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A Study of Performance Practices Pertaining to W.A. Mozart's Flute Concerto in D Major, K.314

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Abstract

Performers oftentimes learn music without taking the time to learn about the work historically. In many cases this kind of research into the performance practices of the time can be key to successfully playing a piece of music in the way it was intended by the composer. Although there are many different concepts that can be considered when studying a piece of music, This manuscript contains focused research on the instrument the piece was written for, the articulation styles used, the type of tone produced and expected, the approach concerning ornamentation and embellishment, and the application and writing of cadenzas. It is focused on one specific work, W.A. Mozart's Flute Concerto in D Major, K.314, and approaches how a musician should take these concepts in mind when learning this particular piece.

Modern performers choosing to play a piece written in a different time period must take the time to consider the performance practices of that day and age. Although there are many factors to consider in a piece such as Mozart's Flute Concerto in D Major, K.314, the most crucial would include the instrument for which this piece was written, the articulation styles common to Mozart's time, the type of tone that was produced and expected, the approach of ornamentation and embellishment, and the manner in which cadenzas were written and used. As this is a standard piece in any modern flute player's repertoire, it is vital to take time to consider these performance practice issues.

Mozart's Flute Concerto in D Major, K.314 was composed early in 1778 while Mozart was in Mannheim. The premiere flutist in Mannheim, Johann Baptist Wendling, introduced Mozart to a wealthy Dutchman. This man (whose name is still unknown) was an amateur flutist and due to his wealth commissioned Mozart to write three concertos for the flute, as well as a set of quartets for flute and strings. Because Mozart was not fond of this instrument, he did not complete all the works, only the two concertos. The first concerto in G Major he composed was an original composition of his; this concerto in D Major was adapted from one of his own oboe concertos, originally written for Italian oboist Giuseppe Ferlendis (Freed, 2012).

At Mozart's time, the flute was a very different instrument from the instrument we play today. The Baroque flute was still employed during the eighteenth century, although several improvements had been made upon it by that time. Due to the expressiveness of the new style of music in the Baroque period (primarily the increased use of prominent solo lines), instruments were required to have greater flexibility in ranges and dynamics in order to better express human emotions. (Toft, 1979). Jacques Hotteterre le Romain constructed the first one-keyed flute with a D# key, the first real standardized flute. The instrument he built was constructed on a D major scale, meaning that D was the fundamental note. He also changed the construction of the instrument from a cylindrical bore to a combination cylindrical-conical bore, and made the finger holes smaller than they were before (see Figures 1 and 2). This flute was typically made of hardwood (usually boxwood or cocuswood) or sometimes ebony (Toft, 1979), which had a very different sound from the metal flute used today; it was typically a much more mellow sound as compared to the shrill sounds the modern metal flute is capable of producing.



Fig. 1

Three different flute bore types: the first is a Renaissance-style flute with a cylindrical bore, the second is a Baroque-style flute with a cylindrical-conical bore, and the third is a modern Boehm flute with a cylindrical headjoint and conical body. The middle figure is a simplified view an instrument of Mozart's time.

**Fig. 2**

A Hotettere Baroque flute

In the sound of the Baroque flute there are also different fundamentals/overtones (a combination of tones that when heard together sound a certain pitch and compromise a complex musical tone (“Definition of Overtone”, 2012)) present aurally than in that of the modern flute; therefore the sound of the instrument differs from register to register—that is, when it’s playing lower, higher, or notes in the middle range of the instrument (Shreffler, 1983). The Baroque flute adds lower partials as it ascends, resulting in a richer rounder tone, whereas the modern flute does the exact opposite, subtracting lower partials as it ascends and becoming higher and more piercing (see Example 1) (Shreffler, 1983). It is important to realize that when Mozart wrote in different registers throughout this concerto, he wrote them knowing that they would produce different effects from those produced on modern instruments.



Example 1 Mozart uses two different registers for two different purposes; the lower/middle register brings in the first statement of the flute, and the higher note, the D, becomes part of the accompaniment. On a modern instrument, the D is a bright and full note, whereas on the flute of the time it would have blended very well with the orchestra due to a difference in tone color, indicating that Mozart had the register in mind when he picked this particular range.

Another factor affecting the sound of the Baroque flute was even the player him- or herself. According to Johann Joachim Quantz, the foremost flutist of his day, “it will be found that each [player] produces a distinctive and different tone quality. This quality does not depend upon the instrument, but upon him who plays it” (Quantz, 1966, p. 51). Although these same differences in tone are not achieved to the same extent today on a modern flute, Mozart intended for each player to put a stamp of originality on the music itself.

