

Mystery and innovation in performances of Mozart's Fantasy KV 475: following the guidance of three great 20th-century masters

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Generating controversy, questions and doubts from the very first bar, Mozart's C minor Fantasy KV 475 is an excellent example of innovation in the 18th century. Searching for a sense of direction in the musical discourse in order to build a coherent interpretation, pianists may be puzzled by the non-conventional compositional resources Mozart has used to build the "musical plot" of this unique work of art. Following the guidance of pianists Werner Genuit and Hans Graf, and the legendary conductor Sergiu Celibidache, three different interpretative perspectives are presented; comments were confined to concrete performance instructions rather than resorting to the use of metaphors, based on the direction of the musical discourse. Analogies were established to orchestral timbres, which by extension may be applied to an operatic context, illustrating creative practice as a means to facilitate access to and gain understanding of composers' musical ideas, and thereby to enhance performance.

DEFINING THE MUSICAL PLOT

Written between May and June 1785, Mozart C minor Fantasy KV 475 is a perfect illustration example of what Brahms had in mind when proclaiming Mozart as "a fellow modernist."¹ Extremely controversial, generating doubts and questions from the very first measure, musical ideas far ahead of their time make the adventure of exploring this piece with performance purposes one of the most exciting. Instructions for the performance of both the Fantasy and the Sonata it precedes (KV457, also in C minor), disappeared; Einstein believes that "they must have constituted one of the most important documents of Mozart's esthetic practice."²

The very first intriguing aspect we encounter is the non-establishment of any specific tonality, due to the absence not only of a key signature but also of a central tonality which would justify the allusion to C minor in the title³.



Example 1: Mozart C minor Fantasy KV475, no key signature.

The same can be said about any of the numerous other tonalities suggested during the piece: none of them is sufficiently present to the point of being considered the tonic key. Mozart himself had done something similar, but not as daring as in the Fantasy - probably because the genre suggests more liberty of expression -, in his String Quartet in C Major, KV 465; Ligeti⁴ calls our attention to the fact that although the initial *Adagio* begins with a C

¹ Michael P. Steinberg, "Old Brahms a Modernist? In More Ways Than One", *New York Times*, 29 September 1996, p. 31.

² Alfred Einstein, *Mozart, his character and his work*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1979), p.247.

³ This concept can be accessed at: Aldwell, Edward and Carl Schachter. *Harmony and Voice Leading*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1989, p. 4.

⁴ György Ligeti, *Neuf essais sur la Musique*, (Genève : éditions Contrechamps, 2001), p. 27.

played by the cello, the tonality of C Major will only be listened twenty two measures later at the beginning of the *Allegro*. Nevertheless, in both cases, this non definition doesn't eliminate a perfectly sequenced and coherent listening experience, which is conducted by other elements of cohesion perfectly combined.

Through the Fantasy's musical discourse, the confirmation of C minor as the main key is held until the end of the piece, justifying the term "musical plot"; the "mystery" will be solved only at the end, like in his operas. Unity and coherence mingle with ingenious - almost *nonchalant* - fluency of discourse, building expectation, which apparently will never be satisfied; these are the cornerstones of the mystery. The three different approaches of the same work explored in this paper, show how possible sources of misunderstanding - which could lead to incoherent interpretation - turned into the very basis of a set of creative practice strategies.

Overlaps

Besides the tonality issue, the non symmetrical grouping of measures is another aspect which could destabilize Mozart's contemporaries' ears. However, the same overlaps, which imply this non symmetry, not only of melodic lines, as in the beginning of the piece, where we here 4+1 mingled with 1+4 (example 2a), but also harmonic progression, as in the *Piu Allegro* where V-I of C mingles with V-I of F, etc. (example 2b), confirm linear hearing (polyphonic or not) as the best option in terms of parameters. These coincidences of endings and beginnings of phrases and cadences, coherently unify a hand full of changing scenarios, cumulating tension, barely "compensated" with very short moments of relaxation, until the last measures of the piece.

Example 2a : phrasing overlaps

Example 2b : harmonic overlaps

THREE LISTENING PERSPECTIVES

The suggestions for creative practice presented in this paper, applied to explore Mozart's Fantasy are based on the ideas of three 20th century great masters - Werner Genuit, Hans Graf and Sergiu Celibidache - from whom I had the chance to receive coaching. Some

particular aspects were emphasized by each one, aiming to define the direction of the listening process, envisaging performance; different perspectives and approaches keep some points in common making a perfect combination.

