

1993

## "Perspectives on Mozart Performance." By R. Larry Todd and Peter Williams

Malcolm S. Cole

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr>



Part of the [Music Practice Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Cole, Malcolm S. (1993) ""Perspectives on Mozart Performance." By R. Larry Todd and Peter Williams," *Performance Practice Review*: Vol. 6: No. 1, Article 9. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.199306.01.09  
Available at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol6/iss1/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Journals at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Performance Practice Review by an authorized editor of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

R. Larry Todd and Peter Williams, eds. *Perspectives on Mozart Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Cambridge Studies in Performance Practice, No. 1. xiv, 246p. ISBN 0-521-40072-4.

In the process of telling his father about an evening spent with Georg Joseph Vogler, Mozart asks,

And wherein consists the art of playing *prima vista*? In this: in playing the piece in the time in which it ought to be played, and in playing all the notes, appoggiaturas, and so forth, exactly as they are written and with the appropriate expression and taste, so that you might suppose that the performer had composed it himself.<sup>1</sup>

How simple he makes sight-reading appear and, by extension, performance practice! And yet, two hundred years after his death, the search for appropriate solutions continues, as in the present volume, an approach to the topic "from the competing, but complementary, viewpoints of performers and scholars." (xiv).

With *Perspectives on Mozart Performance*, the "Cambridge Studies in Performance Practice" debuts, a series intended to provide "a forum through which the most important current research may reach a wide range of musicologists, performers, teachers and all those who have come to regard questions of performance practice as fundamental to their understanding of music." (dust jacket). Collected in this inaugural volume are ten essays. Some of the contributors address traditional components of the subject, albeit often in innovative ways: ornamentation (Paul Badura-Skoda, Frederick Neumann); tempo (Jean-Pierre Marty), the cadenza (Eduard Melkus, Christoph Wolff), and improvisation and Mozart the fortepianist (Katalin Komlós). Others open thought-provoking newer vistas: Mozart's approach to string writing (Jaap Schröder, Robin Stowell), the chromatic fourth, a *figura* of particular significance for Mozart and others (Peter Williams), and Mozart according to Mendelssohn, a contribution to *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (R. Larry Todd).

The proceedings open with "Mozart's Trills," by Paul Badura-Skoda. Refining and updating views originally articulated in the Badura-Skoda's *Mozart-Interpretation* [see note 3 for particulars], the author sensitively explores six topics: long trills beginning on the upper auxiliary, long trills

---

<sup>1</sup>Emily Anderson, ed., *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1989), Letter 273a, 449.

beginning on the main note, speed and ending, short trills and snaps, execution of the *tr* sign as a short upper appoggiatura, and execution of the *tr* sign as a turn. Although deeply indebted to Clementi's *Pianoforte School* (London, 1801), Badura-Skoda by no means relies exclusively upon it. To the contrary, he deals with several types not found in Clementi's table, such as written-out trills in *ribattuta* style, trill chains, and trills preceded by a short note of the same pitch, a favorite figure of Mozart's that continues to challenge the modern performer.

Katalin Komlós's "Ich praeludirte und spielte Variationen": Mozart the Fortepianist" begins with an adventurous foray into the realm of improvisation. From nomenclature, identification of the keyboard instruments used, descriptions of the playing, and various scraps of music, the author deduces much to help us understand Mozart's broad improvisational styles: free fantasy, strict style, and *galanterie*, with its "observance of fine nuances, articulation, precision, differentiation of light and shade, and *Geschmack und Empfindung*" (30). She turns then to written-out compositions. In variation sets, especially their adagio components, Komlós finds "a treasure house for those who wish to borrow ideas for the occasional ornamentation of the more sparsely notated sonata or concerto slow movements: (39-40). Considered also are Mozart's mature concertos and his free fantasies. Combining her analytical results with documentary evidence both indirect and direct, Komlós constructs a compelling picture of Mozart the fortepianist. During the early developmental stages of the fortepiano, she concludes, "it was Mozart who immediately understood both the nature and potential of this new instrument and made it the vehicle of his self-expression and performance fantasy." (54).

