



Study on Mozart Piano Concerto No. 23 Comparing Horowitz's and Curzon's Recording

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Abstract. Mozart Concerto no.23 K.488 is one of Mozart's most famous concertos. Also one of the favourite and frequently performed works of several historical piano masters, this work by Mozart features a contrasting suite structure in three movements: fast-slow-fast, where the first sonata form features a "double presentation section", cadenza with solo instruments. Goldsmith's [1] analysis of horowitz's performance [1], and Neighbour's analysis of Curzon [2]. However no one has judged the recordings of the 2 individuals in 18th century performance style. My aim is to gain a deeper understanding of Mozart's no.23 concerto by comparing the recordings played by the two different players. My approach is to judge Horowitz and Curzon's recordings using the specific classical style of the 18th century as a criterion for my research.

Keywords: Mozart · piano concerto · Horowitz · Curzon · recording · Classical

1 Introduction

This Mozart no. 23 K.488 was composed in 1786 and is analysed firstly because it is one of his most famous works, as editor von and Clarke view in his text [3] "The piano Concerto in A major K.488 is numbered amongst Mozart the piano Concerto in A major K.488 is numbered amongst Mozart's most played and best-loved concertos", so it has an important status.

I have read some literature, for instance, as editors von and Clarke [3] analysis of Mozart concerto no. 23 K.488, Goldsmith's [1] analysis of horowitz's performance, and Neighbour's analysis of Curzon [2]. However, few scholars have compared the recordings of two representative pianists of different styles. And Graeme's [4] analysis of the construction and sound of 18th-century instruments is important for analyzing 18th-century compositions. This article analyses Curzon's [5] with symphonioeorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Rafael Kubelik and Horowitz [6] with conducted by Carlo Maria Giulini, the Orchestra of La Scala. Wherever this article appears about these two recordings thereafter, the "Curzon's recording" and "Horowitz's recording" are used instead. My aim is to gain a deeper understanding of Mozart's no.23 concerto by comparing the recordings played by the two different players. Three points will be discussed in this article. 1. By analysing the pianos of Mozart's time, I deduced what the Mozart piece should sound like, and then compared the recordings of the two different

players, comparing the recordings of the two pianists what the accepted playing style of that era was like, whether this playing style was reflected in the playing of the two pianists, whether the body was not reflected in the performance of the pianist's understanding of the piece was profound enough. 2. The pianist's personal experience is relevant or not. 3. The criteria of touch, speed, intensity and flamboyance of the 18th century are established on the basis of the reading of the literature. The judgement of the two pianists will be on the basis of these criteria.

The first movement occupies an important place in this concerto. The first movement of Mozart's Concerto no. 23 is a double-presentation structure, which is different from other concertos in that it begins with the orchestra on the weak note (p), whereas most other concertos begin with the orchestra on the strong note, making the main part of the first movement harmonious with the sub-part. The following analysis of the first movement includes: sound, tempo, strength, cadenza.

2 Sound

What an 18th-century instrument was like and how did it influence Mozart's music. By reading Grame [4] found that there were two types of pianos of Mozart's time, one with a look modelled after the old pianos, and the second a narrow grand piano representing a modified shape of the harpsichord. The sound of these two instruments is similar. For those who play works of Mozart's time, the most important thing is the homogeneity of the sound, since the 18th century piano has no metal frame construction, plus an all-wood construction with a thin soundboard and light box, which gives a light, clear, resonant sound. However, they are all characterised by a light action, with shallow key drops and skin-covered hammers. In addition, the strings are at low tension, their diameter is much less than ours, and the triplets characteristic of modern instruments are almost entirely absent. In short, the harpsichord does not have the thunderous crescendos and contrasting weak notes of the modern piano, so the light, clear, resonant sound that characterises it is the sound to go for when listening to recordings and playing Mozart pieces, because of it is the most consistent with the original meaning of Mozart's compositions. The pedal used in that period was sparingly a swell pedal, which the player had to initiate with a knee pedal; one cannot help but speculate that in this way the dynamic indications of crescendos and decrescendos often encountered on individual notes could be effectively rendered. It is that the performance of Mozart's work should be as close to the sound of the 18th century piano as possible to better understand Mozart's intentions, Next, this criterion will be evaluated the performance of Horowitz and Curzon in such a way, gaining a deeper understanding of this Mozart concerto no. 23.

