Classical Music

1770-1820
Final exam question

What of Mozart's view of the world, his feelings about the human condition, and his personality can we detect in his instrumental music?
Final exam question

What of Mozart's view of the world, his feelings about the human condition, and his personality can we detect in his instrumental music? Read the textbook’s section on Mozart and listen to the Mozart selections on the textbook CD (Symphony No 25, first movement; Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, 1st and 3rd movements; and the variations for piano on 'Ah, vous dirais-je, Maman'). Comment on each piece of music. How does each piece rate on the scale from ‘perfect realization of the expected pattern’ to challenging the audience, then and now? Can you relate these pieces to information about Mozart’s life and personality (presented in lecture and in the textbook)? Of these four examples, does one stand out as most or least appealing to you?
Robert Levin & Mozart on the fortepiano

Key points:
Performer choices:
how should knowledge of historical instruments change interpretation?

Improvisation & spontaneity

Mozart is a rude bad boy. How?
EMPATHY & IMAGINATION

Act!
Two aspects of Mozart’s musical language

Robert Levin, Charles Rosen:

‘perfect realization of the expected pattern’

Unexpected combination of different ideas, the number and density of those ideas
consciously follow, aware of as much as possible (looking at the score helps!)

attentively listen, but not analytically

processed on some level

or not at all
Mozart’s hidden craftsmanship

"One does not believe it is difficult, one believes one can easily imitate it, and that is the test"

Mozart, in a letter
Mozart

< 35 years on the planet
Mozart

40+ symphonies
23 string quartets
19 piano sonatas
27 piano concertos
masses
20 operas
LIFE-TIME-LINES

BACH d. 1750

BEETHOVEN 1770-1827

MOZART 1756-1791

HAYDN 1732-1809

1770 1820
Compare Bach, Beethoven

J.S. **Bach**, English Suite #3 in G minor

- consistent working out of single idea
  (the Baroque ideal aesthetic of Affect, one mood or emotion per piece)

Ludwig van **Beethoven**, Piano Sonata No. 26 in E flat major, opus 81a, “Lebewohl” (1809-1810), 3rd movement

- abruptly contrasting character
Mozart listening example

a string quartet (a composition for two violins, viola and cello)
the Quartet in E-flat Major, K 428, 1st movement
(one of the 6 “Haydn” quartets)
Music made of music?

Does this piece connect to Mozart's life and world, or is it “music made of music,” in the words of a famous commentator on Mozart, Alfred Einstein?
Mozart textbook CD listening example

Variations on 'Ah, vous dirais-je, Maman'

Variations a “light” form

Variations training the mind for hearing connections under transformations?

Imagine this improvised.
Opera evolution

Baroque

recitative  aria (solo)  recitative  aria  recitative . . .
action  emote  action  emote  action . . .

Classical/Mozart

recitative  aria (solo)  recitative  ensemble . . .
action  emote  action  emotion & action ...
Mozart and opera

-- all voice ranges used (instead of the Baroque’s treble + bass preference)

-- ensembles (groups of solo voices) now contrasted with arias and recitative

-- several operas about contemporary characters, not mythological figures or ancient history from Rome or Greece (although he did a few of those, too)

-- biting social commentary: the decadent aristocracy is compared to the normal, happy, healthy lust and love of the common folk

-- recitative still used

-- some in German with spoken dialogue

Da Ponte – librettist
The Marriage of Figaro

- celebration of “common people” v. the decadent aristocracy

Bourgeois (Genre)

Chardin
The Prayer before Meal
1744
Still from *Amadeus*
Joseph II

Still from *Amadeus*
Joseph II

Still from *Amadeus*
Baron van Swieten

Still from *Amadeus*
Dad (Leopold Mozart)

Still from *Amadeus*
Dad (Leopold Mozart)

Still from Amadeus
Mozart viewing example film by Joseph Losey

**Don Giovanni**

Don Juan as anti-hero – critique of aristocracy? The opera starts with an attempted rape & a murder, yet it is “*dramma giocoso* – comic drama”

Rarely performed in the 1800s – now regarded as one of Mozart’s finest operas

1787
BAROQUE ERA
BAROQUE ERA
David, *The Death of Socrates*, 1787

NEO-CLASSICAL
Don Giovanni
characters are multi-faceted;
not just good or bad

Don Giovanni a sexual predator – but brave
Leporello – likable servant easily swayed by $$$ (or €€€)
Donna Anna – obsessed with vengeance (justly), but loses sight of love
Don Ottavio – noble blowhard; ineffectual
Donna Elvira – noble woman but foolish in love
Zerlina & Masetto – peasants & moral center but easily led astray
Don Giovanni
“catalog aria”

recitative
Text/tone painting
• orchestral laughter
• big women, little women
• turn to minor key – moral commentary
Don Giovanni
voice types

Don Giovanni – baritone
Leporello – bass
Donna Anna – soprano
Don Ottavio – tenor
Donna Elvira – soprano
Zerlina & Masetto – soprano & bass
Mozart listening example

-- finale from Act II of *The Marriage of Figaro*

-- an ensemble scene (six voices)

-- contrasting emotions presented simultaneously (compare that to the Baroque ideal aesthetic of Affect, one mood or emotion per piece)
Mozart viewing example

Cosi fan Tutte (they all do it)

3 pairs of voices – symmetry of design appeals to the Classical mind

Rococo moral stance

Rarely performed in the 1800s – now regarded as one of Mozart’s finest operas
Petit Trianon, Versailles, France 1764 (Louis XVI)

NEO-CLASSICAL
Fragonard,
*The Swing*,
1769

Rococo
SUMMARY

• Mozart has values & opinions about sex, morality, justice, tolerance and politics
• Can we detect, feel and hear them in his instrumental music?