Through the optic of the two pianists and the conductor, we are dealing specifically with direction of discourse, and it seems appropriate to establish an analogy between their remarks and Tarasti's⁵, regarding music as some sort of storytelling.

According to the Finish scholar, there are two forms of narration in music:

1 – one that's inherent to musical structure;

2 – one that depends on a program provided by the composer, justifying this type of approach;

Considering the first alternative, he says that there are pieces where narration is naturally implied, which some interpreters are particularly able to bring out.

In Mozart's C minor Fantasy, the richness of the musical discourse emanating from the score makes it easy to build a narrative; scenarios are proposed, ideas overlap one another announcing new themes, supporting what I have chosen to call an ingenious "musical plot".

Timbre diversity

In 1986, when first approaching the piece, I had the opportunity to perform it to Werner Genuit⁶, who immediately suggested that the piece should be "orchestrated"; the variety of timbres implied by the different melodic lines and harmonic supports - the sound material in general - should inspire an analogy with different orchestral instruments. Richard Wagner clearly emphasized how relevant he considered this new element, the timbre, within the musical process "to the point of this very color becoming action."⁷

Example 3a

Example 3b: preparing the solo

Applying this "orchestration strategy" suggested by Genuit, vocal timbers were naturally perceived as well, mainly inspired by auditory memory of Mozart's operas⁸.

⁵ Eero Tarasti, « La musique comme art narratif », in *Sens et signification en musique*, ed. Marta Grabocz (Paris: Hermann Musique, 2007), p.210-230.

⁶ Karlsruhe, Germany, August 1986.

⁷ Cf. Theodor Adorno, *Essay sur Wagner*, (Paris : Gallimard, 1966), p.93. In the original : « de sorte que cette couleur elle-même devenait action », [Translation by the author].

⁸ While studying in Vienna, I had the chance to attend the performance of most of Mozart's operas at the Staatsoper. This experience strongly confirmed the association between Mozart's compositional approach to sound discourse constantly influenced by the opera context. Many performers agree that in order to perform Mozart piano sonatas and concertos, one simply has to listen to his operas. In a recent e-mail exchange, Ursulla Oppens (CUNY) made exactly the same remark. "Research." E-mail to Zelia Chueke, 2009.

Most of the musical scenarios proposed in this piece imply sopranos' entrances, tenors responses, altos e bass duets, accompanied by the orchestra; sometimes what would be an orchestral material, previously determines the character of an upcoming solo entrance. I would like to invite you to listen to the excerpts shown in examples 3a and 3b above, having in mind the timbers suggested and to consider its effect in daily practice, in terms of listening perspective. Of course, the choice of timbers is personal, and in my case, consciously or unconsciously influenced by the orchestras Mozart had at his disposal.

Expectation

Another great master with whom I had the chance to work with, this time for a longer period of time (together with the Sonata KV 457⁹) was Professor Hans Graf¹⁰. In the first lesson, Graf made three notes in my score: two in the introduction, which consisted of a "VI" under measure number ten (Example 4a) and another "VI" under measure number eighteen (Example 4b). The third one, under measure number 178, will be considered later in this text.

These three indications tend to direct the performer's listening process through the "tonal mystery" proposed and it's solving. Although the second indication has already originated an intriguing analysis discussion, the most possible being VI of E flat minor where the C flat is implied by the *b* natural¹¹, these two chords obviously promote expectation, working as a transitory support, as if the discourse had "landed" there just to take a new impulse and fly again. The fact is that the frustrated resolutions are what keep us alert, expecting, till the end of the piece.

Example 4a

Example 4b

Considering that the few resolutions are barely experienced, due to its briefness, and the relaxation they promote is never enough since no main tonality is ever imposed as such, what happens is a constant deviation from the basic dominant- tonic harmony and therefore, we could state that the introduction of this Fantasy is sustained by two subdominant chords : the two VI chords indicated by Hans Graf.

An analogy can be established with Adorno's remarks, regarding Wagner and Brahms¹², and the applicability of this kind of analogy involving composers separated by almost two centuries is explained by the fact that modernity doesn't necessarily involve new

⁹ Published together; Einstein (op.cit, p.247) suggests that "Mozart himself must have felt necessity of providing a basis to the explosive quality of the sonata, and justifying it as a product of a particular spiritual state; accordingly, he preceded it with the Fantasy, K.475."