About the sound of the piano played by Horowitz, in "Horowitz's recording", Horowitz's touch is also interesting. As Mozart's sound is meant to be light, fresh and rounded, so a fingertip touch is closer to this standard, whereas he uses his fingertips to touch the keys. The present result doesn't think his playing sounded in keeping with the aesthetics of the Mozart period. This flat touch looks closer to the touch of the Romantics and is distinct from the touch of others who play Mozart's compositions, and Goldsmith makes the same point in the text [1] "Similarly, any piano lover who has seen Horowitz play with flat fingers, upwardly curved pinkies and similarly disjointed hand positions

will realise that, according to most textbooks and pedagogues, he was showing off all.” [1] According to the article, Horowitz himself explains why the keys were touched in a “romantic” way. One of his characteristic tonal qualities, with its tremendous internal tonal prominence, is often achieved by the (to the performer) simple means of advancing the sound a fraction before the sequential notes in the chords, a tried and true device of the Romantic pianist. [1] Horowitz describes himself as ‘Romantic’ player, who believed that musicians had to have their own ideas, not play in a specific way and that there is not a specific way of touching the key for playing every period of music. It is well known that Horowitz’s teacher was Felix Blumenfeld, who was born in Russia, as Sutherland writes in the text. [7] It reads “Included here are his “24 Preludes” (1892), loosely modelled after Chopin but rooted deeply in their depiction of Russian life, his brief, elegant, earlier “4 Preludes” (1890), and a series of impromptus ranging from the joyful “2 Impromptus” (1890) to the romantically styled “Impromptus” of 1912.” It is thus clear that Horowitz’s teacher’s own compositions were broadly modelled on Chopin’s, and that in his daily teaching he would have been inclined towards Chopin or the Romantics. Consequently, it is understandable that Horowitz’s touch was influenced by his teacher Felix. According to the 18th-century piano sound that mentioned before, it is not appropriate that Horowitz’s style for an 18th century Mozart piece. The style of playing Mozart’s work should be done as close to the historical as possible. Hence, Horowitz’s interpretation does not reflect Mozart’s true creative intentions.

By contrast, “Curzon’s recording” in Concerto no. 23 is very close to the sound of Mozart’s piano. The sound of the long legato phrases he plays is clear and focused, created by the use of fingertips touching the keys and not lingering too much on the keys to create a bright sound. The shortness of the skipping also fits Mozart’s theme, and the handling of the accents is subtle; although the score is marked with accent marks, he does not play it too heavily, capturing the same style overall. The tune he plays is bright, brisk, and touches the keys with his fingertips. From documents, he was an English pianist whose teachers were Schnabel. His greatest influences were Nadia Boulanger, Wanda Landowska, and he gained an international reputation for his technical virtuosity, crystal-clear keyboards and exceptional sensitivity to tone, his favourites being Mozart and Schubert [6], and there was an influence on his stylistic treatment of Mozart was Curzon’s wife (Lucille Wallace), ‘She was a harpsichordist, and in the 1920s she took lessons with Boulanger, Landowska and Schnabel. She and Curzon had a shared learning experience, and she clearly had a deep understanding of his musical ideals, which she probably did help to shape, and she studied with him and the instrument in Mozart’s time was also the harpsichord, so Curzon would have been inspired by his wife in his style of playing Mozart’s compositions. ‘Later he concentrated on the long-standing favourites, among them the Mozart Concerto in A major K488, Curzon played 143 times’ [7]. The instrument in Mozart’s time was also the harpsichord, therefore Curzon would have been inspired by his wife in his style of playing Mozart’s compositions.

3 Tempo

The tempo of classical works is also important, it is a regular presentation. There is no specific tempo, Mozart’s no.23 Concerto is an Allegro in 4/4 time, and in the metronome

tempo 113–160 is an Allegro, as the author Bauman mentions in his article “In consequence, he does not hesitate to suggest markedly different metronomic rates for the same tempo and meter (in the examples just cited, he sets the quarter-note pulse as MM168 for Allegro Ca, 126 for Allegro Cb, and 184 for Allegro Cc)” [8]. In addition, the speed of the allegro in Mozart Concerto no. 23 is almost 126, I heard Pollini [9] play it at almost 126, Trifonov [10] plays it at almost 126, Lu pu [11] plays it at almost 126. Therefore, I’m going to use speed 126 as a criterion to evaluate Horowitz’s and Curzon’s playing.

