

Piano Fantasia and Sonata in C minor K. 475-457, Piano Rondo in A minor K. 511, Piano Sonata in D major K. 576, the last W. A. Mozart's works for the *fortepiano* from the Viennese Period

Essay

By Jorg Cova, 2006

Abstract

The last years of Mozart's life in Vienna, 1782-1789, were marked by events and psychological experiences for the most intense. His compositions from the last seven years are the true testimony as to the intensity of his Masonic life. By his Viennese Period, Mozart had long ago forgone the gallant style. Henceforth, his compositions bear an astounding length and texture, but above all they are pervaded by highly intense emotions. Notwithstanding, even though Mozart transcends his time toward the future, it would be inappropriate to call them "romantic". Although emotions are intense, they do not overrun reason that betrays a classicism Mozart do not forgo. Form always overtakes content. The intense emotional contents of this music is the result of overwhelming experiences, musical as well as sentimental, and their impact over a frail and unstable personality, stormed by constant psychological crisis and restless inner self seeking.

At the edge of history

The year 1783 unfolds. Mozart is victim of a grave crisis whose consequence is a slowing down of his compositional production. Constance, formerly his inspiring muse in the creative field, becomes a hard to overcome hindrance. Although Mozart's striving to please her, every compositional undertaking devoted to her fails. He cannot even manage any exercise of counterpoint. The crisis Mozart endures seems to be a complex process of a cryptic nature whose origin remains mysterious. In any event, the extent of the uneasiness that troubles Mozart is such that it launches him on a quest for responses based on new evidences. The crisis Mozart endures, far from being a reaction to the shock caused by outer events over a frail personality, seems to be of an inner nature and linked to the compulsions of a repressive education with strong parental domination. The ceaseless demands of excellence from the part of his familiar and social entourage could well have brought about to him an inner dread about rejection and love loss at an eventual failure. These inner conflicts transcend into his affective and creative facets. It was maybe because of this inner struggle between submission and revolt that Mozart adhered to the ideals of the Enlightenment as a seeking of for responses to his grieves.

Constance (Weber) Mozart. Drawing by Joseph Lange, 1783, period of the greatest of Mozart's emotional crises that lead to their disruption.



Joseph Lange, Mozart's brother-in-law, testifies to the mood the latter was in during this period:

« [...]. Besides, he seemed neither to cogitate nor to think of anything. Be it, underneath a trifling appearance he wilfully coached his inward anguish due to causes one could not uncover; be it, he took pleasure from opposing a harsh contrast between his divine musical ideas and the vulgarity of every-day life and make fun of a sort of a self-appointed irony. »

Irony...always the better means to overcome fate which relentlessly makes out of man a puppet to manipulate at will.

We know full well the importance the Masonic contacts had for Mozart in Mannheim and later in Vienna. Importance with respect to friendship, inasmuch as he encountered masters whom he admired unconditionally, but mostly with respect to his reflections about life and art. Was it maybe at this time that he started suspecting that his place was among the Masons? Was his Masonic initiation preceded by a previous one in the Order of the Enlightened? Two of his bosom friends in Vienna, Gottfried van Swieten and Otto von Gemmingen, were among the most active promoters of the Enlightenment. Besides, von Gemmingen himself was the founder and the Master, at that time, of the Viennese Masonic Lodge.

From 1781 onwards, the Order of the Enlightened had filtered through the Freemasonry. It would not have been altogether impossible that van Swieten or von Gemmingen had enrolled Mozart in the preparatory class called "the Nursery" from 1783, before his entrance in the lodge.

However, Mozart's sympathy was with his brethren fellow sons of the Enlightenment and their fully progressive, irreligious, counter mystic, rational and socio-political revolutionary spirit, as he unmistakably puts it in *The Magic Flute*. Entering the Freemasonry, on December 14, 1784, Mozart materialises an attempt toward a personal renewal, to resume his life under new forces, in sum, an answer to his inner seeking of. Thus, Mozart achieves a sort of psychological conversion. Should his final decision be influenced by his emotional conflicts, mainly the one of autumn 1784, is most probable as we shall see further on. Supportive as he already was to the *Sturm und Drang* movement and the ideals of the *Aufklärung*: freedom, equality and fraternity, common effort and reciprocity for the progress of humankind, art and science; through his entry into Freemasonry, Mozart engages himself more deeply with these ideals at the same time that he receives spiritual illumination and warm brotherly friendship which bring him to find himself. This conversion will bear fruit in his works of the last seven years, the true testimony to the intensity of his Masonic life.

