Excuse Me, Where Can I Find Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto*?

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Two letters are often cited in discussions of Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto in A Major*, K. 622. The first letter is from Mozart to his wife, Constanze, dated October 7, 1791 – Example 1 in your handout.

> Now for an account of my own doings . . . I sold my nag for fourteen ducats; then I told Joseph the First to fetch me some black coffee, with which I smoked a splendid pipe of tobacco; and, then, I orchestrated almost the whole of Stadler's rondo.[1]

From this first passage, we learn approximately when Mozart completed what was presumably a clarinet concerto for Anton Stadler. It is because of this letter that Robbins Landon writes that the concerto was completed in "Vienna, ?early Oct 1791."[2] Because of this letter, Alan Tyson also "prefers" the 1791 date,[3] notwithstanding his suggestion that the concerto could have been composed as early as 1787.[4] Mozart's wife answers some of the questions that scholars often ask about any concerto: For whom was the concerto written? *Where* was it written? When was it finished? The next letter, however, has different consequences.

The second letter, dated May 31, 1800, is from Constanze to the music publisher Johann André – this is Example 2 in your handout:

> For information about works of this kind, you should apply to the elder Stadler, the clarinetist, who used to possess the original manuscripts of several and has copies of some trios for basset horns that are still unknown. Stadler declares that while he was in Germany, his portmanteau, with these pieces in it, was stolen. Others, however, assure me that the said portmanteau was pawned there for 73 ducats; but there were, I believe, instruments and other things in it as well.[5]

This letter answers some questions, but creates rather more problems. Costanze indicates that Stadler lost the autograph manuscript of the concerto. Additionally, this letter insinuates that Stadler lost his clarinet, which would not normally be of much historical consequence. However,

Stadler's clarinet was not a standard late-18th-century clarinet; it was a unique one of his own design, built by the clarinet-maker Theodor Lotz. Now described as a "basset clarinet," it was for this specific instrument, with an extended lower range or four semitones, that Mozart wrote his clarinet concerto. It is because Stadler apparently lost the autograph manuscript and the instrument for which the concerto was written that musicologists, clarinetists, clarinet builders, and others, have had to "reconstruct" Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto*. How this concerto has been "reconstructed" is the topic on which I will focus.

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In reconstructing this concerto, one might first consider the relationship between Stadler and Mozart because our perception of Stadler influences our perception of this concerto.[6] Stadler is often described as "Mozart's Clarinetist."[7] Mozart and Stadler were both Freemasons, although they belonged to different lodges. Stadler's first contact with Mozart was likely in March 1784 when Stadler played in a performance of Mozart's Wind Serenade in B-flat.[8] By 1789, Mozart composed a clarinet quintet for Stadler, K. 581. Like the concerto, the quintet was written for Stadler, to be played on his basset clarinet. However, Mozart's perceived relationship to these works and to Stadler is slightly different than one might think.

We recall that Mozart described the rondo of the concerto as "Stadler's rondo." Yet, we usually explain this relationship, as I have done, by saying the concerto was written *for* Stadler. This may seem inconsequential, but Mozart's statement problematizes the duty of the contemporary performer. Should this be Mozart's concerto or Stadler's? Although it is not likely that one would ever find a concert program listing "Stadler's *Clarinet Concerto*," it is clear that Stadler played a significant role in Mozart's "original construction" of this concerto. We know that Mozart was known to have tailored his writing to the specific abilities of his singers and

instrumentalists.[9] In a letter to his father in 1778 Mozart wrote: "I like an aria to fit a singer as perfectly as a well-made suite of clothes."[10] If Mozart's statement also applies to the manner in which he wrote for instrumentalists, then the problem is necessarily compounded with the clarinet concerto; Mozart not only wrote the concerto with Stadler's *abilities* in mind, he wrote it with Stadler's *instrument* in mind. Although an authentic performance of this piece would not likely require a detailed study of Stadler's performance practices, clarinet players have understood the importance of replicating Stadler's instrument. Many clarinetists have had clarinet makers build special lower joints for their clarinets in order to give their performances a greater sense of authenticity.[11] This has been a problematic undertaking, nevertheless, because no examples of Stadler's clarinets have yet been found.[12] A fortuitous discovery by Paula Poulin resulted in some direction when, in 1992, she discovered three complete programs from 1794 that Stadler had presented. One of these programs included the earliest documented performance of this concerto as well as a detailed engraving of Stadler's clarinet.[13] This engraving has helped clarinet makers recreate Stadler's original clarinet, but an exact reproduction is still not possible.