¹⁰ Vienna, 1986 to 1988.

¹¹ I would like to thank Dr. Poundie Burstein, City University of New York, Graduate Center for his invaluable remarks on this particular subject.

¹² Theodor Adorno, *Essay sur Wagner*, (Paris : Gallimard, 1966).

elements, but, as we can perceive here, it may consist in using traditional ones in a revolutionary way. Modernity is inherent to the composer. According to Adorno, it consists in presenting aspects which could sound obsolete, as novelty: “the obsolete factors become seeds of novelty.”¹³

The non establishment of a tonal center is particularly well illustrated by the *Andantino* section. It is in fact the only section which presents a key signature, indicating B flat Major, the relationship tonic-dominant being evident throughout twenty-eight measures which represent the majority of the section. However, this tonal center is deviated from the last V-I in this tonality, which in spite of happening over the tonic chord and in a perfect cadence, originates a terminal development (example 5a) leading to the C minor German augmented-sixth chord (example 5b) - the same chord we hear in the very first measures of the piece - frustrating once more the establishment of a tonal center felt as such. Notice the suggestions of different timbers, essential to the appropriate coloring of this passage.

Example 5a shows a piano accompaniment in B-flat major. The right hand features a melodic line with various ornaments and a final cadence. The left hand provides a steady bass line. A red 'V I V' is written below the final measures, indicating a tonic-dominant-tonic cadence.

Example 5a

Example 5b shows a terminal development for flute and oboe. The flute part has a melodic line with ornaments, and the oboe part has a more rhythmic accompaniment. A red circle highlights a specific chord in the oboe part labeled 'German 6th'.

Example 5b

Dissonances

What we have considered as terminal development, takes us to the most “dissonant” section of the piece, the *Piu Allegro*. Mozart dissolved all the minor seconds of the seventh chords, articulating them in thirty second notes, and conducting the bass line by means of ascending whole steps. Nevertheless, it can’t be denied that it is exactly the dissonances ascending motion, even «disguised», what builds the crescent anxiety until it begins to relax, not coincidentally, by descending motion.

The beauty of these chords brings us once again to Adorno’s comments about Wagner : « ...the function of these chords is more important than their simple existence. »¹⁴ Emphasizing the fact that the dissonance « emancipates from the obligation of resolution », Adorno quotes Kurth¹⁵ who, not wanting to consider these dissonances as simple «sound effects», emphasized the « pleasure inherent to tension, and even to dissatisfaction: simultaneous sweetness and perplexity ». A good device, in order to fully express the dissonant effect of this passage can be fully enjoying them before actually performing them as written in the score.

Example 6 shows the beginning of the *Piu Allegro* section. The right hand features a series of chords with dissonances highlighted in red. The left hand has a bass line with ascending whole steps. The score is marked with a 13-measure rest and 'etc...'.

Example 6: scheme of the beginning of the *Piu Allegro*, emphasizing dissonances

¹³ Adorno, op. cit. p. 86. « l’élément archaïque devient ferment de nouveauté. » [Translation by the author].

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ernst Kurth, *Romantische Harmonik*, Berlin, 1923, p.297, quoted in: Adorno, op.cit., p.83.

Conducting musical discourse

Chronologically between Genuit's and Graf's coaching, maestro Celibidache's advice were equally oriented to sustaining expectation and harmonic connection with the main purpose of organizing the discourse. Celibidache emphasized the need to make one phrase out of three in the opening of the Fantasy¹⁶.



Example 7: one phrase out of three

It is this very chromatic line, which deviates our attention away from harmonic progression and consequently from some kind of tonal justification, what keep our ears attentive to some key notes belonging to a C minor universe. Celibidache emphasized the importance of the A flat in the bass, where we arrive chromatically (meas. 5) which sustains the accompaniment and the following passage (meas. 5 to 7) - the essence¹⁷ of the phrase - moving to A natural, B flat and B natural (example 8).



Example 8: measures 7 to 10

He naturally established a connection with narrative, avoiding different lines to be confounded. In this sense, he particularly emphasized the total clearance of the pedal at each note in measure n^o3 for instance allowing the perfect contour¹⁸, clarifying the discourse. He even suggested that the A flat pedal (meas. 6 to 7) should be done only with the fifth finger, in order not to “blur” the sustaining note, which happens to be the VI of C minor.