Typically, the flute had a cork plug at one end that could be pushed in and pulled out to change the intonation, moving the pitch of the instrument up or down a minute amount. It was even advised that the player should move this cork based on the sort of movement of piece that he/she would be performing (Toft, 1979). Flutes with interchangeable bodies (or *corps de rechange*) were also developed to enable the instrument to play with different pitch centers (Yonce, 2005). Because of this elaborate system of intonation, the instrument was often very out of tune. Although good intonation was desirable, the lack of it did have its advantageous side; it

provided different tone colors from one key to the next and even from one note to the next. The modern flute is much more homogenous throughout, with all keys and notes producing about the same tone color. Certain key centers were better than others, and G major and D major were typically the keys with the best intonation on the eighteenth century flute (Yonce, 2005).

Because this concerto was written in one of the “good” keys, it was considered very idiomatic for the instrument of the time. Arthur Morgan states that Mozart “knew the types of figures that sounded best for it [the flute]; he wrote within the range where it sounded best; and when he wanted the flute to sound out, the other instruments did not get it its way” (Morgan, 1991, p. 15). Still, the instrument of Mozart’s time was by no means easy to play, and was in fact much more difficult than the instrument we use today. Playing the flute required the use of cross fingerings (fingerings that are awkward or out of order to natural finger movement), air stream angling (directing the air very precisely in order to produce the proper pitch on the instrument), and severe embouchure adjustment (a large amount of movement in the face muscles) in order to play in tune (Morgan, 1991). The standard Boehm key-system flute used today has been designed to be much easier for the musician to play, and so we do not have many of the difficulties characteristic of Classical-period flutes.

Articulation was also approached in a different manner in Mozart’s time. Players were expected to apply different and “tasteful” articulation and tonguing patterns according to whatever they were playing. Double tonguing, an advanced technique requiring real agility and control where the player alternates the position of the tongue in the mouth in order to enable faster tonguing as opposed to continually placing the tongue in the same spot in the mouth, was a very controversial subject in this era; many flutists rejected the use of double tonguing altogether (Brown and Sadie, 1989). This is important to keep in mind as flutists rely on double tonguing very heavily today; perhaps, though, when applying this information to the faster sixteenth-note passages of the concerto a player may want to consider using single tonguing in order to get a tonguing style more similar to the one that Mozart intended (see Example 2).



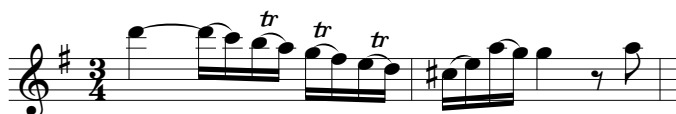
Example 2 Here there are lots of articulated notes present; although this would take some practice to single tongue properly a modern flutist may consider using it in order to get a more accurate representation of what Mozart would have intended.

The subject of articulation was in general rather ambiguous, as sometimes it was indicated by the composer (through the use of articulation marks and rests), but oftentimes it was left to the performer’s discretion, which would be influenced by their own prior experience and knowledge (Brown, 1999).

The approach to tone in Mozart’s time had a lot to do with standard singing practices and pedagogy of the eighteenth century. The *Bel canto* (in Italian “beautiful singing”) style of singing used by vocalists had a strong influence on the way musicians played wind instruments.

Instrumentalists were taught to use singers as models, and were even urged to adopt the singers' breathing technique. At the time, the focus was on intensity of sound rather than volume, and so the air was to come from the chest area more than the diaphragm. Because of this gentler use of the air, the tone produced by wind players was typically more light and relaxed (Vester, 1999). Due to the development of louder and larger ensembles and the need for more projection, twentieth-century musical style and instrumental design have favored volume rather than intensity, but this was not necessarily what Mozart intended. In most cases, a lighter style is far more appropriate in this concerto, especially in the faster passages. Again, as a result of vocal influence, instrumentalists desired to have an evenness of tone, in all keys and from one note to another, with a bright singing quality. Although this wasn't really possible on the instrument, it is important to note that the instrumentalists worked for this concept of sound. This is a principle that flutists try to employ today, and is especially important when approaching Mozart.

The use of ornamentation as an expressive tool was essential to music of Mozart's time. Modifications to the rhythm of the work through ornamentation and embellishment, such as arpeggiations, turns, trills, and appoggiaturas, were considered essential to the realization of the music. Brown (1999) states that "without [these ornamentations] the music would be lacking in communicative power" (p. 416). It was expected that composers would provide the performers with a sort of outline for how the piece was to sound, and then the players would be free to display their own abilities in whichever manner suited their playing best. Although ornaments were for the most part written in, it was expected that performers would substitute another type of ornament when desirable (Brown, 1999). Mozart himself used a variety of ornaments sparingly, but often he placed a trill simply to indicate that an ornament was required in that spot (see Example 3) (Vester, 1999).