It is not enough, however, to recreate the instrument; an allied requirement is to reconstruct the manuscript. Mozart's undated, 199-measure autograph fragment of a concerto in G for basset horn, K. 621b, both complicates and elucidates our understanding of the *Clarinet Concerto*. These 199 measures form the basis for the first part of the first movement of the concerto. Why Mozart abandoned the basset horn concerto to write a basset clarinet concerto is not clear. Stadler played both instruments. This fragment, which dates from about 1791, is the only extant source material in Mozart's hand for the Concerto.[14] Regardless, this only provides information about the first 199 measures. Recreating the rest of the piece is more burdensome.

The next important source to consider is an 1801 or 1802 Breitkopf & Härtel edition of the concerto that was adapted for a normal clarinet because Stadler's basset clarinet did not become popular. Breitkopf & Härtel, who were in competition with Anton André for Mozart's works, enlisted the assistance of Mozart's early biographer, Franz Nemetschek, to obtain as many of Mozart's missing works as they could find. Nemetschek wrote to the publisher in 1800, believing, "I shall most certainly receive the concerto for clarinet." However, it is not certain that the Breitkopf & Härtel edition was based on a manuscript in Mozart's hand. It is clear, however, that this edition is *not* the same as the original version.

An anonymous reviewer detailed the changes to the score in the 1802 edition of the *Allegemeine musikalische Zeitung*, or *AMZ*.[15] This is Example 3 in your handout:

> Whereas nowadays such clarinets descending to low C must still be counted among the rare instruments, one is indebted to the editors for these transpositions and alterations for the normal clarinet, although the concerto has not exactly gained thereby. Perhaps it would have been just as well to have published it entirely according to its original version and to have rendered these transpositions and alterations at most by smaller notes.[16]

This review further problematizes the identity of this concerto. Can we believe this anonymous reviewer? Would it be accurate to call this adaptation "Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto*"? Before I discuss these issues in more detail, I need to mention yet another score that further confuses the situation.

Christian Schwencke's *Grand Quintetto,* published ca. 1799-1805, is probably the most useful source because it was likely made from a handwritten score of the original concerto.[17] Because Schwencke places the solo line of the clarinet in the piano, it would not have been necessary to rewrite the low basset notes. Pamela Westen has suggested the following hypothesis: She believes that Nemetschek borrowed Schwencke's copy of Mozart's handwritten score to make the Breitkopf & Härtel edition. As interesting as this hypothesis may be, it still is

what we might call an "educated guess." Weston's guess is by no means the only one. Numerous scholars have tried to make some sense out of this quandary. But rather than trying to figure out exactly how the concerto is "supposed to go," I am interested in how the concerto is perceived.

At this point you might be curious about the differences between the different versions. In Example 4, I have short sections from the first movement of the concerto. The top line, that I labeled "Mozart," comes from the 199-measure autograph fragment. The second line is what one finds in most scores. First you will hear the "Mozart" except, played on a basset clarinet, then the "Traditional" excerpt, played on a modern clarinet.

On the second page of you handout, I have provided one page from miniature score.

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Despite the shades of gray with which I have painted this concerto, we all know that Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* has not had problems gaining attention. One can hear movements from this concerto in films such as *American Gigolo*, *Green Card*, and *Out of Africa*. It annually holds a position in the "Top 100" lists of most "classical" radio stations. A quick search on WorldCat produces more than 250 recordings of this work, some with names like *Unforgettable Classical Melodies*. This concerto has assuredly invaded popular culture.

