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Neal Peres Da Costa: Some Thoughts on Style and Notation

How did Mozart expect his piano concertos to sound? How can historical performance research and experimentation today shed light on this question? Until recently, reimagining how music of the past sounded was achieved by re-enacting (in a literal manner) fragmentary historical written information. But today the field has opened up through engagement with early sound recordings of musicians trained in the 19th century, a period in which expressive performances utilised practices that had evolved in a continuum of practice dating back several centuries (in some respects). These recordings demonstrate the effect of music performance before the text-literal standards that took over during the first half of the 20th century. The recordings are often shocking by modern standards for the freedoms and artistry that they reveal!

Carl Reinecke (born 1824) is one of the oldest generation of 19th-century musicians to make [piano-roll] recordings. He was highly respected by many others including Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847) and Robert Schumann (1810–1856); Franz Liszt (1811–1886) even admired his “beautiful, soft, legato, singing touch.” Throughout his career Reinecke strove to “perpetuate the example of the Classical composers” and to be a “representative and guardian of tradition.”

By the end of the 19th century, Reinecke was considered to be one of the most important authorities on Mozart performance, and was considered the ‘keeper’ of traditions in terms of Mozart performance that were fast being forgotten. There were high hopes that his complete Mozart Piano Sonata roll project for the Aeolian company would help preserve for the future “the style of the famous Leipzig Mozart-Player.” This statement alludes to a particular style of playing that included significant use of arpeggiation, as we know from Reinecke’s roll performances. Significantly, in his memoirs the violinist Carl Flesch (1873–1944) noted a “Leipzig” manner which he found irritating in the pianism of Julius Röntgen (1855–1932) who had studied with Reinecke. For Flesch, this was characterised by “arpeggio execution of chords and the delaying of thematic notes in the right hand.” While Flesch did not appreciate this expressive style, the positive appraisals of Reinecke’s piano playing, particularly in relation to Mozart, are noteworthy. In 1894, the British music scholar and critic John Alexander Fuller Maitland (1856–1936) opined:

> “He [Reinecke] is not merely an admirably sympathetic accompanist, but a most highly accomplished pianist of the older school – a school unaffected by the pyrotechnics of a generation that is now in its turn passing away.”

An article about Reinecke in the 11th edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1910/11) explains that Reinecke’s playing “belonged to a school now almost extinct. Grace and neatness were its characteristics, and at one time Reinecke was probably unrivalled as a Mozart player and an accompanist.”

It is significant that both appraisals equate Reinecke’s style with a school of the past. Presumably his playing preserved remnants of practices familiar to earlier musicians, perhaps even to Mozart. And during his lifetime he does not seem to have received any criticism for his highly-arpeggiated style or his rhythmic or tempo freedoms. Such practices, undoubtedly stemming from traditions dating back to the late eighteenth century or earlier, were considered indispensable in artistic piano playing throughout the nineteenth century, and positively promoted in writing. To provide some context for this claim, I will cite two examples from the rich evidence of nineteenth-century arpeggiation practices.

Let us consider first the little-known edition of Mozart's piano sonatas edited by Cipriani Potter (1792–1871), published in London in circa 1857. Potter studied counterpoint for a time with Thomas Attwood (1765–1838), who had been one of W. A. Mozart's favourite students. From 1805 to 1810, Potter studied the piano with Joseph Wölfl (1773–1812), himself a former student in Salzburg of Leopold Mozart and Michael Haydn. It is thought that Wölfl had lessons with W. A. Mozart in Vienna in around 1790. According to G. A. Macfarren: "Potter used to speak of him [Wölfl] with profound admiration. Significantly, Mcfarren noted that Potter had gained experience (possibly through Attwood's teaching) of Mozart's practice of amplifying his own scores to the point of "recomposition":

> "When Potter returned to England he again played at the Philharmonic, and the piece in which he made his reappearance was the Concerto of Mozart in D minor. He had learnt, perhaps in Vienna, and from the particular explanations of Attwood, who had witnessed Mozart's performance of his concertos, the fact that the printed copies are but indications [presumably meaning basic indications] of the matter which Mozart himself used to play, and he gathered from Attwood and others what was the manner in which Mozart used to amplify the written memoranda in his performance. It almost amounted to a re-composition of the part to fill it out with such pianoforte effects as would do justice to the original intention, and it was with such amplification that Potter presented the D minor Concerto."

Returning to Potter's Mozart piano sonata editions, apart from the amplification of slurs (presumably bringing Mozart into line with the 19th-century cantabile approach), dynamic and expression marks appropriate to the pianos of the day, and occasionally added notes, Potter sporadically marks arpeggio signs in both right and left hands. Since his editions were probably intended for students and amateurs (he became Principal of the Royal Academy of Music and is said to have established a "London School" of piano playing), it seems logical that his added signs were a way of indicating essential chords that needed arpeggiation, though this did not preclude its use elsewhere. We may assume that Potter's edition does not preserve the frequency of arpeggiation that in reality would have been heard and expected in professional renditions, such as is the case in Reinecke's interpretation of the Andante K.488.

Our second telling piece of evidence is from Hummel (who studied with Mozart), who in his *Anweisung* (1828) noted that on Viennese or German pianos "the power of the sound must be brought out entirely by the speed of the finger. Full chords, for instance, are mostly broken very quickly and are far more effective thus than if the notes were played together with the same degree of strength." The strong impression here is that full chords should almost always be treated in the arpeggio manner. Other chords would presumably receive the same treatment.

