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Ulrich Konrad

Mozart's sketches

In a letter to his father, written from Mannheim on 28 February 1778, Mozart reports on his latest compositions and mentions, among other things: 'Yesterday at Wendling's I sketched the aria which I had promised his wife, adding a short recitative.'¹ Dorothea Wendling (1736–1811) was the singer in question (it was she who sang Ilia in *Idomeneo* in 1781), the work intended for her the recitative and aria, 'Basta vincesti . . . Ah, non lasciarmi', K295a. Little attention has been paid hitherto to the significance of Mozart's remark that he 'sketched the aria'. The idea of Mozart *sketching* anything is one which, from the outset, had no place in the traditional picture of the composer and which, even today, plays only the most shadowy role. Conversely, 200 years of Mozart scholarship have done little to explode the myth of Mozart as an artist who 'composed in his head', someone who, without the use of any aids that would facilitate his work, produced his works in the form of imaginary scores which he memorized before committing them to paper or, rather, before mechanically copying them out. Numerous anecdotes seem to confirm the truth of this notion: one thinks, for example, of the story that Mozart wrote out the overture to *Don Giovanni* on the eve of the première in the company of friends and in a state of semi-inebriation, having first played to a handful of acquaintances three different versions of the piece and asked them to choose which one they liked best.

Every historian has discovered to his cost that myths can rarely be controverted by facts and that, not infrequently, he runs the risk of being reproached for destroying an otherwise pleasing picture. Yet the passage quoted here leaves us in no doubt that Mozart sketched the aria in question, which means that he had recourse to certain aids when drafting his compositions. The reader will, of course, object that the passage says something about the particular case in hand but nothing about Mozart's general practice. It is an objection which would be valid if we did not have a wealth of historical material at our disposal which, taken together, must force even the most obdurate sceptic to reconsider the matter, even if it cannot provide the ultimate proof.

There are two kinds of documentary evidence. The first kind allows us an insight into the origins of the myth that Mozart composed in his head and consists of evidence gleaned from the history of Mozart reception and

furnished by two strikingly different types of people, half of whom breathed the spirit of the rationalistic Enlightenment, while the other half reflected Romantic thought: all of them, however, shared the view that Mozart was a natural genius. The most important representative of this school of thought was the critic and editor Friedrich Rochlitz (1769–1842).²

The second group of documents brings us right to the heart of the compositional process, including, as it does, all the working manuscripts, sketches, drafts or fragments—in other words, all the manuscripts which go back to Mozart himself. Admittedly, the sketches which are of greatest interest to us here make up a relatively small part of all those which have survived, but, even ignoring those manuscripts which are known to have been destroyed, there are still some 320 individual sketches and drafts which, according to the latest state of research, are known to have survived from the years between 1768 and 1791. Sketch material exists for 10 per cent of the works listed in Köchel, a figure which does not include works for which sketches must once have existed. In other words, it does not take account of the recitative and aria, K295a, for which there is no trace of any sketches, even though Mozart's letter makes it clear that such sketches once existed.

Space does not allow me to consider the general background of Mozart's way of working; readers wanting a thorough and accurate account of the subject will find one elsewhere.³ I shall restrict myself here to a brief glance at the first group of documents mentioned above in order to suggest how the myth in question came into being. I shall then attempt to characterize Mozart's sketches in a few brief brushstrokes.

No one seems to have been interested in the way Mozart worked, at least while he was still alive. But why should they have been? That a composer was quick and prolific was entirely normal. His contemporaries were not disposed to worry about the practicalities of the compositional process, quite apart from the fact that scarcely any of them would have permitted himself the indiscretion of peering over Mozart's shoulder. Even after Mozart's death there were more important things to think about. When, during the summer months of 1798 and 1799, the Abbé Maximilian Stadler, a Viennese acquaintance of Mozart's, and Georg Nikolaus Nissen,

Constanze's second husband, looked through Mozart's posthumous papers and attempted to put them in some sort of order, they threw away, as a matter of course, whatever seemed in their eyes to be worthless. According to Constanze, a great deal 'was destroyed because it was completely unusable'.⁴

It was around this time, however, that the first sustained attempts were made to enhance Mozart's significance in the public consciousness. We must not forget, after all, that, although Mozart was a well known figure when he died, his eminence as a composer was not beyond dispute. In addition to the praise he received, voices were frequently raised in criticism, complaining that his wealth of ideas was lacking in clarity, describing the orchestration of his operas as too fussy and finding his harmonic writing in general needlessly difficult.⁵ Even Mozart the man was not free from reproach; fault was found with his allegedly loose living and his disorderly domestic circumstances.

