

Mozart and Today's Children¹

Dr. Stefana TITEICA
Bayerischer Rundfunk, Munich, Germany

Abstract

It is widely reported in the Western world that today's children have poor listening skills and short attention spans. Combined with the low status of music in general education, the current young generation are at risk of losing out on any appreciation of classical music and the opportunity it provides to learn to listen. Mozart is known to all and his iconic status as well as the popularity of some of his works could provide a gateway for children to classical music. In order to effectively introduce Mozart and his music to children, active engagement and exploration is favored over verbal information. Examples of verbal, kinesthetic and purely musical activities are presented, in which children can explore samples of Mozart's music. This approach fosters an improved ability to listen and concentrate for longer. The role of children's books about Mozart's life is also discussed.

Keywords: children, classical music, Mozart, active engagement, attentive listening

Today's children

From all over the Western world the same alarming news is heard: today's children do not listen! Poor listening skills and a short attention span, the domination of visual over auditory information and the omnipresence of very short units of information received via multimedia are not only disquieting in themselves, they also seriously

¹ English translation of the paper *Mozart și copiii de astăzi*, presented at the 2010 International Symposium of the Romanian Mozart Society in Cluj-Napoca, *Mozart and our world*.

jeopardize the perception of music. In addition, there are increasing and legitimate complaints about the state of music education in schools, kindergartens and families and fear that the young generation is lost to classical music. There is, therefore, an urgent need to take action and develop strategies to familiarize children with classical music that also help them improve their listening skills, both musical and general.

Mozart today

To musicians, Mozart is one of the greatest composers and his music the archetype of classical music in the specific sense of the music of the classical era. However far from classical (in the more general sense) music someone might be today, there is a shining star whose name is well-known to all: Mozart. More than ever, Mozart seems to enjoy an iconic status; the myth of the wunderkind and the genius is alive. The impact of the movie “Amadeus”² by Milos Forman 1894, based on Peter Schaeffer’s successful play from 1979, two decades of popular success for the “Mozart effect” and the associated registered trademark, the commercializing of Mozart’s name and music for children’s products (Munchkin Mozart Magic Cube, Baby Mozart video) and the constant use of Mozart music in movies and commercials prove his everlasting fame. There are more books and more children’s books on Mozart than on any other composer. “Mozart” seems to serve as the symbol par excellence for music.

Mozart – a gateway to classical music

Leveraging Mozart’s iconic status can be used for addressing the above-mentioned problems of children: Mozart as a gateway into classical music can be a solution. It is essential, however, to have the right approach in order to captivate children. Starting with extensive information about the life of the composer followed by information about his music has not proved to be successful in achieving this goal, be it in the classroom or in educational concerts.

² Joseph Horowitz, “Mozart as midcult: Mass snob appeal”, *The Musical Quarterly*, 76 no. 1 (1992): 1-16.

Today's progressive educators and teaching artists "apply the *engagement before information* guideline"³. "This approach differs radically from traditional music appreciation methods, which tend to rely heavily on verbal information."⁴ The largest part of this presentation will be devoted to hands-on activities for interactive engagement with Mozart's music. In the case of Mozart, however, the biography of the composer can be used for its intrinsic educational value.

Mozart biographies for children

An age-appropriate version of Mozart's biography can be successfully used with children not only for pure entertainment or cultural enrichment. It also keeps the "myth" about Mozart alive, it can correct misconceptions, and it provides a motivating role-model for achievements in childhood. Mozart's life also provides an interesting opportunity of introducing children to the 18th century (dress, travel, family life, court life, social status of a musician).

A quick search yields some thirty plus books for children about Mozart in print in English, probably more than about all other composers together – the market obviously takes advantage of Mozart's fame. Not all the books are equally valuable, either artistically or educationally, and some impart a biased view or contain outright wrong information. It is the responsibility of the educator to choose the way he deems right for introducing children to Mozart's life. The critical analysis of ten children's books about Mozart in a scientific article⁵ shows different aspects that are worth considering when selecting a book and stresses the responsibility of the authors who write biographies for children.

³ Eric Booth, *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible: Becoming a Virtuoso Educator* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 89.