"Time is the soul of music," the father claimed. For the son, tempo was "the most difficult and most important, and the main thing in music" (letter of 24 October 1777). Frustratingly, the problem of determining tempo for music composed in a pre-metronomic age remains vexing. In "Mozart's Tempo Indications and the Problems of Interpretation," Jean-Pierre Marty, writing as scholar and conductor, helps performers bring to life the results presented so elegantly in his recent book, *The Tempo Indications of Mozart* [see note 3]. Marty is convinced that tempo indications were part of "a common language, almost a code, which was shared by all eighteenth-century composers and, concomitantly, understood by all experienced performers" (70). Thus, when properly read, Mozart's tempo indications convey important messages through ingredients such as meter, a key note value or values, and the role of the upbeat. For Mozart performance, then, "tempo" is not synonymous with "time." Indeed, in reducing tempo to the

quantitative, the advent of the metronome "represented a distinct setback for both the comprehension and the expression of tempo" (72). The purely quantitative element alone is insufficient. Equally important are the qualitative elements, especially articulation. In this way one can, on the one hand, differentiate tempos through internal articulation rather than through speed and, on the other, convey the same tempo feeling through different means. Indeed, "the dialectic of time and tempo, the paradox of a living order emerging from an abstract one, is at the centre of the art of the interpreter" (70).

Eduard Melkus writes "On the Problem of Cadenzas in Mozart's Violin Concertos." An examination of thirty-six cadenzas by other composers (we have none by Mozart) in terms of length, material, tonal plan, and difficulty demonstrates graphically how unsuitable the familiar modern choices are. Adopting a sensible, musical scheme calculated to help violinists devise their own cadenzas, Melkus first draws upon three didactic collections from the Classic Period. He then proposes ways of adapting piano-cadenza material to violin cadenzas, by condensing and simplifying passage-work, for example. Finally, recognizing that competition juries will continue to require the standard, overly long, stylistically inappropriate cadenzas, he appends some practical suggestions to make them more Mozartean.

To a Will Crutchfield article<sup>2</sup> Frederick Neumann responds with "A New Look at Mozart's Prosodic Appoggiatura," i.e., *unwritten appoggiaturas* added by singers, chiefly in recitatives, to reflect "the prosodic accent on the penultimate syllable of a feminine ending" (92). Neumann argues for greater flexibility of application, or non-application, based on considerations such as the power of note repetition, Salieri's testimony, theorists' evidence (by Agricola, Rellstab, Marpurg, and Mancini), and composers' evidence (by Mozart and Gluck). Re-examination and reinterpretation of Crutchfield's own evidence further strengthens Neumann's conviction: "the insertion of appoggiaturas was a matter of music-dramatic judgment, not of legal obligation" (116).

In "A Performer's Thoughts on Mozart's Violin Style," Jaap Schröder shares welcome reflections derived from thirty-five years of professional involvement with Mozart's string music. In brief, to recreate Mozart's spirit in performance one must "rediscover the many stylistic points that have been obscured by later technical developments which have radically altered

---

<sup>2</sup>Will Crutchfield, "The Prosodic Appoggiatura in the Music of Mozart and His Contemporaries," *Journal of the American Musicological Association* 42 (Summer 1989), 229-74.



the sound." (117): vibrato, intonation, bowing speed, tempo, articulation, and the realization of Mozart's embellishments. With abundant supporting examples, Schröder demonstrates that Mozart's violin technique, based on that of the baroque masters, achieved "a clarity and brightness of tone that enabled players to produce a well-articulated sound, intense but not tense" (119). This music, which lives by constant impulses and relaxations, requires a performance style that combines incisiveness and lightness, that produces excitement and avoids dragging.

A key component of Schröder's essay, articulation (with its interrelated matters of phrasing and accent) is the focus of Robin Stowell's "Leopold Mozart Revised: Articulation in Violin Playing during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century." Mozart's lifetime coincided with a dramatic change of emphasis in articulation practice, "the clear, distinct mid-eighteenth-century style of playing [the "ordinary" manner of bowing—a non-legato stroke] gradually giving way to a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century manner founded on a legato approach as a general rule" (132). Receiving careful attention is a host of topics, among them staccato notation, slurs, portamento, phrasing, and bowing. To a remarkable degree, during this crucial period of transition, Leopold Mozart's principles of violin playing withstood the test of time.