Faced with such reservations, Friedrich Rochlitz was one of the first who felt himself called on to come to Mozart's defence. Rochlitz became editor of the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1798 and quickly turned it into the leading German music periodical of its day. The journal espoused the view that music was of no value as an art unless it strengthened man's moral fibre. It had to be morally pure. Hand in hand with this approach went the desire to see the composer as a man of genius. His creative gift was the expression of a superior, otherworldly power—the expression, in short, of divine favour. But the divinely gifted and inspired artist must necessarily also be good in the moral sense. In the case of Mozart, therefore, two types of evidence had to be adduced, first, that he was inconceivably highly gifted and, second, that he was of unquestionable moral integrity. Only the first of these approaches is of interest to us here.

Rochlitz was quick to realize that penetrating analyses were unlikely to convince the public at large of the high quality of Mozart's works and hence of his claims to be called a genius; but that public was more likely to believe miraculous reports. After all, nothing impresses people more than news of things which they can grasp only with difficulty, even after having had the matter explained to them. Even today the way in which a composer writes down his music and imagines how it will sound remains a mystery to many laymen.

What are we to make of a man like Mozart, who ostensibly composed a great violin sonata within the space of an hour, writing out only the violin part and

playing the keyboard accompaniment from memory at the concert, without ever having heard the piece before? This was the kind of anecdote with which Rochlitz regaled his audience. He did not even need to tell deliberate lies, since it was sufficient to offer a skilful arrangement of fiction and truth. Mozart himself offers only a brief account of the genesis of the Violin Sonata in B flat major, K454, in a letter to his father of 24 April 1784.⁶ If, however, we assemble all the authenticated facts and examine Mozart's autograph in detail, it is clear that he could have spent at least seven days, if not longer, working on the piece, and that he did indeed do so. His own keyboard part is sketched out, in varying degrees of completeness, in 93 of the first movement's 159 bars, in 56 of the second movement's 116 bars and in 111 of the third movement's 269 bars.⁷ That what he had written was also tried out on the instrument may be regarded as certain, since we know from two of Mozart's letters that he could not, or would not, compose without a keyboard to hand. But the public at large knew none of this.

Rochlitz's collections of anecdotes, together with his articles on Mozart and, not least, his palpable forgery of the oft-quoted 'Letter from Mozart to Baron von . . .', proved immensely popular and were read all over Europe.⁸ Within a few years the somewhat pale and insipid picture of Mozart had been turned into one of well defined outlines and garish colours. His alleged compositional practice became a striking and colourful cliché. By 1820 at the latest it was generally held that Mozart always composed in his head, that he was able to jot down whatever works he liked, whenever he liked, wherever he happened to be, independently of moods and feelings, and that he was capable of doing all this at incredible speed. Mozart came to be seen as the outstanding example of a particular type of composer whose characteristic profile emerged with all the greater clarity in that he was joined, at about this time, by a stylized antitype in the form of the 'titanic' Beethoven, a composer who had to wrest every note from his genius by dint of desperate effort—in other words, with the help of sketches and only after experimenting at length and reflecting critically on what he had written.

Since the 19th century the names of Mozart and Beethoven have represented two opposing types of creative behaviour. And since it was now impossible to imagine Beethoven without his sketches, it seemed equally absurd to burden Mozart with any sketches at all. The few examples of Mozart's working method which came to light were interpreted (if at all) as exceptions which confirmed the general rule.

We now have every reason to draw a careful distinction between such polar opposites and, in the case of Mozart, to qualify the picture quite decisively. The surviving sketches in his own hand—and they represent only a fraction of what must once have existed—are more than negligible signs of an occasional desire to make his task a little easier. From his earliest compositions onwards, the use of sketches was a customary part of Mozart's working method, but we need to be clear on certain basic principles in order to understand the sort of procedure involved.