In “Horowitz recording”, and begins at a slightly faster tempo nearly 136 tempo. The overall duration of the first movement of “Horowitz’s recording” is 10:13, with the duration of the first movement being, bar 98, the B chord with the pedal, which also announces the end of this section and the beginning of the “dolce” The “marcato” part in bar 108 is played on the keyboard and does not maintain coherence, the three Gs in bars 120–122 are faded, the G in bar 149 is well articulated with the orchestra and is clearly. The “p” begins, bars 259 and 260 speed up, and here it could be slowly accelerated to set the mood for the crescendo, in contrast to the tranquillity after the empty 2 beats in bar 261. Therefore, the piece as a whole sounds somewhat aggressive in feel and not in keeping with Mozart’s original compositional intentions. Although Horowitz’s playing speed is very fast, it is not suitable for the speed of playing this piece, but he shows that he is very skilled. It is that “Curzon’s recording” playing is more in line with this criterion. He plays at a tempo of almost 126. The overall duration of the first movement of “Curzon’s recording” is 11:07, which is more appropriate to the tempo of the piece, and I feel that he plays in a way that understands Mozart’s compositional intentions better. At this tempo, he brings out all the details of the melody, reflecting the classical style of the 18th century. More specifically, this tempo presents the first and second phrases of the theme in bars 67–74, highlighting the theme. The “dolce” section on beat 4 of bar 98 is noticeably slower, in contrast to the preceding theme line, and the slower tempo brings out the softness and beauty of the movement, with a large number of 16th note runs in the unfolding section, which lends itself well to this tempo, and does not seem to panic, with every note clear. In my opinion, the tempo played by “Curzon’s recording” is more in line with the aesthetics of history.

4 Strength

The strength is also part of the style of the melody. The author Skoda has written in his book “To play early ‘hammer-harpsichords’ (as pianos continued to be called as late as the 1780s) modern pianists must adopt a light-hand playing technique appropriate to the delicate eighteenth-century instrument. The lack of the appropriate technique may be the main reason why a recital on a fortepiano is not always an unqualified pleasure: the heavy modern piano touch leads to pounding.” 1, Considering that the instrument of the 18th century was the harpsichord, the music of the 18th century should be close to the sound of the harpsichord, played on a modern piano with a light touch and a crisp sound, as close as possible to the standards of Mozart’s time.

“Curzon’s Recorded”, this piece is well-conceived as a whole, showing the sonic form of the piece, with contrasting and distinctive styles in each of the 3 movements. The first movement, which begins with a very relaxed entry, is very clean, with good control of

the timbre, and very well done with the vocal shapes of the movement, capturing the meaning of the movement, with no “>” accent on the E in bar 79 of the score, which is not obvious enough, followed by the “stronger” group of scales from D to D. The “stronger” of the subsequent D to D scale is well done, and in the second idea from the B position, the rhythm is a little rushed. The B “>” at the beginning of bar 113 is not sufficiently pronounced to suggest the next theme, and the contrast between the left and right hands is not obvious, the left hand should be a little lighter, the melodic line in the right hand is clear, the strong contrast on p. 14 is finally washed out to ff, a weaker G at the beginning of bar 149 would have been perfect, a variation treatment on p. 21, and no crescendo contrast treatment in the middle 3 Cs of bars 250–252. According to my criteria, this is how the intensity should have been at the time, and he is quite historically accurate, although the score is marked with accent marks, which is understandable given the fact that 18th century instruments did not produce very broad sounds, and the way Curzon handled it.

“Horowitz’s playing” is too heavy in the left hand, and the flat touch does not make the piano sound clear and crisp, and I do not think he meets the criteria for an 18th century sound. As mentioned before in the article, the sound of the 18th century music is clean and light, also the reason why the 18th century musical instruments can only produce this kind of sound, thus when playing it, it is necessary to fit the crisp of the sound of the 18th century musical instruments.