⁴ David Wallace, *Reaching out: A musician's guide to interactive performance* (McGraw-Hill, 2008), p. 9.

⁵ Claudia Bullerjahn and Elisabeth Volkens, "Mozart-Biographien für Kinder", in *Kinder – Kultur. Ästhetische Erfahrungen. Ästhetische Bedürfnisse*, ed. Claudia Bullerjahn, Hans-Joachim Erwe, and Rudolf Weber, 159-193, Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1999.

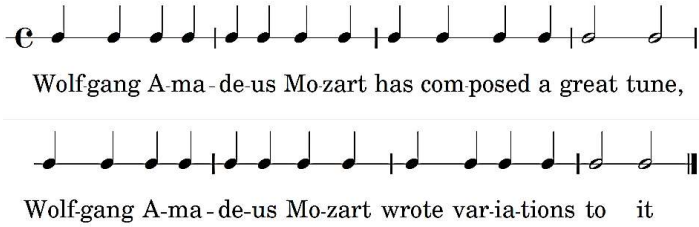
Mozart's music for children through active exploration

As mentioned before, the goal is to foster children's focused listening over time by engaging them in an active exploration of the music. The effects (not only expected but observed) are an improvement of the attitude towards classical music in general, familiarity with Mozart and his music, as well as with the characteristics of the music of the classical era.

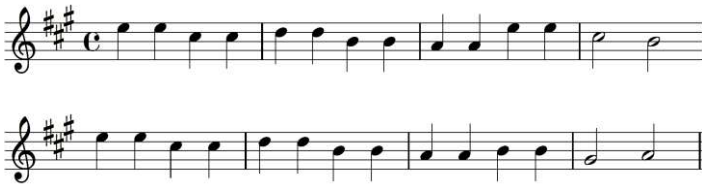
Though quite a lot of Mozart's music is likely to appeal to children, carefully choosing the repertoire for the first encounters with classical music is essential. Length and structure of the pieces are to be considered. Mozart's dance movements, rondos, theme and variations works are excellent for beginners.

A variety of approaches can be considered for children's interaction with Mozart's music. We will briefly present examples of a few verbal, kinesthetic, and purely musical activities, and attempt to give some guidelines about designing and using them. Recordings of good performances (no electronically produced sounds!) are of paramount importance, not only for listening but also for play-along activities.

Verbal activities. Musical themes from chosen instrumental works can be turned into rhythmic sing-along activities ("Sprechlied", "rap") by adding a text to the melody. Oftentimes, the melody needs to be slightly simplified. After having practiced the rhythmic text, children should perform it together with a recording of the music. The text should ideally follow the structure of the music (same or similar words for similar music patterns) and possibly contain some relevant information about the composer and/or the piece. The simplified melody can also be sung, in which case it is important to take into account the range of the children's voices, and transpose it into another key, for example D major.



© Stefana Titeica, 2010



© Stefana Titeica, 2010

Figure 1. Rhythmic sing-along and Simplified melody
Mozart's Clarinet Quintet KV 581: Finale, bar 1-8

Note the repetition of the words “Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart” in two identical bars of the melody (pattern congruence) and the occurrence of both the name of the composer and the concept of composing (writing) variations on a theme.

The verbal activity above is then extended to the whole (recorded) theme of the finale of the Clarinet Quintet KV 581. It includes both the 4 bars “tacet” and the two repeats (Figure 2). Sections of “tacet” heighten the focus of listening attention in order not to miss the subsequent entrance. Repeats are also important factors for the conscious grasp of the formal structure.



© Stefana Titeica 2010

Figure 2. Rhythmic sing-along and simplified melody
Mozart's Clarinet Quintet KV 581: Finale, bar 1-16

Kinesthetic activities. Both the importance of kinesthetic activities for learning in general and the effect of these activities as perceptual aids for children as they listen to music are well documented^{6 7} Any form of meaningful rhythmical moving to music fulfills the educational goal, but the intrinsic connection between dance and music makes the use of dance activities for supporting the improvement of active listening skills especially valuable. Moreover, the necessity to rehearse a certain movement pattern to the same musical excerpt several times increases familiarity with the music. It has been proven that the preference for music pieces depends among others on the degree of familiarity with that piece^{8 9}. Dancing is a fun and rewarding form of movement, which can also “musicalize” some P.E. (physical education) classes.