Mozart noted down his sketches almost exclusively on separate sheets of paper, using ink. He had no use for 'sketchbooks' and almost never sketched in pencil. This means, first, that he was probably not thinking in advance of systematically collating his sketch material and, second, that he generally produced his sketches indoors, at a desk, rather than out of doors. (In this he differed from Beethoven, whose pencil sketches were often written down on walks.) The reliable report that Mozart also used a wax tablet or slate when producing his sketches is one we should do well to bear in mind, for, even if it does not extend our knowledge of the sketches themselves, it reminds us that sketches could be erased after they had been written down. If Mozart worked in this way, it means that he had little sense of any need to keep a sheet of paper once it was filled with sketches. No doubt he would simply throw it away after use.

An unmistakable sign that a Mozart autograph is a sketch is the form of the handwriting. Mozart had two different types of handwriting—his normal handwriting, which he used for everything from rough jottings to carefully prepared fair copies, and a *Skizzenschrift*, which he developed specifically for his musical sketches, and which was never intended to be read by others. Everything that Mozart noted down in his *Skizzenschrift* served merely as private information. Our first task today is to transcribe his sketches in a standard format—in other words, to establish their musical meaning.

We must assume, as a matter of principle, that sketches make musical sense or at least that they form part of a meaningful musical context. Of course, this context may not be immediately or totally clear to the uninitiated reader: we are often at a loss to explain odd scraps of music, fragments of what are evidently much longer passages, mere hints at what is intended, apparently meaningless passages which must, however, have made sense in conjunction with the ideas in Mozart's head. We shall make progress here only if we can

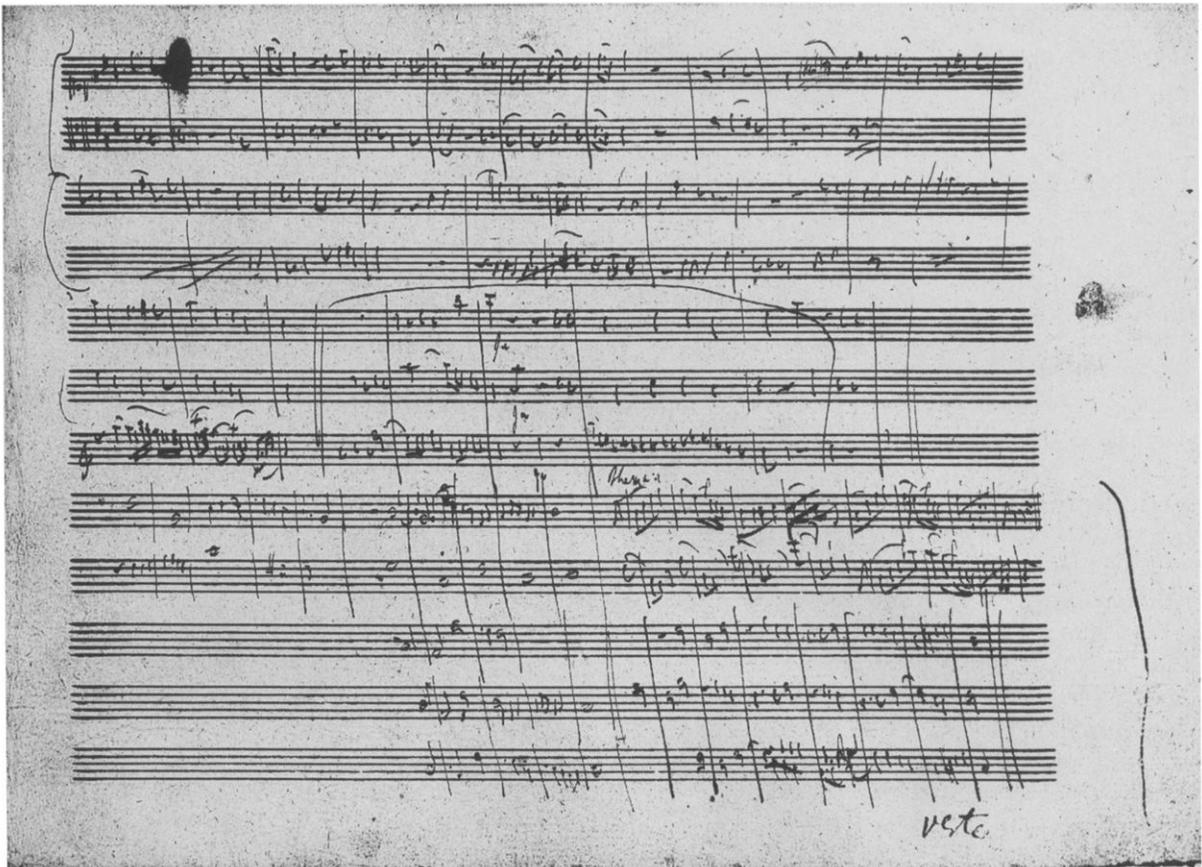
describe the sketches in all their variety and if, having arranged them according to certain common criteria, we can establish a system behind them. This can, indeed, be done.

