Courtly Behaviors

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In addition to preserving a record of tones, chords, intervals, and other musical features, the historical text known as Mozart's Keyboard Sonata in Eb Major, K. 282 (189g), also preserves traces of complex musical behaviors that were developed and replicated within eighteenth-century court society. The article focuses on several musical behaviors that would have been obvious to courtiers in Mozart's time and relates his presentation of them in K. 282 to courtly norms.

Introduction

In the 1950s, America's brief fling with mass-market do-it-yourself art featured two plausible, if nonetheless opposing, notions of how a picture was made. On the one side stood "paint by number." The budding Levittown Seurat could, by painting small numbered regions with preassigned colors, produce an artistic "impression" of the purchased genre scene. Though kitsch, the result looked like what it was bought to represent. On the other side stood John Nagy, host of a televised art program and purveyor of a line of instruction books and supplies. Mr. Nagy lured the tyro Cezanne with the siren song of fundamental forms: if one could only learn to draw a cylinder, a sphere, and a cone, anything was possible. The television program showed how Nagy could transform these idealized solids, with the help of a little smoothing, shading, and interpolation, into human faces, household pets, or landscapes. The solids seemed to reveal the essence of the appearances.

Although both techniques produced pictures by the millions, neither gave an accurate image of how real artists have traditionally produced art. In his 1960 book *Art and Illusion*, E. H. Gombrich provided a corrective and historically informed description of how the training of the artist was characterized by the internalization of conventional pictorial schemata and how

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the manipulation of those learned schemata constituted much of the artist’s working life. Drawing a hand was thus not solely a capturing of a visual impression of light and hue, nor was it solely a contemplation of a three-dimensional structure. It was more importantly a contextualized reproduction of a learned pictorial behavior.

Attempts to explain the composer’s art have often shared rather too much with paint-by-number or essential-forms notions of artistic production. Eighteenth-century music treatises, openly marketed to the musical amateur, favored the paint-by-number approach. For example, given a bass line and the desire to harmonically “color” it, amateurs could employ a scheme known as the *regula dell’ottava*, or “rule of the octave,” whereby they memorized the correct chord to place over each of the eight possible diatonic tones in the bass octave (do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, do; Arnold, 1931). Even eighteenth-century professional musicians “colored” bass lines “by number,” that is, by the numerical shorthand used to “figure” basses. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century music treatises, by contrast, leaned toward essential forms. The great German scholar Hugo Riemann (1849–1919) more than matched Nagy in declaring that all harmonies could be reduced to just three essential forms: tonic, dominant, and subdominant (Riemann, 1893). Whatever the sonorous appearance of a group of simultaneously sounding tones, the proper application of theorized transformations would reveal one of the idealized forms. Learn to manage the three forms, and all of harmony is at your beck and call.

More recent studies have pointed out the tremendous reliance of traditional composers on learned compositional schemata (Gjerdingen, 1988, 1991, 1992; Meyer, 1980, 1989). Rather than tapping into the hidden truths of harmonic essences, or mastering the combinatorics of discrete musical “colors,” composers seem to have worked largely through the emulation and variation of learned musical Gestalts. In the same way that showing how a human face can be depicted as a composite of idealized solids in no way describes how that face came into being or how it is perceived by others, so being able to show that musical Gestalts can be decomposed into some idealized constituents may have little bearing on how these Gestalts arose or how they were and are perceived by listeners. Thus many of the elements of music, rather than being universal and self-evident, are likely to be historically and culturally contingent. Psychological studies of music that use actual music as stimuli need to recognize these contingencies.

To explore the image of the composer as reproducer and reshaper of culturally significant patterns, let us try to recreate something of the context of a particular musical event from the late eighteenth century.