Mozart, himself a passionate dancer, composed a great deal of dance music. In the last years of his life, having been appointed by Emperor Joseph II “Royal and Imperial Chamber Composer”, Mozart had to write dance music for the balls held in the Imperial palace in Vienna (Hofburg, Redoutensaal). Many of these charming short pieces, written by the mature composer at the zenith of his career, are perfectly suited for dancing with children as young as the first grade of elementary school. These dances are mainly minuets, German dances and contra-dances. The easiest for young children is the walking step of the contra-dances in binary meter. From the variety of

⁶ Robert E. Dunn, “Perceptual modalities in music listening among third-grade students” (Doctoral diss., Northwestern University, 1994) cited in Jody L. Kerchner, “Children's verbal, visual, and kinesthetic responses: insight into their music listening experience”, *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 146 (2000): 31-50.

⁷ Wendy L. Sims, “The effect of high versus low teacher affect and passive versus active student activity during music listening on preschool children's attention, piece preference, time spent listening, and piece recognition”, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 34 (1986): 173-191.

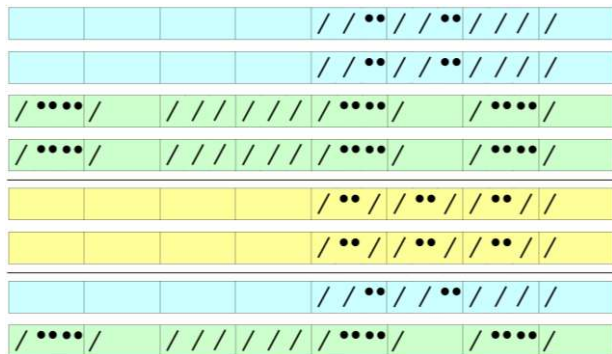
⁸ Karla R. Hamlen and Thomas J. Shuell. “The effects of familiarity and audiovisual stimuli on preference for classical music”. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 168 (2007): 21-34.

⁹ Ian L. Bradley. “Repetition as a Factor in the Development of Musical Preferences”, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 19, no. 3 (1971): 295-298.

historically documented movement patterns^{10 11} a choice of a few simple dance figures can make a lovely choreography for children.

Musical activities. Musical activities include conducting as well as performing rhythmic and harmonic accompaniments and melodic parts. They are to be practiced and then performed with the recording of the music excerpt. For the performing activities, body-percussion, un-pitched and pitched percussion instruments (Orff or other) as well as singing can be used – separately or simultaneously.

Without entering the debate about when to teach all children music notation (if at all), an example of an easy to read intuitive “children’s sheet music”, designed by the author and successfully used with children in elementary school, is proposed for the drum part of Mozart’s KV 609 No. 4 (Contredanse in 3/8). Repeats and *da capo* (senza replica) are written out; identical parts are highlighted with the same color. The groups of four bars of rest (“tacet”) help children to listen attentively before the next entrance (see above).



© Stefana Titeica 2010

¹⁰ Verena Brunner, *Tanzen mit Mozart* (Fidula, 2001).

¹¹ Herbert Lager and Hilde Seidl, *Kontratanz in Wien: Geschichtliches und Nachvollziehbares aus der theresianisch-josephinischen Zeit* (Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1983).

Figure 3. Representation of drum part & original (bars 1-8)
Mozart Contra-dance KV 609 no. 4

Visual Listening Aids. The use of graphical representations as visual aids for focusing the listening process is not uncommon. So-called “listening maps” assist the listener in following the way music unfolds through time and visualize the formal structure of the musical work (excerpt). We will briefly present a few formats of still (non-animated) visual listening aids. They differ in imaging approach (figurative versus symbolic/abstract), granularity of representation (anywhere between one pictorial representation per large section of the musical form versus one representation per measure or even per beat) as well as in the amount of additional musical information they convey (about instrumentation, texture, dynamics). A special form of listening map was proposed by music educator Jos Wuytack for the strategy he developed for his “Active music listening with the musicogram”¹²

There is quite a display of creativity in the design of listening maps. The following three listening maps are all designed for Mozart’s famous “alla turca” (last movement of Piano Sonata KV 331).

