart Oboe Concerto," score with commentary. Boosey & Hawkes (1948).
- ³ Giegling, Franz. "Mozart Neue Ausgabe" Series V, Group 14, Vol. 3 (1981) pg. X.
- ⁴ Gerbert, Rudolph. *Concerto in D Major for Flute and Orchestra* by Mozart score with commentary. Eulenberg (1936).
- ⁵ Goritzki, Ingo. Analytic commentary accompanying recording. CLAVES D606. Thun/Schweiz (1976).

About the Author ...

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