One early November day in 1777, a concertmaster connected with the court of Salzburg performed a set of his keyboard sonatas for the director
of music at the court of Mannheim (Deutsch, 1961). Six in number, these sonatas conformed to the eighteenth-century custom of grouping instrumental works, like eggs, by the dozen or half-dozen. Each individual sonata comprised the normal three or four movements, most movements contained the standard two parts, both intended to be repeated in performance, and each part consisted of the expected series of tried-and-true phrases that characterized musical discourse in a courtly setting (Elias, 1991; Gjerdingen, 1988).

The clearly evident hierarchy of set, sonata, movement, part, and phrase—a conventional structure so in keeping with the organization of courtly society itself—is not, however, the hierarchy that music theorists generally have in mind when they now discuss the music of that Salzburg concertmaster. The overtly conventional nature of court music has been obscured by a romantic fog so thick and of such long duration that many today cannot imagine a discussion that approaches these works as other than the products of natural harmonic forces shaped by the genius of Mozart.

Mozart was a genius. Yet acknowledging his powers of invention in no way compels one to grant the late-Romantic belief that all great music grew out of a governing harmony extended through time on a framework of “pure” counterpoint (Schenker, 1935). If music is a form of human behavior intimately situated in the transactions and practices of people with definite goals and histories, then perhaps our attention should be drawn to examining specific patterns that people can perceive and evaluate in real time in specific social situations. Mozart, court musician at Salzburg, played his keyboard sonatas for Cannabich, court musician at Mannheim, not with the goal of laying out eternal musical geometries but to show a colleague (and potentially useful business contact) the skill and ingenuity with which he could present the set of “compulsory figures” that they both were required to perform on a daily basis.

Success for a court musician meant pleasing a patron. Success for a patron meant getting value for money spent. These goals, while clear and consistent across most of eighteenth-century European society, could be realized only in the context of delicate and shifting personal relationships. Flattery, political alliance, and petty intrigue could serve to maintain a court position or preference for some time. Spectacular dexterity upon an instrument could likewise open courtly doors. Yet musical pattern itself had a central role to play as medium of exchange. A composer who had not internalized the courtly phrases of galant music could not expect to “speak” to the nobility. Only a repertory of properly presented, stereotyped musical patterns could provide the requisite tableaux vivants across which skilled servants could display wonders of craftwork and discerning nobles could make public their taste and refinement. As preferred courtly behaviors,
these stereotyped musical patterns thus merit our attention not only for their historical import but also for their bearing on eighteenth-century modes of listening.

What Do You Say After You Say Hello?

In Mozart's time, court life externalized matters of rank and status. One knew that a musician was a lackey because he dressed the part. Haydn's contract with his patron, for instance, specified the livery—the uniform—appropriate to his station (Landon, 1981). Language itself recognized such distinctions. Speaking “up” to a superior called for different forms than speaking down to an inferior (McIntosh, 1986). Even within ranks, the required social interchanges constantly tested and revalidated position and precedence. Each conversational thrust required an appropriate parry, each witty verbal gambit an apt riposte.

Galant music sanctioned quite a number of appropriate opening musical gambits. One finds openings emphasizing either (1) the expositional quality of ascending-triad or do-re-mi melodies, (2) the balanced character of paired gestures simulating the tam-guam, με-δε, or on-the-one-hand-on-the-other-hand forms of rhetoric, or (3) the long-tested reliability of bass patterns retained from the late Renaissance. The appropriate responses to these gambits were perhaps less varied. One preferred riposte acted to balance an assertive, ascending opening gambit with a concessive, descending pattern. To hear this riposte externalized in sound, let us turn to the opening measures of four of the dozen flute sonatas that make up Pietro Locatelli’s Opus 2 (1732).

For the opening gambit of the first movement from Sonata No. 1, Locatelli chose an eighteenth-century version of the centuries-old Romanesca bass (the tones C₄-B₃-A₃-E₃, as marked in Figure 1). For a riposte, Locatelli chose a “Prinner” (Gjerdingen, 1992). The Prinner has among its characteristic

![Musical notation]

Fig. 1. From the Flute Sonatas, Opus 2, of Pietro Locatelli (1732), the opening measures of the first movement of the first sonata.
features the descent of the melody’s tones la-sol-fa-mi in parallel with the bass’s tones fa-mi-re-do (as marked in Figure 1).