Current attitudes regarding this concerto, among even "scholars," can be equally fascinating. For example, Robbins Landon, a doyen of Mozart scholarship, believes that "of all Mozart's last music . . . this concerto is the most personal [with a] deep-seated satisfaction in pure orchestral sound [like] no other concerto."[1] And Landon is not alone. For example, Michael Steinberg, program annotator for the San Francisco Symphony and the New York Philharmonic, writes about the Adagio: "This movement, whose beauty is of a truly ineffable sort, begins in

[1] H.C. Robbins Landon and Donald Mitchell, eds., *The Mozart Companion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), 279.

calm but grows to admit Mozart's tribute to Stadler's virtuosity and vocality, and its arpeggios rise into quiet and deeply affecting ecstasy."[2] Other commentators are more blunt. In his 1971 book, *The Clarinet*, Geoffrey Rendall**,** writes what I am sure many people believe: "This, the best-loved concerto in the repertoire, needs no description, but calls maybe for a few comments."[18] And Clarinetist Eric Höprich, expressed his view about the above-mentioned controversies: "When you know what Mozart wrote, it's stupid, almost, to think anyone would play it on an instrument other than the basset clarinet."[19] This work is regularly performed on the basset clarinet and some people believe that performances of this concerto on a modern clarinet … will soon be unacceptable.[20]

I do not object to the manner in which Steinberg, Landon, Hoeprich, and others, write about this concerto. It is not a problem for me that they are "deeply affected" by this work; because Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto*, like any musical work, has a different meaning for each individual.

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Now it is time for the postmodern turn. First, I have found Roman Ingarden's comments about the "identity" of a musical work to be helpful. For Ingarden, the musical work is dependent on performances, scores, conscious minds, etc. Ingarden writes, "a musical work [is] a purely intentional object with its original source in a specific real object and its ground of continued existence in a series of other real objects."[3] One might say that for Ingarden, the musical work is the signified object. Its signifiers are scores, performances, recordings, etc. With Mozart's

[2] Steinberg, 275.

[3] Ibid., 120.

Clarinet Concerto, the original source – that is, the real object – is lost. Consequently, the identity of concerto is not stable.

Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language is also befitting of this attempt to identify Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto*.[4] Saussure discusses "absence" in language, specifically the absence of the author's voice. He sets up a binary opposition between speech and writing, and believes that writing is haunted by "absence." We might, for example, misinterpret written words when their writer is not present. Speech is favored because it represents inner meaning. Writing is twice removed from meaning because it merely signifies speech. By this reasoning, speech is seen as "present" and "true" whereas writing always brings with it an inherent absence.

In sharp contrast to Ingarden and Saussure, Jacques Derrida believes that there is no stable signified. Derrida distances himself from the Western metaphysics of presence. His signified and signifier are connected only by chance. Every potential signifier is linked to another signifier. Derrida believes that in Saussure's system of signs, speech is just one part of an endless chain of sounds. Each utterance is *different* from the others. Likewise, in a critique of Ingarden's theory of musical identity, Derrida might say that each performance, interpretation of the score, recording, etc., is *different*, and there is no "stable" musical work. Speech, writing, performance, listening, are all merely plays of difference, and the signified – in this case, the concerto – is composed of signifiers – all of the scores, types of clarinets, performances, etc.

So where does this leave us? Is there a stable, signified, *Clarinet Concerto*? As I see it, the concerto is missing at least three parts: Stadler, his instrument, and Mozart's autograph manuscript.

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[4] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye (London: Duckworth, 1983).

First, when we hear what Mozart called “Stadler’s Rondo” today, we know that Stadler is not present. In this view, any performance of K. 622 has an inherent, unavoidable “absence.” Contemporary performers are effectively “imitating” Stadler, and every performance is *different* from Stadler’s performance. However, for Derrida, Stadler is but one of the signifiers.

A second “missing” component is the instrument. One could say that it is not possible to “hear” an authentic version of this concerto because there is no “authentic” instrument. The abundance of scholarship I have mentioned is evidence that many desire an “authentic” instrument. However, an “actual” basset clarinet, in Derrida’s view, would only be *different* from a normal clarinet and neither instrument would be the stable signified – both instruments signify the concerto.

There is a third absence, the absence of Mozart’s “voice.” As I have shown, the various contradictory scores are an endless irritation because the only part in Mozart’s hand is the 199-measure fragment of a basset horn concerto and we don’t know if the “real” version of Mozart’s concerto is related to this fragment.