Amongst Mozart's 1784 creations, the *Sonata in C minor* K. 457 testifies to the aforementioned emotional conflict. Unfortunately, there is no extant documentation capable of being entrusted to historical analysis. The awkwardness, foolishness and lack of honesty on the part of the involved are responsible for this invaluable loss. No other choice at hand, we may only look back to the sole extant document, by chance the most important one: the music.

Back from Linz, around the middle of 1783, Mozart moved with his family to the Trattner residence. There, he devoted himself to offering recitals by subscription. Suddenly, he got rid

of the former emotional disorder that hindered him and began producing works full of strength, pride, self-reliance, and a peerless rhythm never matched in further compositions. At the same time, the feeling of ardent passion and a desperate need for tenderness pervade these pieces. Abruptly, with no apparent reason, Mozart left Trattner's residence. From this point on, he produced for his former employer's wife a work of matchless quality. In fact, on October 14, 1784, Mozart published in Vienna the *piano Sonata in C minor* K. 457 dedicated to Theresa von Trattner, after six years of having been unable to complete any composition for solo *fortepiano* (except for the *Prelude and Fugue* K. 394 in 1782).

Until then he had published his sonatas in sets of three; nevertheless, the one in *C minor* was released alone. It seems obvious that this sonata carries a special significance for Mozart, since on May 20, 1785, he felt the necessity of giving it an even more significant introduction of a larger scope than the *Sonata* itself: the *Fantasia in C minor* K. 475. The overwhelming character and emotion of the *Sonata* are hence extolled to the utmost expression and brought to an astounding monumental dimension. Mozart had already met Theresa in 1781, when she became his pupil. The dedication of the *Sonata* reveals the deep Mozart's sentiments toward her that inspired the piece.

The rapid unfolding of events suggests a sentimental drama or a public scandal about to explode. In fact, around mid-August 1784, Mozart hastily left Trattner's residence, maybe seeking to distance himself from Theresa and to avert from him any possibility of a social scandal. This purpose or maybe the dread of a social commotion could well have been responsible for the foregone disappearance of all previous correspondence between both Mozart and Theresa. Even worse, Theresa would later refuse to hand over to Constance the letters in which Wolfgang explained the sense and interpretation of the *Sonata*; this loss having drastic consequences for posterity.

These documents having been spared from historical analysis, we are unaware of the true nature of that relationship as well as the reasons driving Mozart to part from Theresa. Was it carnal passion? Amorous friendship? Platonic admiration from pupil to master? Or simply fellow souls spiritually linked by philosophical, intellectual and aesthetic ideals? Whatever the case, it was not strong enough a cause to hinder Theresa from publicly accepting the explicit dedication of two exceptional and "firebrand" works, as Massin calls them, for whom, with respect to the other works in minor tonality...

« [...] a peerless maturity and a higher virility pervade those from 1784 – instead of the typical Mozart's discretion that remains in lamentation [...] a rugged expression stands still here, a one that can abide neither to be covered up nor to deceive. »

The *Sonata* develops increasingly doubling the tragic violence of its starting point. The first movement, based on two contrasting themes: majestic the first and agonising the second, unfolds in mounting agitation up to its climax, the *coda*. The *Adagio*, far from leading to balance and peacefulness, conveys tenderness ready to flow out with no restriction. The *finale* also offers two contrasting, agonising and majestic, themes (this time in reversed order) and taken in the "burning" state they had reached in the *coda* from the first movement. Both themes appear fragmented by *fermatas* and abrupt interruptions from one another. Obviously, these effects point not to a simple pleasure of combining sound formulas, but to expressive attempts. Actually, they are the utterance of the inner Mozart's breathless struggle: submission against revolt before merciless die?

According to Massin, it would not be accurate to speak of “romanticism” about a work which is historically contemporary of the *Sturm und Drang* and the *Aufklärung* just because it reflects a conflicted and violent pathos. A composition of this kind remains true to the Mozart’s genius in its most original and irrefutable form, even more than many other gallant works from the Salzburg period:

«*The Sonata in C minor –Massin says -, in the sense that it delivers us Mozart’s soul, is infinitely more Mozart-like than all the Divertimento "Lodron" or Serenade "Hafner" or Sonata "Dürnitz" that we could ever imagine. »*

Some aspects of the *Sonata*, namely the *chiaroscuros* and sudden changes of affect, are inherent of the Sentimental Style from the School of Berlin, of which Mozart is, at least partly, the heir. Suffice it to recall Mozart’s utterance of admiration for the music, as well as the school, of C. P. E. Bach, mainly the keyboard ones. Some quotations from Mozart come to us from Rochlitz:

«*He is the father; we are the children. Those of us who do anything right, learned it from him. Whoever does not own to this is a scoundrel. »*

And farther on he adds:

«*We can no longer do as he did; but the way in which he did it places him beyond all others».*

Thus, Mozart summarises the link the music of his generation kept with C. P. E. Bach, whose contribution stands as part of the significant forces that infused the leading musical tendencies of his time.