Note that the linear motion was equally present in Hans Graf's annotations, as illustrated in example 2a; he included a little crescendo sign connecting the A flat to the B flat (meas. 1 to 2), indicating the continuation of that note, sounding until the B flat. The indications he made of *una corda* in the appoggiaturas, emphasizes their character of “comments”, outside the main flow, where he indicated *tre corde*.

¹⁶ Live recording's excerpts of Celibidache's Master Class, referring to the particular subjects mentioned in this text, can be accessed through: http://www.zeliachueke.com/gravacoes_in.php

¹⁷ « l'essentiel » (the master class was conducted in French and German, because of the audience).

¹⁸ « C'est mouillé! Ce [n'est] pas clair! »

According to Graf we arrive at the A flat (meas.6) in *piano*: he indicates a decrescendo between the *f* and the *p* at the beginning of measure n°5 (A flat to C).

What happens is that the entrance of the new element – the suggested clarinet solo – sounds as coming naturally from the previous scene, and not as a surprise – this feature confirms measure n° 5 as an overlap. It is the measure which works as the “extension” of the first group of four measures and at the same time the beginning of the next group. In this next group, measure n° 7 moves to measure number 8 by step motion (example 8). Graf indicated a *crescendo* from the last beat of measure number 7 to arrive at the *f* on the first beat of measure number 8, as well as a *decrescendo* from this point until the second beat of this measure. The same happens in the following measures, and the piano which is kept entering measure number 9, brings a *non-challant* character to the unexpected VI chord, as in improvisation, as if the performer had just decided to change the flow of the discourse.

The whole scene moves chromatically, as indicated on example 8; the discourse is interrupted on the *b* natural reached on the right hand by a descending diminished fourth, changing the scenario as we’ve discussed before, with the VI chord. However, the chromatic motion continues, until the G in measure 18 (example 9), which brings more expectation, with the VI chord.

Example 9: measures 15 to 18

Celibidache insists that novelty must be emphasized; he says that reinforcing what was naturally expected “don’t take us anywhere.”¹⁹ So, in the beginning of the *Allegro*, it is the fourth beat which should be accentuated not the first, the procedure being repeated during the next measures.

Example 10 : emphasis on the new element.

Within the same idea, the tension should remain during the following passage, which should not sound as a “relaxation”, keeping the same intention, the same direction.²⁰

¹⁹ « On arrive à nul part ! » cf. http://www.zeliachueke.com/gravacoes_in.php

²⁰ cf. http://www.zeliachueke.com/gravacoes_in.php

Example 11: holding the tension

MYSTERY SOLVED

At the end of the piece, everything becomes clear, when the main theme returns, and we hear the resolution of the augmented-sixth chord into the dominant, followed by the C minor VI and V chords (measures 168 to 169) followed by VII-I in E flat minor (measures 169.2 to 169.3) building a last moment of tension until measure 172 where finally it resolves in the minor tonic chord (measures 172.4 -173.1). Cadence confirmation follows, as if to reassure the listener about the end of the plot, and also, making one last allusion to the initial expectation, we hear the C minor VI chord (V-VI, meas. 178), as if it had found what was missing from the beginning; this « V-VI » was exactly the third indication made by Has Graf in the author's score. The VI chord in numerous tonalities presented until this point are justified as elements of the « plot », or « mystery », solved in these last measures. Yes, the missing tonality was in fact C minor; “atonality” is of course not justified, but it was certainly hinted...Adorno's « hegemony of tonality » remains and Mozart's acquisitions anticipate those of Wagner, transforming musical language « only indirectly, by means of the amplification of the tonal space and not through its abolition »²¹.

Example 12: mystery solved

²¹ Cf. Haimo, Ethan. 1997. “Schoenberg and the Origins of Atonality”. In *Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the transformation of the 20th century*. Ed. Julian Brand e Christopher Hailey, 71-86. Berkeley, LA: Arnold Schoenberg Institute .

The main goal of these illustrations is certainly not to describe the numerous scenes built from grouping, overlaps, and subdominant chords delaying resolution as in a “guided tour”. It is all about performers building in their inner hearing a story to be communicated to the audience, based on all the mystery and innovation of Mozart’s ingenious musical ideas, widely (and why not wildly?) opened to individual imagination. The direction pointed by the combination of three great masters’ ideas is a perfect example of how creative practice – built on musical ideas and thoroughly supported by them - can enrich and bring coherence to performance.

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