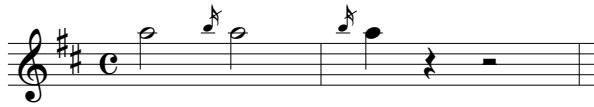


Example 3 In this excerpt of the second movement, Mozart has indicated a few trills, but it is possible for a player to substitute other ornaments they may find suitable.

With this in mind, a player must approach the ornamentation in this piece knowing that he/she has the power to make interpretive decisions; different performances of the piece would provide different results entirely.

Ornamentation also varied depending on the use of the work written. Works written for amateurs or students typically had embellishments and ornaments indicated, as these players were not expected to have mastered the arts of improvisation and ornamentation. However, works written for virtuoso players or for the composer's own use often did not have ornamentation indicated as they were to be improvised on each performance (Brown and Sadie, 1989). In addition, the style of the piece was an important factor in how ornamentation was approached. Pieces in which the primary theme was stated a second time often required ornamentation on the repeat. Typically, slow movements required more ornaments than faster movements (Brown & Sadie, 1989).

Appoggiaturas—a single neighbor-note above or below the melodic pitch—play an important part in creating emotion in Mozart’s music. How to approach the appoggiaturas was a highly debated subject then, and is even more so today. Traditionally the symbol is placed on the dissonance, and the regular note on the consonance, although this is not always consistent (Neumann, 1986). In Mozart’s music they are typically notated as grace notes, but this leaves it up to interpretation how long these appoggiaturas should be (see Example 4) (Vester, 1999).



Example 4 The two A’s have an appoggiatura marked, but the length of these need to be decided by the performer as it has not been indicated by the composer.

Specifically the use of the so-called *galant* figure (an appoggiatura grace note tied to an eighth with then two sixteenths) has been debated greatly as to its rhythmic values. C.P.E. Bach, for example, thought that the appoggiatura should be a thirty-second-note and then the first note after should be the value of a dotted sixteenth-note, creating a slightly uneven rhythm. Quantz wanted the appoggiatura to come before the beat. The length of the appoggiatura seems to largely depend on context (Vester, 1999). For example, based on the harmony or the accompaniment going on below, the length of the appoggiatura can vary greatly (Wion, 2002).

In relation to trills, there was much disagreement as to whether one should start the trill with the main note or the note above (Neumann, 1986). Frederick Neumann, one of the greatest scholars of seventeenth and eighteenth century ornamentation, advises that the player should leave out the trill or ornament and then decide whether or not it would be a good addition to the melody; if so, then the indicated trill is probably the right choice in this particular location. However, when Mozart intended a specific appoggiatura trill, a trill that creates tension by accenting the note above therefore creating dissonance, he would usually indicate clearly that this is what he desired (Neumann, 1986).

When approaching the practice of playing a cadenza, a longer and sometimes improvised passage, in a classical (specifically Mozart) concerto, it is important to look at what was considered appropriate performance practice in the eighteenth century. In fact it was not universal practice to include cadenzas in instrumental concertos (Brown & Sadie, 1989). However, when a cadenza was employed, it was thought of as less of a virtuosic display and rather more of a decorated cadence (as the name “cadenza” implies) (Brown & Sadie, 1989). Quantz stated that the purpose of a cadenza is to “surprise the listener unexpectedly once more at the end of the piece, and to leave behind a special impression in his heart” (Vester, 1999, p. 157). He also believed that cadenzas should “stem from the principal sentiment of the piece, and include a short repetition or imitation of the most pleasing phrases contained in it” (Vester, 1999, p. 158). It seemed to be the general consensus that players should typically limit the cadenza so that it could be played in one breath (Vester, 1999). However the exact way to play a cadenza seems to have been a controversial issue throughout history, as people have abused the freedom that it allows for.

When approaching writing a cadenza in the twenty-first century, it is important to keep the range, possibilities, and traditions of the eighteenth century in mind (Vester, 1999). Although many times it is desirable to display the best aspects of playing, it is important to remember that the instrument itself was very limited, and what was considered virtuosic then would not be considered so today.

In general, when approaching Mozart's Flute Concerto in D Major, K.314, considering the performance practices of the eighteenth centuries and Mozart's time can give us a very different view of what he composed than what we would have originally guessed. Although performance is a very subjective art, taking into account this information is useful in deciding the best way to play a piece. Applying this information on the instrument Mozart wrote for, the articulation styles commonly used, the type of tone that was produced and expected, the approach of ornamentation and embellishment, and the manner in which cadenzas were written and used can add a whole new level of individuality and musicality to a performance.

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