The second of Locatelli's flute sonatas begins with the same pairing of Romanesca opening gambit and Prinner riposte (see Figure 2, which is transposed to the key of C for ease of comparison). In fact, Locatelli chose the Prinner riposte in sonata after sonata. Among the 11 major-mode sonatas in his Opus 2, Locatelli used the Prinner riposte at least once in all 11 of them, and in the opening measures of the opening movements in 8 of them. Given the extreme regularity of this behavior, psychologists and others not professionally involved in music history or analysis may be surprised to learn that a Prinner riposte is virtually an unknown concept in music scholarship. To gain an understanding of how this blind spot developed, let us inspect two large Prinner ripostes taken from Locatelli’s eighth and tenth flute sonatas (see Figure 3, where the excerpts are transposed to C major).

Both examples in Figure 3 share the same class of two-measure opening gambit—a particular blend of a Romanesca bass with a do-re-mi melody. The two-measure Prinner ripostes that Locatelli places after these openings require, in early eighteenth-century terms, a “mutation of hexachord.” In particular, the tone mi (in reference to C), which is prominent at the conclusion of the opening gambit, becomes reinterpreted as the tone la (in reference to G), which initiates the Prinner riposte. Apart from their hexachordal mutation and their larger size, these two Prinners differ little from the Prinners shown in Figures 1 and 2. Yet because the focus of nineteenth- and twentieth-century music analysis has been directed so intensely on harmony, a modern music student would not recognize their similarity. That is, because the patterns differ with respect to a single feature defined by a particular tradition of harmonic analysis—the first kind of Prinner begins with a “subdominant chord” (F-A-C) whereas the second kind seems to begin with a “tonic chord” (C-E-G)—the manifest similarity between the two complexes of features remains concealed. The false assumption that “classical” music is an axiomatized epiphany of harmonic elements

Fig. 2. From the Flute Sonatas, Opus 2, of Pietro Locatelli (1732), the opening measures of the first movement of the second sonata (transposed to C major for comparison with Fig. 1).
and their "functions" submerges the more empirically justifiable and more modest contention that one pattern often sounds like another. For these ripostes by Locatelli, the similarities of position, context, counterpoint, sonorities, relative size in relation to the opening gambit, and entire clusters of ancillary features and featural correlations suggest that a holistic judgment of "this courtly gesture sounds like that one" is a safer point of departure than oversimplified assertions based on an imagined calculus of imagined musical forces.

**Playing Off Traditions**

Among the sonatas believed played for Cannabich that November day is one in E major now known as K. 282 (or 189g). As do many of Locatelli's sonatas, Mozart's sonata begins with a slow movement that presents a common opening gambit followed by a Prinner riposte (Figure 4).

Each aspect of this beginning—indeed of the whole work—represents a complex negotiation between Mozart, with his own compositional history, and the traditions defined by his experiences with other composers' works. For example, the pairing of K. 282's particular opening gambit with a Prinner riposte has a tradition of its own within Mozart's compositions. Years before, as a young boy of eight, he had offered up this same combination in what was only his second set of published pieces, the Sonatas for Keyboard...
with Violin Accompaniment (K. 8-9). Shown below is the opening of the Minuet from K. 8 (see Figure 5, transposed to $E_{b}$ major for comparison).

Each part of this combination in turn has its own complex history. Mozart’s opening gambits in both K. 8 and K. 282 share many features with the Romanesca openings shown earlier in the examples by Locatelli. Both have melodies that emphasize the first and fifth degrees of the major scale and basses that descend, initially stepwise, from the first degree of the same scale. Yet whereas the bass of the galant Romanesca leaps downward from the sixth scale degree to the third scale degree (in $E_{b}$ major, the tones $E_{b}^\flat-D_{b}^\flat-C_{b}^\flat-G_{3}$ or scale degrees 8-7-6-3; see Figure 6a), the basses in K. 282 and K. 8 proceed directly down from the sixth to the fifth scale degree (in $E_{b}$ major, the tones $E_{b}^\flat-D_{b}^\flat-C_{b}^\flat-B_{b}^\flat_{2}$, or scale degrees 8-7-6-5; see Figure 6b).