It is possible to do justice to the multiplicity of Mozart's sketches by recourse to a simple pair of concepts, the continuity draft (*Verlaufsskizze*) and the partial sketch (*Ausschnittsskizze*). The chief function of the continuity draft is to record the overall structure of a work, a section of a work or a constitutive structural component such as the vocal line of an aria. It may consist of only a single vocal or instrumental line (this type predominates with Mozart) or of more than one; as a rule, the number of voices is fewer than in the finished composition. The aim of the partial sketch is to solve the problems posed by a relatively short excerpt of musically striking structure (striking, that is, in terms of harmony, style and so on) by concentrating on the compositional task in hand. Such sketches tend to comprise more than one instrumental or vocal line, single lines being rare. In offering a systematic account of these different types of sketches we need to distinguish between vocal and instrumental works and, within each subgroup, between the number of parts involved. In addition to these main types, mention should also be made of independent contrapuntal sketches, study sketches and canon sketches.

It would, of course, be interesting to say something about the musical significance and status of the different types of sketches in Mozart's creative process, but space does not allow me to do so here. Instead, three examples may serve to illustrate a number of characteristic features of Mozart's sketches.

Illus.1 shows the verso of a folio preserved in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin. It dates from c.1785–6 and contains a total of 11 entries. It has so far proved impossible to ascribe even one of these entries to a known work and it is this, as much as anything else, which makes this folio so exceptional. Seven independent sketches are recorded on the verso of the folio; I shall consider these in turn.

The first is a continuity draft, on two staves, for a soprano and tenor duet in A major (systems 1–2 + 3–4 + 5a–6a, transcribed as ex.1). Presumably Mozart had a text in front of him, on the basis of which he wrote out the melodic lines of the two voice parts, jotting them down, with extreme economy of means, in his shorthand manner and making a note of whatever occurred to him (or, rather, including only those of his ideas which needed to be written down, so that meaningful



Ex.1 Transcription of illus.1, systems 1-6



Ex.2 Transcription of illus.1, systems 5-7

Ex.3 Transcription of illus.1, system 7

Ex.4 Transcription of illus.1, systems 8-9

information was conveyed by them). It is easy to imagine that, in sketching out this duet, Mozart would also have been thinking of certain dynamic effects or the underlying harmonies of the bass line. But neither these nor other details were given written form. It is unclear what compositional plan he may have been following, although we may not be entirely wide of the mark in suggesting that these are unrealized sketches for a duet section from *Der Schauspieldirektor*.

This suggestion receives some support from the partial sketch in G, which, noted down on three staves immediately after the duet, is evidently for a trio with German words (systems 5b-7b, transcribed as ex.2). There is no doubt that we are in the middle of an ensemble (possibly operatic) which is moving towards its climax. The voices enter imitatively, each of them culminating in the third bar of their respective phrases on the common word 'Ja', which falls, echo-like, on the first, second and third beat of each individual line. The two upper voices continue singing in 3rds, with a short crotchet-based phrase, evidently to the same text, while the bass line provides a semiquaver parlando accompaniment. Bar 5 looks as though it will launch into a repeat of the two preceding bars, but the sketch breaks off at this point. Mozart includes neither clefs nor key signature nor time signature, since he clearly knows the

context in which the excerpt will appear. What we see before us here is presumably an 'aside', which would be worked into the compositional context when the piece as a whole was written down. Is it perhaps an argument between Buff, Madame Herz and Mademoiselle Silberklang which was not taken over into the final version of *Der Schauspieldirektor*?

The two sketches which follow offer no clue to their significance. The first is a single melodic line in E \flat for soprano instrument (system 7a, transcribed as ex.3), the second an instrumental theme in B \flat major (systems 8c-9c, transcribed as ex.4). The 'theme', intended, no doubt, for a set of variations or a rondo, is of some interest in that the corrections show that Mozart did not jot down a 'definitive' idea, but that he continued to work on it after he had written it down.