«*Under a trifling appearance he coached at will his intimate anguish...a kind of irony of himself. »* (Lange)

Mozart at the piano, at 27, in 1783. Unfinished picture by his brother-in-law Joseph Lange. Period of the existential crisis that will precipitate his entry into Freemasonry. A few months later, he will create the *Piano Sonata in C minor* K. 457.

On May 20, 1785, seven months after the completion of the *Sonata in C minor*, appeared the *Fantasia in C minor* K. 475. They were both further released together by Artaria in Vienna in December 1785 as *Piano Fantasia and Sonata* under the opus number 11. Obviously, it is not an independent work; furthermore, its significance seems to be clear. What could have driven Mozart, after seven months of quietness, to go back with a passion to a work he considered

finished? There is such a close link between both pieces that the gusts that sweep the conclusion of the *Fantasia* foreshadow the *finale* of the *Sonata*.

Mozart seems to have felt the need to return to a finished composition, but most of all to a previous mood to revive it, go deeper into it and to give it a new and greater span. We ignore the biographical incidents, if any, capable of justifying such an attitude. The *Fantasia* is also dedicated to Theresa von Trattner. It would not be illogical to think that this attempt could keep a link with the old passion that had encouraged the creation of the *Sonata*. But even if that passion had revived, would it be enough for the author to consider that a sonata completed seven months beforehand now needs to be re-dimensioned by an introduction of equal breath, or even of greater density?

According to Einstein, it would have been Mozart's will to "motivate" the firebrand character of the *Sonata* and justify it as the result of a particular frame of mind. Despite its free form, the *Fantasia* seems a rigorous "exposition of motifs" in the literal and figurative sense, besides the fact that it returns to itself with a reprise of the beginning as conclusion. Massin up holds the hypotheses that the self-conscious maturity process Mozart had launched in entering the Freemasonry could have pervaded all the spheres of his life, namely the sentimental one. Hence, if Mozart wanted to "motivate" in May his *Sonata* of October, it was, maybe, because within his newly acquired self-vision he could deeply "motivate" and plainly assume his old experience. Even though both works are pervaded by the same tragic atmosphere and plenty of passionate feeling with traces of tenderness, the wavering caused by the struggle between submission and revolt seems to be better dominated in the *Fantasia* than in the *Sonata*. The cyclic form of the *Fantasia* would have found its counterpart in Mozart's own mind if he had discovered a new sense to the drama he had endured. Had it been thus, the new vision would have been brought about from the Masonic horizon, namely its Christian spiritual themes simultaneously with the hope of a new temporal world which would be, thanks to the gleams of reason, more just and brotherlier, and would give scope to unleash the purest sentiments from human heart.

The *Piano Rondo in A minor* K. 511, published in Vienna on Mars 11, 1787, is the sign of a new disruption in the frail and hardly conquered Mozart's emotional balance between 1785 and 1786. On December 26, 1786, Mozart had written the *Escena drammatica* K. 505 dedicated to Nancy Storace. In Einstein's vision, Mozart here wants to embody a declaration of love in music, put in the plenty of love pledge words of two faithful lovers, Idamante and Ilia, at the point of secluding from each other. Thus, he wished to express to this young soprano, endowed with such a tender and warm voice, the unfulfilled longing he felt for her. Three months later the *Rondo* broke in as an anguished confidence caused, presumably, by Nancy's despondency. He seems to have intended to keep for ever the stirring recall of the magic fusion between that tender and harmonious voice and his piano playing in which he poured his heart's most intimate, though unrequited, secrets.

Mozart had not yet written in *A minor* since that nasty May of 1778, when he wrote in Paris the *Piano Sonata in A minor* K. 310, while being the prey of the darkest sentiments and most bitter loneliness he had ever endured. This very same atmosphere returns with the *Rondo*. Once again, the most subjective lyric impressions break into the piece henceforth pervaded



with the human maturity and aesthetic mastering he had acquired. They are the hint of a return to pathetic utterance coming from the depth of his being and rooted in the inner principles of life.