In comparison to readings of the 20th and 21st centuries, Reinecke's performance of Mozart's middle movement (Andante) from K.488 is eye-opening. Reinecke's 1896 solo piano arrangement of this movement, in conjunction with his [piano-]roll performance of this arrangement, reveals the myriad ways in which he amplifies Mozart's music. It also shows clearly how Reinecke departs from his own notation, prompting us to think about the function, meaning and value of musical notation, and what composer/performers such as Reinecke intended notation to convey.

Reinecke was hardly alone in amplifying and embellishing Mozart's text. Throughout the 19th century, pianists from Hummel to Clara Schumann arranged Mozart's piano concertos in ways that they felt painted his music in the best light, taking into account the newer, brilliant, virtuosic styles of concerto writing and the increasing power of 19th-century pianos. In [his own writing] Reinecke points out that the pianists Clara Schumann, Ferdinand Hiller (1811–1885) and Wilhelm Taubert (1811–1891) often performed Mozart's piano concertos, and at least the first two "elaborated Mozart's score, just as he did himself." We do not know exactly what changes Mozart made to his own concertos in performance, though contemporary accounts make it clear that there was much improvisation. And there are sources emanating from Mozart and his circle that provide evidence

of florid ornamentation. Today, we face many of the same issues pondered by 19th-century pianists: “What exactly did Mozart play as compared with what he wrote down? How does our view of what he played affect what we play? Just how are we going to achieve a brilliant effect with his concertos?” But we also face a fundamental challenge; adopting informed practices can go against the status quo and attract criticism as even educated listeners find it difficult to hear well-known music in an unfamiliar style. In his recording, [Robert] Levin gives a highly ornamented rendition (inspired by [Mozart's student Barbara] Ployer) of the Adagio from K.488. About this Levin remarked that: “To judge from Ployer’s embellishments [...] her teacher’s improvised decorations were considerably more elaborate than the most fanciful attempted by any performer today.”

Reinecke’s performance is thought-provoking in the possibility that it represents the final phase of a genuine tradition harking back to Mozart and the late 18th century, of which the thread was decisively severed during the early years of the 20th century. Overall, the effect is of an improvised style, not necessarily exactly as Mozart might have expected, but far removed from the style associated with playing Mozart and Classical-period music today, which is generally faithful to the text. Reinecke may have expected students at the Leipzig Conservatory to follow his new, revised edition of 1880 closely as a first step in learning how to play correctly. But for professional pianists of his generation, this edition would have been considered only as a starting point, to which the finer, essential, more complex details of artistic performance (elucidated in his 1896 solo piano arrangement) would have to be added in order to bring Mozart’s music stylishly and artistically to life. In this respect, it is worth considering the thoughts of Hummel in his *Anweisung* (1827) and Spohr in his *Violinschule* (1833), both of whom explain two types of interpretation. The first type they describe as a correct performance or interpretation (*richtiger Vortrag*), producing the notes correctly, more or less exactly as written, which they regarded as merely a first stage in becoming a masterful artist. The second they describe as a beautiful performance (*schooner Vortrag*), requiring a high level of expressive input from the performer who was expected to read between and beyond the lines of the notation using a range of devices that were part of a valued tradition. In prefatory remarks to an edition of Mozart’s piano compositions, Reinecke himself draws a line between a correct interpretation and a beautiful interpretation:

> “A correct execution may be learned; one characterized by beauty, intelligence and soul can be learned only when the player possesses the capacity to recognize and to interpret the general meaning inherent in a piece of music, and likewise the constantly changing moods that recur in it, according to his nature.... But exactly where is the boundary between the correctly regular and the beautiful execution? A correctly regular performance in certain circumstances may be the exact opposite of beautiful; a beautiful performance may apparently offend against all the rules.”

For Reinecke it was important to work from Mozart’s original score, “not for the purpose of piously following it note-for-note, but rather in order to determine how to realize the best modern performance from it.” The same is true of Reinecke’s new, revised edition of 1880 and his 1896 solo piano arrangement of the Andante from Mozart’s K.488. Following Reinecke’s scores

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correctly, exactly, or at face value, would simply not produce the artistic flavour of Reinecke's performance. And yet this modernist reverence for the score, with its 'urtext' mentality is still exerting a straightjacket effect on classical music.

Early recordings in their various forms demonstrate that the oldest generation to record (who learned their craft before or around the middle of the 19th century) employ a range of expressive practices that is quite different from 'modern' practices with respect to articulation, accentuation, dynamics, agogic accentuation, rhythm, and tempo. As the late Richard Taruskin (1945–2022) famously opined, "[early] recordings are the hardest evidence of performance practice imaginable. If we truly wanted to perform historically, we would begin by imitating early-20th-century recordings of late-19th-century music and extrapolate back from there." Given that stylistic change would have been slower in the pre-recording era, we might safely assume that at least some of the practices preserved on these recordings were familiar to Beethoven and Schubert and very probably to earlier musicians such as Mozart. It is significant that when Reinecke embarked on his musical studies, there were people alive who related and transmitted their ear-witness experience of musicians from Mozart's lifetime.

For the present performance of K.488 with the Australian Romantic & Classical Orchestra, I have been inspired by the ways in which Reinecke and his students, and other 19th-century pianists including Theodor Leschetizky (who studied with Czerny) employ arpeggiation, agogic accentuation, rhythm and tempo flexibility, and ornamentation in their interpretations of Mozart (as preserved on rolls and acoustic recordings). In the Andante, I have incorporated elements of Reinecke's arrangement (and his style of playing), together with Ployer's florid ornamentation.

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