The rest of the page contains a series of contrapuntal sketches showing the composer working out the problems involved in a cantus firmus or canon. From a musical point of view they are not particularly enlightening, but they provide evidence of the extent to which Mozart worked on relatively abstract compositional problems. To what extent such contrapuntal exercises influenced the development of Mozart's style during his years in Vienna is a question which demands a study in itself. At all events, exercises such as these are far from uncom-



Ex.5 Transcription of illus.2, system 3



mon in Mozart's sketches.

We do not know how long this folio was in use on Mozart's desk, whether it was a matter of only a few hours or several days. Clearly it was used only for jotting down random thoughts, which were recorded spontaneously, just as they occurred to Mozart. If this 'random folio' was preserved, it was presumably because it contained sketches which had not been put to direct use and which could be taken up again later. On the other hand, Mozart was not the sort of composer to make a habit of

stocking up with themes in advance and he had equally little time for leftovers.

The sketch reproduced in illus.2 is a single-sided folio which represents a different type of working method. It contains sketches for a single composition only. The Italian words attesting to its authenticity were added by the composer's son, Franz Xaver Wolfgang (1791-1844), and by the Viennese collector Aloys Fuchs (1799-1853). The manuscript is now in the Biblioteca Estense in Modena. It shows three one-part continuity drafts for Act 3 of

Le nozze di Figaro (1786).

Systems 1 and 2 contain a sketch for the Andante from the Countess's aria, 'Dove sono i bei momenti' (no.20), which is still some distance away from the final version. It runs to only 20 bars, whereas this section is 51 bars long in the finished aria.

The entry on system 3 is transcribed in ex.5. This sketch, which, somewhat surprisingly, is not reproduced with the other sketches in NMA, contains the first period (bars 52-64) of the Allegro from the Countess's aria ('Ah! se almen la mia costanza'). Evidently Mozart needed only this brief indication to develop it into a 59-bar period in the score.

We can also see here a good example of the relationship between a sketch and the final version of an individual passage or excerpt. Writers on Mozart are fond of claiming that he often came very close to the final version in his sketches. In theory this is true. But it is worth looking at the problem from the opposite standpoint and suggesting that, although Mozart comes close to the final version, as a general rule he never actually reaches it. This approach makes it clear that a further thought process took place between the sketch and its realization and that, in his sketches, the composer reached an initial plateau which, often already high, none the less generally required him to take an extra, decisive step which would allow him to complete the piece. Sometimes this step came at a relatively late stage. From the beginning of the Allegro in the autograph score (transcribed in ex.6)⁹ we

can see that Mozart originally followed his sketch without thinking; it was only when he corrected it that he found a solution which ultimately satisfied him.

Systems 4-9, finally, contain an extended sketch for the Count's aria, 'Vedrò, mentr'io sospiro' (no.18). Typically, Mozart has sketched the essential melodic line. Occasional instrumental interjections are suggested by pauses, while the instrumental introduction is indicated, exceptionally, by the first violin part. To a greater or lesser extent, all of Mozart's surviving aria sketches resemble this one.