Nancy Storace. The sweet and tender voice of this soprano had captivated Wolfgang's heart. The anguish caused by her despondency inspired, in 1787, the pathetic *Piano Rondo in A minor* K. 511.

In July 1789, Mozart achieved the *Piano Sonata in D major* K. 576 devoted to the princess Fredericka of Prussia, who had commissioned it. Mozart had conceived this sonata as the first one of a cycle, yet far from suspecting that it would be the last sonata he would compose or, at the very least, that he would finish. On July 12, 1789, Mozart wrote to his Mason brethren Puchberg:

« [...] I am writing six easy piano sonatas intended to the princess Fredericka and six quartets for the king, which I shall have engraved at my expense by Kozeluch. Both dedications will bring me along some good wages! »

The extent to which the texture of this piece outmatches the epithet renders Mozart's threshold of "difficult" hard to imagine.

Moreover, a new element breaks in along this sonata: the counterpoint. Mozart had been initiated to the music of J. S. Bach by the baron Gottfried van Swieten, by the way court librarian. Mozart is henceforth confronted to a phenomenon that tosses the very pillars of his musical background. He assesses it as a return to the source and foundation of the music of his time, as a vivid contact with the transcendental, universal and eternal. From 1782 on, Mozart paid weekly visits to van Swieten's residence where took place the musical encounters called "Musical Sundays" at noon. They were devoted to the interpretation of instrumental music and, above all, singing of Bach vocal works, committing Mozart the alto part. In a letter of April 10, 1782, Mozart writes:

« By the way, I should have wanted to beg you to send me along with the *Rondo* the six fugues by Haendel and the *Sonatas and Fugues* by Eberlin. I go every Sunday at noon to the baron van Swieten's and there we play only Haendel and Bach. I am making myself a collection of fugues by Bach, as well Sebastian as Emanuel and Friedemann Bach, and those by Haendel; the latter ones being the only missing to me. I would also wish to make the baron listen to those by Eberlin. »

Mozart's devotion for Bach knows no limit. When he visited Dresden in April 1789, Mozart made a detour to Leipzig on his way to Berlin. He reached Leipzig on April 19 or 20, 1789. He felt morally compelled to pay that tribute to the great master. From his very arrival, Mozart headed to the *Thomasschule* and presented his vows to the current *kantor*, Johann Friedrich Doles, a former pupil of Bach's. According to the testimony of a contemporary, quoted by Reichardt, we get know that:

«On April 22, Mozart, with no previous announcement, performed for free at the organ of the Thomaskirche. Along one hour non stop, he played before a big audience in a beautiful and artful manner. Görner, the organist, and deceased Doles stood at both his sides and pulled the stops. I saw him myself; he was a man of an average height, geared on fashion. Doles was so enthusiastic with the artist's playing that he believed to see his master, old Sebastian Bach, before his eyes. Mozart had sight read in an admirable way, totally at ease and with all the refinements of harmony, whatsoever they had committed to his eyes and the themes among which was the choral tune: Jesu, meine Zuversicht. »



Rochlitz recounts about the same occasion:

«The choir gifted Mozart singing in double choir: Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied by the ancestor of the music, Sebastian Bach. Mozart knew more through rumours than through his works, which have become rare, this Albert Durer of the German music – inaccurate since van Swieten had showed Mozart his collection - The choir had hardly performed few measures so far when Mozart shouted: "What is that?"- It would have seemed that his entire soul was sheltered in his ears. As soon as the performance finished, Mozart enthusiastically exclaimed: "That is something we have a lot to learn from!" – They told him that that school, where Sebastian Bach had been cantor, held the whole collection of his motets keeping them as if they were holy relics. "That is just, that is good – he exclaimed- show them to me!"- But there were no scores of those chants. Mozart then had them given to him the manuscript parts and it was rejoicing for those who beheld him to see how enthusiastically he ranged his eyes through all those parts he had around him, in both hands, on his knees, on the chairs beside him, forgetting everything and without rising until he had read all they had there by Sebastian Bach. He begged them for copies. »



«This little man without
appearance...pale like the death»
(Rochlitz)

Mozart at 33, in Dresden, on April 17, 1789, two days before his visit to Leipzig. Drawing by Doris Stock, the most accurate of Mozart's portraits, three months before the creation of the *Piano Sonata in D major* K.576.