Equally distinguishing in K. 282 and K. 8 is the ascending inner voice that, as part of the ancient clausula vera, or “true cadence,” introduces the raised tone $A_{b}^\natural$ and suggests the shading of scale degrees toward a temporary $B_{b}$ keynote.

These opening gambits thus begin sounding like Romanesca and end sounding like a class of patterns that feature descending tetrachords in the bass and modulations to the dominant key. Such patterns are not suspect, odd, or some personal quirk of Mozart’s style. He could produce at will a standard, even archaic, Romanesca opening, as the following example from
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(a) 

Romanesca

E₄ D₄ C₄ G₃

(b) 

Romanesca

Fig. 6. A comparison of the typical galant Romanesca (a) and the initial pattern of K. 8 and K. 282 (b).

his later String Quintet in C Minor, K. 406, indicates (Figure 7). Note the identity of the Quintet’s opening chord and melodic motive with their counterparts in K. 282 (shown as Figure 4). The particular openings presented in K. 8 and K. 282 merely follow a path that crosses from a Romanesca over to another type of pattern.

More complex still is the specific Prinner which, in K. 282, Mozart chose as riposte to his opening gambit. Its place in Mozart’s world of musical patterns is conditioned by the fact that characteristic features of the Prinner—a relatively slow stepwise descent in the melody and bass, among other things—match important features of another stalwart eighteenth-century pattern, the diatonic circle-of-fifths sequence. A passage written by Mozart’s

Fig. 7. From Mozart’s String Quintet, K. 406 (516b) (1787/1788?), the opening measures of the slow movement.
father is shown below. It presents the Prinner simultaneously with a circle of fifths (see Figure 8, transposed to Eb major for comparison).

For Wolfgang, his father's pattern would have seemed old-fashioned for the way in which its bass leaps dogmatically to the root of each new chord. At an early age, the son had been drawn to the more elegant style of the cosmopolitan composers whom he had met while touring Europe as a child prodigy. For example, a circle-of-fifths-as-Prinner by Johann Schobert greatly attenuates the active bass of the older style and refocuses its harmonies more tightly on the tonic key (see Figure 9). To our ears, in comparison with the Prinner by Leopold Mozart, Schobert's Prinner sounds more "Mozartian."

There is yet one more eighteenth-century musical pattern that must be introduced in order to properly situate Mozart's Prinner. Because this other pattern figures prominently in K. 282, let us turn first to its more characteristic forms before returning to see its impact on the Prinner.

**What to Do at the Double Bar**

As mentioned earlier, most eighteenth-century instrumental movements were composed of two parts, each meant to be repeated in performance. Separating these two parts stood the music-notational symbol known as

![Prinner Riposte with Circle of Fifths](image)

Fig. 8. From Leopold Mozart's Chamber Symphony, D1 (1750s), measures 15–21 of the last movement (transposed to Eb major for comparison with Figs. 4–7).
the double bar. Choosing what to do following the double bar—that is, choosing how to initiate the second part of a movement—was so obviously a concern for composers that the problem was addressed in a musical “how-to” book of 1755 (Riepel). As posed in that treatise, the choices appropriate to a small movement were between (1) a contrapuntally static yet harmonically implicative repetition of a dominant seventh chord, (2) an open-ended ascending sequence, and (3) a closed descending sequence presented as a pairing of two similar gestures. Mozart knew all these alternatives and, over the course of his three decades of composing, presented each one many times in many different guises. For the Adagio of K. 282, he chose number three, then known as a *fonte* (Italian: meaning perhaps a pattern that descends down a well or fount). The norms for a fonte are suggested in Figure 10.