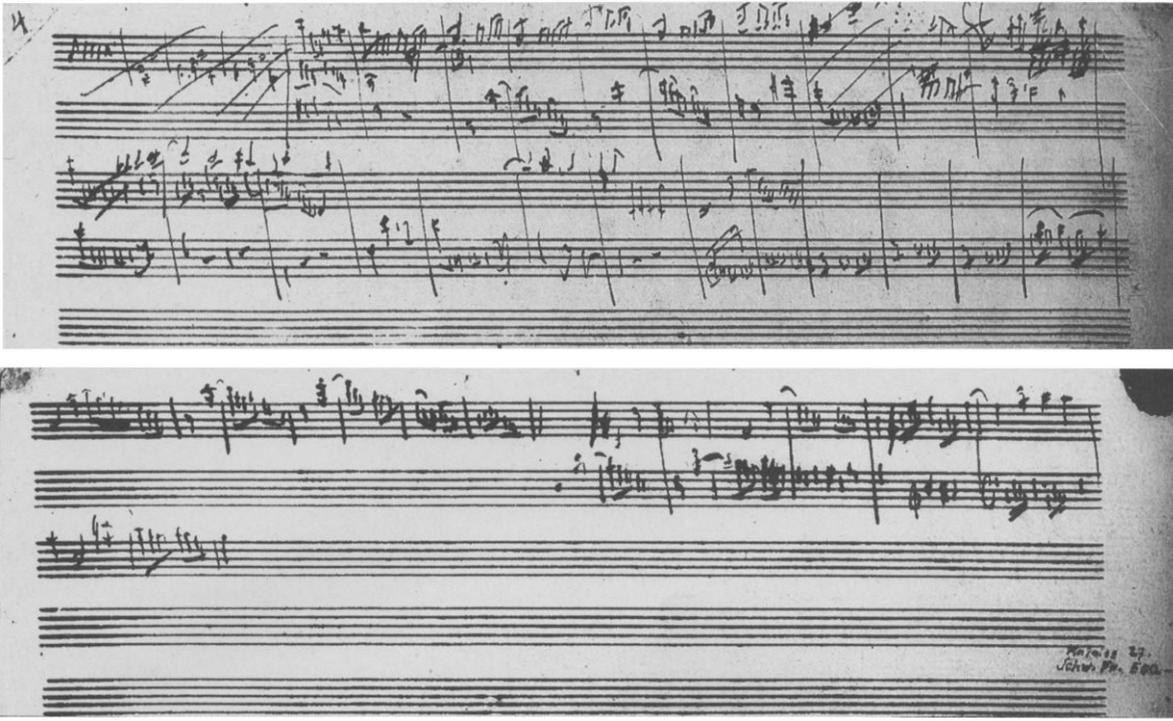
Illus.3 shows a page currently owned by the International Mozarteum Foundation, Salzburg. Both sides of this strip of paper, barely 8 cm high, are filled with partial sketches of the development section of the first movement of the 'Prague' Symphony in D, K504 (1786). These sketches, transcribed in ex.7, are of particular interest in that they allow us to chart the progress of a single passage.

The development section of the 'Prague' Symphony consists chiefly of imitatively and contrapuntally interwoven fragments of motivic material first heard in the exposition.¹⁰ The first section runs from bar 143 to 155 and treats the two-bar conclusion of the period from the main theme (bars 43-4) which, until now, has been heard only once. Mozart sketches out this passage (verso, transcribed as ex.7b) and has already added a planned transition to the second section; in doing so he takes up a semiquaver motif familiar from the developmental episode following the exposition of the first

Ex.6 *Le nozze di Figaro*, Act 3: from the aria, 'Ah! se almen la mia costanza'. Transcription from the autograph of the passage corresponding to the sketch in ex.5.

The image shows a musical score for Ex.6, transcribed from the autograph. It consists of three systems of music. The first system is for the soprano part, labeled [La Contessa], with lyrics: "ah se almen la mia co - stan - za nel lan - gui - re a - man - do ognor, mi por - tas - se un - a spe -". The second system is for the bass part, labeled [Bassi], with lyrics: "ran - za di can - giar l'in - gra - to ~~cor~~ l'in - gra = = to cor". Above the second system, there is a bracketed note "[X= erasures]" pointing to several 'X' marks on the bass staff. The third system shows a corrected version of the bass part with lyrics: "cor di can - giar l'in - gra = to cor". The score is in 3/4 time and features various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

3 Sketchleaf for the Symphony in D ('Prague'), K504 (top recto; bottom verso). Salzburg, Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum



Ex.7 Transcription of illus.3

(a)



(b)

theme (bar 55ff.). But Mozart seems to have had second thoughts about this use of earlier material. At all events, the second page (recto, transcribed as ex.7a) begins at the very point at which the previously sketched transition had started (bar 13 of the first sketch = bar 1 of the second sketch = bar 155 of the final version). This new sketch is preceded by four bars from the main theme in the dominant which have been crossed out; it is not clear whether Mozart considered continuing the development section with a quotation from the main theme or whether these bars had already been written down for a different purpose.

The second sketch extends from bar 155 to around bar 172 and it, too, is concerned with reworking a particle from the main theme (compare bar 41). This brief phrase is linked together with the two-bar motif from

the first section. Only in the eighth bar of the sketch does Mozart take up the semiquaver motif from the previously planned transition so that, from bar 162 onwards, the development section draws on a total of three different motifs.