5 Cadenza

The cadenza is the part that reflects the player’s virtuosity; it is not an absolute standard, but it is to be played according to the score. In his book, Robert describes the Mozart concerto K488 with particular reference to the cadenza, “Exceptionally, the first-movement cadenza is notated in the score; apart from the Exceptionally, the first-movement cadenza is notated in the score; apart from the passagework at the beginning, it is a free fantasy unrelated to the motives of the rest of the movement” [12]. In point of fact, the florid is not improvised, it was written down by Mozart, consequently, it has to be played according to the score, and Robert also mentions that it is a free fantasy unrelated to the rest of the movement, which means that the player can add his own personal touch to the score. The free playing is also an expression of technique. The author, Mrika, mentions in the text that “Because the metrical acoppe of cadences in Classical music corresponded to their structural strength, the enlarged cadence was normally used as the last and most emphatic closure in the exposition or reprise of a sonata form. Its realization by the melodic formula 5-2-1 in an unadorned form constituted, in fact, the most typical final cadence in the pre-Classic music of the mid 18th century as well as in Viennese Classicism. Logically, the schema used by Mozart in most of his piano cadenzas turns out to be a particular elaboration of the most emphatic structural cadence available in virtuoso genres of the time” [13]. Here it is shown that Mozart’s cadenza is rhythmic, not improvised by the player, he had it written down in a regular manner, so when playing Mozart’s cadenza, follow the score and play it, this is what Mozart originally intended, so I will use this criterion to evaluate the part of the cadenza played by Horowitz and Curzon.

In the “Horowitz’s recording”, Horowitz’s cadenza is an improvisation on the original score, showing great technical skill and ending with the orchestra, but he does not meet Mozart’s criteria for the cadenza because he adds too much improvisation and improvisation based on Mozart’s original score. This approach to Horowitz’s playing may well follow Levin’s view that ‘improvisation and the uncertainty that accompanies it are the essence of flamboyance, and this may be true for the audience as they see an authentic, unprepared improvisation by an artist known for this technique. It is true that such a performance would be a stunning visual and audio experience for the audience, but there are still flaws in this thinking’ [14].

On the other hand, ‘Curzon’s recording’, in which the author Frederick mentions that ‘the usual and sensible goal of historical performance is to interpret a work in the spirit of the composer, and in Mozart’s flamboyance we can clearly In Mozart’s flamboyance we can clearly feel the spirit of the composer’s gift to us’ [13]. It is clear that Curzon has been following the classical style of performance and the spirit that the composer intended to convey. “Curzon’s recording” clearly follows Mozart’s score, it does not deviate from the score of the piece and shows his own style of playing, and it is the orchestra that takes over after his performance, with a very regular ending. In contrast to Horowitz, I think that Curzon’s playing is up to the standard of Mozart’s cadenza. Curzon’s approach is in keeping with Mozart’s original approach and in keeping with the classical style. In the “cadenza” section, rhythm is not the main concern, as this is the section that highlights the player’s pianistic skills. Firstly, it would be difficult for the orchestra to work together if they added a lot of their own reworked ornamental notes to this part, especially improvised ones, and it would probably cause confusion in the formal performance. Secondly, the “cadenza” in the commercially available scores is a uniform standard and can be more easily understood by listeners who have seen the score, whereas adding a lot of improvisation can cause confusion to the listener.

6 Conclusion

The central thesis of this essay is an in-depth understanding of the Mozart Concerto No. 23 K.488. Which reveals that each player has a different approach to playing. Through the analysis of strength, the sound, cadenza, tempo, the standard of 18th-century music was derived, then compared to the recordings of Mozart’s Concerto No. 23 K.488 played by Horowitz and Curzon, it is obvious that Horowitz was greatly influenced by his teacher Felix, and his teacher was deeply influenced by Chopin. Consequently, Horowitz was indirectly influenced by Chopin in piano performance, especially the way of touching keys. As far as I know, Curzon was influenced by his wife in the understanding and processing of the music. His wife was a harpsichordist, and the creation of music in the 18th century also came from the harpsichord. Thereby Curzon’s performance of k.488 concerto on a modern piano would be closer to the sound of harpsichord, and closer to the style of 18th-century music. Moreover, Curzon and his wife also have the same learning experience is a pair of immortals, so they can better understand each other’s musical ideas. This piece of music played by everyone is unique. In fact, there is no absolute standard for this piece of music, but there is a relative standard when referring to some literature. In my opinion, “Curzon’s recording” are more in line with the style

of 18th-century music. While it's impossible to tell who's playing better or worse, the standards are different, and the listeners' aesthetics are different.

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