In the listening map in figure 4, the formal structure of the movement (in the traditional sequence of capital letters) as well as the rhythmic pattern (in traditional music notation) of the starting

¹² Graça Boal Palheiros & Jos Wuytak. “Effects of the ‘musicogram’ on children’s musical perception and learning”. *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition*, Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna (2006): 1264-1271.

measures of each section appear on the background of a Turkish fez (formerly the Turkish national headdress for men).



© Macmillan/McGraw-Hill

Figure 4. Listening map
Mozart Rondo alla turca

The listening map in figure 6 goes for a rather unexpected programmatic approach invoking winter; the pictures are accompanied by short verbal explanations.

Snow falls lightly, dancing in the air on its way to the ground.



Listen for the strong beat of the shovel trying to clean the sidewalk. (This is the Rondo theme).



It's slippery on a cold winter day. Listen for the music sliding up and down the scale.

3



Still shoveling.



Once again, we hear the breezy melody of the snow falling.



The shoveling continues.

6



A *coda* (Italian for "tail") ends the piece.

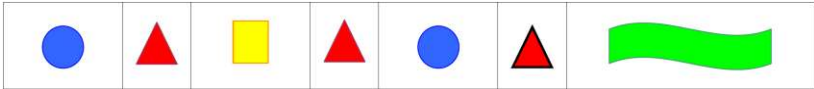
7



© Classics for Kids ®

Figure 5. Listening map (figurative) *Mozart Rondo alla turca*

In figure 6 we propose our symbolic representation (geometric shapes) of the sections of the rondo. (From the scholarly debate about the formal structure of the piece we choose the approach that considers the C-section to be the Rondo-theme.)



© Stefana Titeica 2010

Figure 6: Listening map (symbolic)

Mozart Rondo alla turca

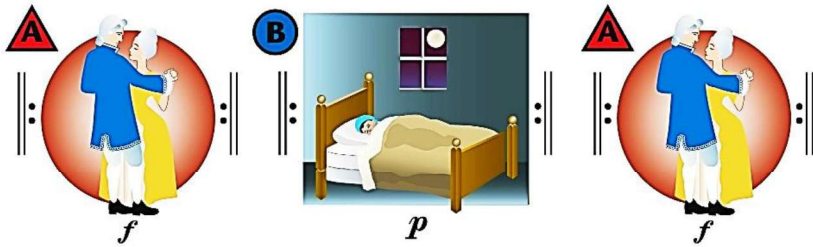
circle (blue) and square (yellow) = I: 8 :I: 8 + 8 :I bars

triangle (red, last triangle slightly different) = I: 8 :I bars

wave (green) = coda

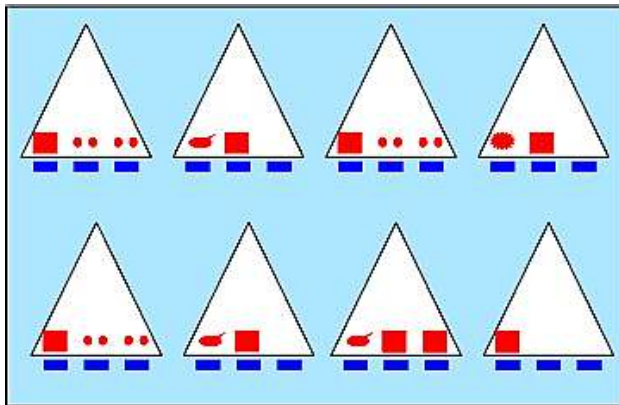
It is recommended to have the children become familiar with one of the main themes of the music by active exploration (through at least one verbal, kinesthetic or musical activity) and then have them listen to a larger excerpt (featuring that theme) following a visual aid. In the case of the *Rondo alla turca* this could be a simple rhythmic accompaniment to the rondo-theme. The children can perform the activity to the theme whenever it occurs. Waiting for it to appear makes them listen carefully to the section before, in order not to miss the next entrance.