The final section of the development, bars 172–89, is familiar only from the definitive score. It was presumably not sketched out in advance, since Mozart repeats large sections of part of the exposition (bars 55–71). The compositional challenge facing him here had been solved some time previously. Mozart knew the formal goal towards which he was working, so that there was no need for any further sketches. (In composing the section from the exposition he may very well have had recourse to a sketch.)

We may well be astonished to discover to what extent

Mozart's method of composing combined a high degree of conscious skill with an equally assured instinctiveness of approach, both of which qualities express a consummate musical intelligence. In no way does it detract from Mozart's genius to suggest that, notwithstanding the popular myth, he must have worked hard in order to achieve his artistic ends. Not every work he wrote was, like his Haydn Quartets, 'il frutto di una lunga, e laboriosa fatica'; many of them may have been tossed off with ease. But, in either case, Mozart's sketches are an integral part of his compositional method. Their existence should be a permanent part of our picture of the composer, a picture in which, 200 years after Mozart's death, historical truth is finally being granted precedence over myth.

Dr Ulrich Konrad is Professor at the University of Göttingen. He is the author of Otto Nicolai (1986), Mozarts Schaffensweise: Studien zu den Werkautographen, Skizzen und Entwürfen (1992) and (with M. Staehelin) Die Bibliothek W. A. Mozarts (1991). His edition of Mozart's sketches will be published in the NMA.

¹Mozart: *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, ed. W. A. Bauer and O. E. Deutsch [hereafter *Briefe*] (Kassel, 1962-75), ii, p.305; Eng. trans. from *The Letters of Mozart and his Family*, ed. E. Anderson (London, 3/1985), p.497

²H. Ehinger, *Friedrich Rochlitz als Musikschriftsteller* (Leipzig, 1929/R1976). See also M. Solomon, 'On Beethoven's Creative Process: A Two-Part Invention', *ML* (1980), lxi, pp.272-83.

³U. Konrad, *Mozarts Schaffensweise: Studien zu den Werkautographen, Skizzen und Entwürfen* (1992)

⁴Letter to Breitkopf & Härtel, 1 March 1800: *Briefe*, iv, p.324, no.1288

⁵W. P. Robinson, *Conceptions of Mozart in German Criticism and Biography, 1791-1828: Changing Images of a Musical Genius* (PhD diss., Yale U., 1974)

⁶*Briefe*, iii, p.311, no.786. Mozart had already entered the Sonata in his *Verzeichnüss* on 21 April 1784: see *Briefe*, iii, p.310, no.784.

⁷The autograph manuscript is preserved in the Stiftelsen Musikulturens Främjande in Stockholm; I examined the score in May 1989. See the commentary by E. Melkus in his facsimile edition of the sonata (Stockholm, 1982).

⁸'Verbürgte Anekdoten aus Wolfgang Gottlieb Mozarts Leben', *AmZ*, i (1798-9); 'Einige Anekdoten aus Mozarts Leben', *AmZ*, i (1798-9); 'Raphael und Mozart', *AmZ*, ii (1799-1800), cols.641-51; 'Ein guter Rath Mozarts', *AmZ*, xxii (1820), cols.297-307; 'Schreiben Mozarts an den Baron von . . .', *AmZ*, xvii (1815), cols.561-6; English versions of the last two articles in *The Harmonicon*, iii (1825), pp.152-4, 198-200.

⁹Biblioteka Jagiellońska, Kraców; I examined the score in July 1989.

¹⁰It would help the reader's understanding of what follows if he or she were to consult either a pocket score (Eulenburg no.446) or the NMA edition (IV/11/8).



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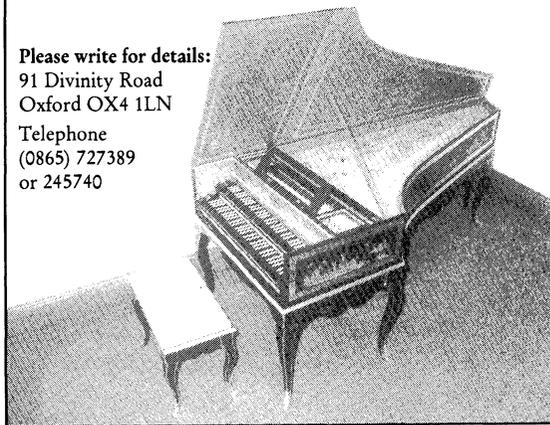
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