In "Mozart According to Mendelssohn: A Contribution to *Rezeptionsgeschichte*," R. Larry Todd examines Mozart's attitudes toward the high-Classic style. Utilizing several little known sources, Todd explores two facets: how Mendelssohn's response to Mozart shaped his own development as a composer; how Mendelssohn's efforts as conductor, pianist, and chamber musician "served to strengthen and confirm Mozart's canonisation in the classical school" (161). Included here is a helpful preliminary list of Mendelssohn's known performances of Mozart. Of particular interest is Todd's investigation of Mendelssohn's cadenzas for Mozart's piano concertos, notably the two he composed for the Double Concerto in E<sup>b</sup>, K365. The second, especially, emerges as a stylistically appropriate, "meticulously crafted miniature composition with a carefully unified thematic, harmonic, and tonal structure" (196).

In a stimulating extension of the boundaries customarily observed in performance practice studies, Peter Williams offers "Some Thoughts on Mozart's Use of the Chromatic Fourth," one of the 17th and 18th centuries' most common thematic allusions. His concern here is not simply with how music was performed, but also how it was heard. Whether the figure appears as a simple formula or as a well-developed idea controlling longer paragraphs, Mozart uses it particularly for serpentine lines, melodic and

essentially decorative (Symphony in G Minor, K550, all movements), and for bass lines, harmonic and coda-like (Sonata for Two Pianos, K448/III). Occasions likely to elicit chromatic fourths are the key of D minor, minuets, Kyries, and instrumental pieces otherwise marked by bright, open *Affekt*. Viewed atmospherically, the chromatic fourth can bring with it "a sense of expectancy, even anxiety," as in the slow introduction to the "Prague" Symphony (216). Citing the overture to *Don Giovanni*, and noting the variety of treatment the chromatic fourth finds in *Figaro*, Williams poses two provocative questions: in a given verbal context, what are the levels of allusion for chromatics?; when is a chromatic line over the melodic interval of a fourth a true "chromatic fourth"? Having answered some questions and raised many more, Williams concludes "that Mozart's use of the chromatic fourth was exceptionally varied . . . and that more often than not there was associated with it some manner of performance (dynamic, articulation) that marked it out from its surroundings or contributed to the character of those surroundings" (224).

Christoph Wolff authors the closing essay, "Cadenzas and Styles of Improvisation in Mozart's Piano Concertos." Four basic problems, or questions, trigger his inquiry: the function of Mozart's cadenzas; why did he write alternative versions?; how do the cadenzas reflect the early performance history of the piano concertos?; how do the cadenzas as improvisatory elements correspond and harmonize with the concerto development from K175-595? In probing these areas, Wolff calls into question several long-held bits of conventional wisdom, among them "the often expressed view that Mozart's piano concerto cadenzas were primarily written for students incapable of improvising" (230). To the contrary, Mozart kept a portfolio for his personal use. Indeed, a second portfolio, now lost, may have existed for the later concertos! With the passage of time, Mozart adopted an increasingly "anti-improvisatory" approach.

The chronology of Mozart's cadenza style reflects a move from the motivically free-wheeling fantasia manner to motivically and metrically tightly controlled improvisational gestures which are gradually more and more removed from genuine improvisation and, instead, come much closer to compositional elaboration (234-35).

Through the cadenza, Mozart as composer/performer could "change, modernise, and individualise a finished work through later re-performances" (p. 238).

Attractively designed and cleanly printed, *Perspectives on Mozart Performance* is a joy to read. Generous musical examples, useful tables and

charts, and five clearly reproduced figures supplement the literate prose of this truly international band of contributors. The editors deserve credit for felicitously coordinating styles, thus achieving a connecting thread while preserving individuality at the same time. Throughout, the translation of foreign-language quotes is commendable, as is Tim Burris's translation of the Melkus essay.

Criticisms are few. Some misspellings and damaged characters appear, especially in the second half of the volume. The spelling of Sarastro as "Zarastro" (68) seems unnecessary. For American readers, a refresher course in English equivalents for note values is highly recommended. Comprehension of Marty's essay depends upon facility with minims, crotchets, quavers, etc. Glancing through those essays supplied with subtitles, one might question why the type face-changes for Badura-Skoda's two last categories of trill realization (23-24; it is already somewhat confusing that the five categories announced on pp. 1-2 have been supplemented by a "Speed and Ending" section and interrupted by an examination of trills not mentioned in Clementi's table). In a purely organizational matter, readers of Komlós's essay might wonder why, after a lengthy look at variations, the author shifts to concertos for one paragraph (41-42), only to return to variations for several more pages.