The following two examples of listening maps are extreme opposites in terms of granularity. Figure 7 is the listening map for the Minuet from Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* KV 525, which uses a coarse-grained figurative imaging for the broad sections of the movement (Minuet – Trio – Minuet da capo). Figure 8 is our listening map for the Minuet from “Don Giovanni”, which uses a fine-grained symbolic imaging for the musical patterns of each bar. The fine-grained graphical representation can also be used as an aid for conducting in 3/4.



© Macmillan/McGraw-Hill

Figure 7. Listening map (figurative, coarse-grained)
 Mozart: *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (3rd movement)



© Stefana Titeica 2010



Figure 8. Listening map (symbolic, fine granularity) &
 music notation of melody
 Mozart: *Minuet from Don Giovanni* (bars 1-8)

We end this brief overview of various approaches to an active exploration of Mozart's music with a more elaborate activity used with elementary school children (age 6-11) in preparation for an educational concert featuring the entire final movement of Mozart's Clarinet Quintet. After becoming well acquainted with the theme by performing the verbal activity presented before, the children were confident enough to perform the rhythmic sing-along to the recording of variation I and variation IV, in which the theme is clearly heard in the strings, while the clarinet plays different melodic decorations or brilliant show-offs. In art classes the children worked on the project "Theme and variations in painting", with both creative work and art-appreciation elements. They then listened to the theme and variations I and IV following a complex visual aid featuring the formal structure, the instruments, and the texture. During the concert they listened to the whole movement (theme with all the variations) and reported having loved the experience.

Conclusions

There are several different approaches for using engagement with Mozart's music as a gateway for children into classical music; they also provide a good training for improving listening skills. Ideally, the different activities by which children engage with the music should be performed in preparation for an educational concert featuring this music. An effective education concert should be itself designed as an interactive performance (Wallace, 2008).

Each type of activity presented above has been described and used before; all the activities have been performed by the author with children in elementary school classes. The consistent use of combined activities in the classroom, promoted by the author in preparation for educational concerts, enjoys high acceptance among children and favorable response from teachers. It also leads to more attentive behavior during children's concerts. It is assumed that a thorough study of the children's listening behavior as a result of these activities would bring forth an improvement in listening skills, but such a study has yet to be performed.

References

- Boal Palheiros, Graça, and Wuytak, Jos. "Effects of the 'musicogram' on children's musical perception and learning". *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition, Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna*, (2006): 1264-1271.
- Booth, Eric. *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible: Becoming a Virtuoso Educator*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Bradley Ian L. (1971). "Repetition as a Factor in the Development of Musical Preferences". *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 19, no. 3 (1971): 295-298.
- Brunner, Verena. *Tanzen mit Mozart*. Fidula, 2001.
- Bullerjahn, Claudia, and Elisabeth Volkers. Mozart-Biographien für Kinder. In *Kinder – Kultur. Ästhetische Erfahrungen. Ästhetische Bedürfnisse*, edited by Claudia Bullerjahn, Hans-Joachim Erwe, and Rudolf Weber, pp. 159-193, Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1999.
- Dunn, Robert E. "Perceptual modalities in music listening among third- grade students". Doctoral diss., Northwestern University, 1994.
- Hamlén, Karla R.; Shuell, Thomas J. "The effects of familiarity and audiovisual stimuli on preference for classical music". *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 168 (2006): 21-34.
- Horowitz, Joseph. "Mozart as midcult: Mass snob appeal". *The Musical Quarterly*, 76, no. 1 (1992): 1-16.
- Kerchner, Jody L. "Children's verbal, visual, and kinesthetic responses: insight into their music listening experience". *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 146 (2000): 31-50.
- Lager, Herbert, and Seidl, Hilde. *Kontratanz in Wien: Geschichtliches und Nachvollziehbares aus der theresianisch-josephinischen Zeit*. Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1983.
- Sims, Wendy L. "The effect of high versus low teacher affect and passive versus active student activity during music listening on preschool children's attention, piece preference, time spent listening, and piece recognition". *Journal of Research in Music Education* 34 (1986): 173-191.
- Wallace, David. *Reaching out: A musician's guide to interactive performance*. McGraw-Hill, 2008.