The effect of Bach's music on the conscience and spirit of the Viennese society of that time was astonishing. Musicians and music-lovers had their minds boggled by something never ever heard in gallant music: the independence of the inner voices. Mozart dives with endeavour into the study of the fugue and devotes himself to counterpoint exercises, which were not always successful. An accurate analysis of these exercises shows that Mozart's conceit of Bach's counterpoint was strongly influenced by his Classical background. In fact, he sees tonal links where there are just consonances due to the overlapping of voices supported by a thorough base scheme.

It is Mozart's contention to make out of the *Sonata in D major* a true step back to the counterpoint as a return to the foundation of the music itself. Thus, thanks to his experiences with Bach's music, Mozart added to the maturity and new vision of life and world acquired in the later years of his Masonic life, a novel projection over music, which became henceforth compatible with his current and most intimate aesthetic and rational ideals.

About interpretation

In the preceding paragraphs we have assigned to both the biographical circumstances befallen the author and their psychological effect a determining role in the character of his compositions, both capital issues that must not be neglected at the moment of re-creation. Taking into consideration that many of the aforementioned circumstances are closely related to the unfolding of history at the time they occurred and set up stages in the continuous psychological evolution of the author, they obviously go beyond the simple anecdote. Furthermore, the author's psychological evolution materialised in works which are landmarks in the historical sense. In the background, we found the essential: human eternal and universal passions, which will always be the incorruptible element, the intimate common link among men of all times. Through the interpreter, they allow us to set up close sympathy with the author of the music and revive the emotions responsible for its genesis.

Hence, music from another era cannot be approached in a retrospective manner, so to say looking back from today, as it has been customary during a large part of the twentieth century. A certain tendency toward structuralism has threatened the diversity of style leaving aside

history and yet some aspects of musical language, namely articulation, ornamentation, improvisation, *rubatto*, etc. According to Nikolaus Harnoncourt, it would be incorrect to approach music of a past period through today's musical intuition.

The interpreter who is serious enough should be able to afford a Cyclops' undertaking: get to know and comprehend all aspects of "early" music, including the particular idiosyncrasy of the musical language at a determined period, of which all direct tradition has been lost. Classical music has its roots in the musical tradition of the eighteenth century to an extent that only the prospective approach would be apt to restore it within the character it irrupted into history with. Only thus, it would be possible, according to Harnoncourt, to produce a true historical interpretation that could bear the name "modern".

It would be inappropriate to talk about "purity" or "accuracy" when it comes to reproducing Mozart's music. These terms, as well as "right" and "wrong", of completely abstract meaning, are not quite apt for something as vast as the general idea of art and all that it entails, yet least of all when it comes to judge the art of another age of which the direct tradition of its sources has been lost. "Transparency" would be the proper term if it is taken in the sense of an absolute respect for the text and an interpretation based on historical analysis as well as on a full comprehension of the psychological aspects that pervade these works in order to reproduce them without betraying them.

The music of a composer is the main consideration to keep in mind amongst the diversity of aspects that interpretation entails. Historical data, those concerning the performance practice of an epoch, the sense of form in the composer's vision, are, although of critical importance, an additional responsibility for the interpreter. A true piece of musical art deserves the effort of scrutinizing the vision and structures of the person who created them. This means that the composer comes first, the interpreter after. The latter creates not the work anew, but he presents a version of it. However, the presence of the interpreter is undeniable as it is his natural tendency to pour in his interpretation his own conception of the work. That makes part of the individuality of each interpreter.

Notwithstanding, a composition is a structure comprising multiple facets which are to be reproduced according to the composer's vision and not recomposed according to the particular vision of each interpreter. It is altogether valid that an interpreter with scholarship, passion and technical excellence, has his own vision. But if the vision of someone else's work should operate with integrity and respect, an acknowledgement of the aspects that had driven a creative spirit to create it is required. This acknowledgement resides in the capacity and desire to perceive the original vision and remain faithful to it. According to Rosalyn Tureck, it is just this acknowledgement that constitutes the true quality of a great interpretation: "the recognition of the uncontroversial aspects of a composition that gravitate in its form, significance and communicative sense". This respect is the basic element to achieve integrity between artistic creation and recreation. The integrity would be a kind of engagement with respect to the composition, the composer and his time, but taking care that one does not impose on the other. It would be a sort of respect on the part of the interpreter of the original thoughts of the creator together with recognition of his own cultural responses, as well as of the expectations and judgements of his own times.

Albeit the latter could be stranger to the composer and his time, the study of the past and the contemporary may lead to a deep sense of aesthetical identity and intellectual conviction within the framework of a global vision. Maybe this synthesis is the source of artistic inspiration.

The aesthetic identity between Mozart and his time and us will always be valid insofar as it concerns the universal and eternal.