First, note how four measures of music are paired into two groups of two measures each. And second, observe how the voices first converge on an F-minor chord and then, transposed down a step in the following gesture, converge on an Eb-major chord.

Simple presentations of fontes abound in Mozart’s early works. An example from K. 1, one of his first keyboard works, is typical (see Figure 11, transposed to Eb major for comparison). As in the prototype of Figure 10, this actual example (Figure 11) has four measures grouped into two parts,
the first of which moves harmonically to a minor triad, the second of which to a major triad one step lower.

Had Mozart always contented himself with merely reproducing stock patterns, the fonte following the double bar of K. 282 might have gone as

Fig. 11. From Mozart's Keyboard Minuet, K. 1 (1e) (1764?), measures 8–12 (transposed to Eb major for comparison with Fig. 10).
shown in Figure 12. The fonte actually presented in K. 282, however, is a good deal more complex. Beneath the fonte proper, Mozart had learned to place a descending chromatic line (D₄-C₄-B₄-B₃) as early as his Church Sonata K. 145 (124b) (see Figure 13, transposed to B♭ major for comparison).

![Figure 12](image1)

Fig. 12. From Mozart's Keyboard Sonata, K. 282 (189g) (1774/1775), measures 15–19 of the first movement as they might have appeared if written to conform to conventions of the fonte.

![Figure 13](image2)

Fig. 13. From Mozart's Church Sonata, K.145 (124bg) (1772), measures 38–45 of the first movement (transposed to B♭ major for comparison with Figs. 10–14).
In K. 282, he makes this chromatic line even more prominent and goes on to preface the expected melodic A♭₄ in measure 17 with an A♭₃, thus creating a second descending chromatic line (B♭₂-A♭₃-A♭₄-G♭₄). Moreover, instead of presenting his fonte's second part as a simple downward transposition of its first part, he presents it as an ornamental variation on the first part (Figure 14).

**Prinner + Circle of Fifths + Fonte + ...**

The roots of the four chords of a typical fonte match a portion of the circle of fifths (in the examples above, the roots C-F-B♭-E♭). The Prinner-with-a-circle-of-fifths riposte thus can be adapted to include a fonte, as Mozart demonstrates in K. 282 (Figure 15).

Such a dense, multilayered presentation of stock patterns characterizes many of Mozart's mature works. In Leonard Meyer's apt phrase, works like K. 282 exhibit both "relational richness and grammatical simplicity" (Meyer, 1975). That is, the simplicity of the component patterns is more than matched by the complexity of the ways in which they interact when simultaneously or sequentially presented. New relationships emerge from juxtaposing or overlaying standard components. In Mozart's day, this style of presentation was not universally admired. A more successful court composer, Carl von Dittersdorf (1802), wrote of Mozart's style that "he leaves his hearer out of breath; for hardly has he [the listener] grasped one beau-

![Fig. 14. From Mozart's Keyboard Sonata K. 282 (189g) (1774/1775?), measures 15–19 of the first movement.](image-url)
tiful thought when another of greater fascination dispels the first, and this goes on throughout, so that in the end it is impossible to retain any one of these beautiful melodies."

We are unaccustomed to think of Mozart’s works in other than laudatory terms. Yet within the system of values sketched by Dittersdorf, one may have to admit that an opening-gambit/Prinner-riposte pairing such as one by Antonio Salieri (B-major Keyboard Concerto, 1773) provides the listener with patterns that are easier to “grasp” and “retain” upon a single hearing (see Figure 16, transposed to E-major for comparison). Had Salieri or Dittersdorf composed K. 282, it would likely have begun as shown in Figure 17. What this denatured version lacks in complexity it gains in easy comprehensibility and memorability. As a modern musician might say, it “scans” better.

The uncertain scansion of Mozart’s version led Richard Rosenberg (1972) to describe the opening “theme” of K. 282 as being “not strictly symmetrical.” Yet at the same time, Rosenberg singled out the measures presenting the Prinner as forming “an exquisite phrase.” He likened it to a “melodic bud” that opened into “full flower” only 50 years later in Beethoven’s String Quartet, Op. 127 (Figure 18).