To obtain maximum benefit from this sophisticated, state-of-the-art contribution, a great deal of preliminary reading (and listening) is desirable.<sup>3</sup> In no way is the citation of titles in note 3 an implication that some of the Cambridge essays might simply be rewrites of earlier scholarship. To the contrary, the volume is filled with important new concerns, new information, new insights, and new interpretations. For example, now believing that a main-note beginning is required to create the proper melodic effect for the opening of the Piano Concerto in G, K453, Badura-Skoda no longer advocates one of the executions of the short trill that he recommended in both his book and his *NMA* edition of this concerto.

Throughout, the contributors demonstrate a keen awareness of each other's work and a genuine respect for it. See, for example, the exchange of ideas

---

<sup>3</sup>Eva and Paul Badura-Skoda, *Mozart-Interpretation* (Vienna: Eduard Wancura, 1957), trans. Leo Black as *Interpreting Mozart on the Keyboard* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962; repr. New York, 1986); Jean-Pierre Marty, *The Tempo Indications of Mozart* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Frederick Neumann, *Ornamentation and Improvisation in Mozart* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Robin Stowell, *Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).



between Neumann and Badura-Skoda, or Melkus's use of the Badura-Skoda's findings about keyboard cadenzas as a springboard to his work on violin cadenzas. Moreover, they are admirably aware of other scholars' efforts. Although it appeared too late for incorporation in Wolff's research, Robert Levin's important "Instrumental Ornamentation, Improvisation, and Cadenzas" is cited conspicuously at the end of Wolff's essay.<sup>4</sup> That Levin could not have been involved more directly in the Cambridge project is unfortunate. To judge from his *Requiem* reconstruction/composition and his unforgettable fortepiano recital at the recent "Mozart's Music: Text and Context" conference (the Clark Library), his view would have enriched further an already lavish offering.<sup>5</sup> And, of course, new work continues to appear. For the cadenza, an area of concern to several of the contributors, there is now Philip Whitmore's book to consider.<sup>6</sup>

Within this volume, the contributors examine a vast repertoire of instrumental and vocal music (not exclusively by Mozart). A refreshing attention to strings (Melkus, Schröder, Stowell) redresses somewhat the long-existing imbalance between keyboard studies and everything else. Several threads are pursued throughout the book, offering the reader a tantalizing range of nuance. Here, for example, are three capsule views of tempo: "The dialectic of time and tempo . . . is at the centre of the art of the interpreter" (Marty, 70); "Playing the classical violin . . . helps to rediscover a sense of speed that is closely related to the human pulse and does not need extreme values at both ends of the scale" (Schröder, 122); "Clearly the system based on tempo terms was far from infallible as a means of establishing the optimum speed on which the music's proper effect so vitally depended" (Stowell, 151).

In their different ways, the contributors are both refining the field and expanding its boundaries, seeking enlightenment rather than dogmatic answers to questions incapable of such answers. To take the Neumann-Crutchfield dialogue as an example of refinement, each potential prosodic appoggiatura amounts to a detail, nothing more. However, projected over

---

<sup>4</sup>Robert Levin, "Instrumental Ornamentation, Improvisation, and Cadenzas," *Performance Practice, Music after 1600*, ed. Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie (New York: Norton, 1990), 267-91.

<sup>5</sup>Sponsored by the UCLA Center for 17th- and 18th-Century Studies and the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, this conference of lectures, workshops, and performances took place April 3-4, 1992, at the Clark Library.

<sup>6</sup>Philip Whitmore, *Unpremeditated Art: the Cadenza in the Classical Keyboard Concerto* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).



an entire score, these details profoundly influence the shape and impact of the performance. To cite one example of extending the boundaries, Williams, having presented a magisterial overview of the chromatic fourth, stops short of drawing firm conclusions, modestly cautioning instead, "There is no real system or theory to be constructed, merely a versatile *practice to be observed, illustrated, and contemplated*" (225).

In this first volume of "Cambridge Studies in Performance Practice," R. Larry Todd and Peter Williams, both currently at Duke University, have sought "to encourage a cross-fertilisation of viewpoints from scholars and performers, and to open up for further consideration new issues in performance practice" (dust jacket). In both respects, they and their contributors have succeeded admirably.

Malcolm S. Cole