In conclusion, I hope to have demonstrated that a musical work can easily be popular without a “stable identity.” Although Ingarden believes that the musical work exists in the score when it is not being performed, this work has found other places to live. In Derrida’s post-modern assessment, the autograph manuscript is important, but it is not central. Remember that other works have charmed audiences without the support of an autograph manuscript, such as Monteverdi's *Poppea*, Bach's Cello Suites and his Toccata and Fugue in D minor, and Mozart's *Requiem*. What is more, there are no autographs from earlier than the 16th century.

What I have attempted to show in this examination is that this concerto is problematic. All too often, we see a work of art as a complete whole, and we forget that it changes.

Correspondingly, the history of Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* is discussed widely, while its identity changes. Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* is not a fixed object, it exists as an assemblage of signifiers.

[1] *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, trans. Emily Anderson: 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1985), 2: 967. This letter is also mentioned David Etheridge, *Mozart's Clarinet Concerto: The Clarinetist's View* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company, 1983), 11; H.C. Robbins Landon, ed, *The Mozart Compendium: A Guide to Mozart's Life and Music* (Ann Arbor: Borders Press, 1990), 270; Michael Steinberg, *The Concerto: A Listener's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 274.

[2] Landon, 270.

[3] Colin Lawson, *Mozart: Clarinet Concerto*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 35. Lawson makes this assertion based on private communication with Tyson on 17 January 1995.

[4] Alan Tyson, *Mozart: Studies of Autograph Scores* (London, 1987), 35.

[5] Anderson, *Mozart Letters*, 1478-79. This letter is also mentioned in Pamela Weston, *Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past* (London: Hale, 1971): 54 and "Schwenke's Mozart Concerto: A Hypothesis," *The Clarinet* (Nov./Dec. 1996): 65; Lawson, 27-28; and Etheridge, 11.

[6] See, for example, Karl Maria Pisarowitz, "'Müasstma nix in übel aufnehma . . . ", Betragsversuche zu einer Gebrüder-Stadler-Biographie,' *Mitteilungen der Internationalen Stiftung Mozarteum*, 19 (1971): 29-33; Pamela L. Poulin, "The Basset Clarinet of Anton Stadler," *College Music Symposium* 22 (1982): 67-82 and "An Updated Report on New Information Regarding Stadler's Concert Tour of Europe and Two Early Examples of the Basset Clarinet," *The Clarinet* 22 (1995): 24-8; Kurt Birsak, "Salzburg, Mozart, und die Klarinette," *Mitteilungen der Internationalen Stiftung Mozarteum* 33 (1985): 40-47; Weston, *Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past*; and Martha Kingdon-Ward, "Mozart's Clarinettist," *Monthly Musical Record* (January 1995): 21-34.

[7] See, for example, Weston, 46 and Kingdon-Ward.

[8] Lawson, 18.

[9] Landon, *The Mozart Compendium*, 263.

[10] Anderson, *The Letters of Mozart*, 497.

[11] Poulin, "The Basset Clarinet of Anton Stadler," 81.

[12] Pamela L Poulin, "Anton Stadler's Basset Clarinet: Recent Discoveries in Riga," *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 22 (1996): 111.

[13] Ibid, 112.

[14] Robert Adelson, "Reading Between the (Ledger) Lines: Performing Mozart's Music for the Basset Clarinet," *Performance Practice Review* 10 (1997): 156-57. The *Neue Mozart Ausgabe* contains a facsimile of the Winterthur manuscript after K. 622.

[15] A review of the Breitkopf and Härtel edition in the Leipzig *Allegemeine musikalische Zeitung* 4 (March 1802): col. 408-13.

[16] Ibid., 83.

[17] Weston, “Schwenke’s Mozart Concerto,” 64.

[18] F. Geoffrey Rendall, *The Clarinet**:** Some Notes Upon its History and Construction* (New York: Norton, 1971), 81.

[19] http://www.smh.com.au/news/0007/28/features/features11.html (3 December 2000)

[20] Harry Haskell, *The Early Music Revival: a History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 190-91.