Such organic, Romantic metaphors of growth and destiny typify modes of reception that developed after the eclipse of the courtly society that Mozart
served. In their own time, however, the stock patterns that figured so prominently in galant musical presentations were not buds or seeds but fully developed forms with rich histories.

History and Perception

Prior experience surely affects present perception. To give an extreme example, what I perceive listening to speech in English is quite different than what I perceive listening to speech in, say, Urdu. In the one case, my long experience with English allows me to parse the auditory stream into discrete chunks that match memories of meaningful words and phrases. In
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Fig. 17. From Mozart's Keyboard Sonata, K. 282 (189g) (1774/1775?), the opening measures of the first movement as they might have appeared if written to conform to conventions.

Fig. 18. From Beethoven's String Quartet, Opus 127 (1824), the passage beginning nine measures from the end of the first movement (a passage which, in various forms, permeates this movement).

the other case, my ignorance of Urdu prevents me from perceiving more than a flow of phonemes and gross changes in loudness or tone. “Native listeners” of eighteenth-century court music—whether we mean by that term the deceased members of those courts or modern listeners who have immersed themselves in the galant style to the point of acquiring it as a second language—hear in its compositions discrete chunks that match memories of meaningful gestures and phrases. Other, more casual listeners will perceive a pleasant flow of tones, gross changes in texture and dynamics, and those elements of musical syntax that may transcend the period in question. Because their prior musical experiences differ substantially, these two classes of listeners will have different musical perceptions of the same piece.

Charting the exact musical knowledge of modern listeners would be a daunting task. Musics from popular culture, musics from the near and distant past, and musics from various ethnic regions coexist today in a vast commercial marketplace of sound. The musical knowledge of eighteenth-century aristocratic listeners, by contrast, stemmed from relatively homogeneous compositions of similar ethnic, geographic, social, and chronological derivation. If we assume that the musical patterns replicated in this repertory correspond to the patterns learned by its listeners, then an inven-
tory of those replicated patterns is at once an inventory of part of their musical knowledge.

Concerning this inventory, a methodological point may be in order. The frequent co-occurrence of the Romanesca and Prinner is a statistical fact that allows inferences to be made about eighteenth-century musical expectations. The Romanesca and Prinner separately, however, are not facts in the same sense. Each can be defined as a cluster of constituent features and featural correlations. Yet the limits by which each pattern may digress from its prototype are partly determined by the presence or absence of competing patterns in this repertory. Thus questions of categorization can often be answered only in the context of a specific repertory of categories. Further, the structure of a repertory of musical categories depends on the experiences, training, and strategies of a class of listeners. In a sense then, a musical style and its listeners mutually organize each other. Neither can be defined autonomously.

Just as there are different modes of performing Mozart—original/modern instruments, free/strict tempo, extended/limited ornamentation—so there may be different modes of listening to Mozart. I have tried to suggest how a mode of listening that emphasizes the matching of specific learned patterns to the musical presentation at hand may approach the type of listening practiced by eighteenth-century courtiers. It is a mode of listening that rewards experience, attention, and active engagement. For courtiers accustomed to following the clear presentation of the standard musical behaviors, Mozart’s mature style presented a challenge. Ironically, for the listeners of later eras accustomed to a more passive mode of listening to broad harmonic progressions, the very same compositions became synonymous with ease and grace. Both types of listeners hear “Mozart,” but I would argue that those who are challenged by his musical behavior ultimately have the richer experience. That experience is grounded not in mere appearances or in some imagined essences but in the real-time evaluation of musical patterns by those listeners with the relevant repertory of learned schemata. The great moments in Mozart’s music, then, depend less on how chords progress or how dissonances resolve and more on how an experienced listener evaluates the import of nuances detected in the presentation of complex musical behaviors.

References


