Mozart and the Josephian Era: Some Socio-Economic Notes on Musical Change

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> I am now happily arrived at that part of my narrative where it is necessary to speak of HAYDN! the admirable and matchless HAYDN! from whose productions I have received more pleasure late in my life, when tired of most other Music, than I ever received in the most ignorant and rapturous part of my youth, when everything was new, and the disposition to be pleased undiminished by criticism or satiety.[1]

Thus Charles Burney, about to conclude *A General History of Music*, introduces the composer in whom he and the immediately following generation saw the very apogee of Western musical history. Burney then proceeds to a general discussion of Haydn's life and work through the 1780's. Mozart, on the other hand, "who astonished all Europe by his premature talents during infancy," is treated summarily in just three lines, less than half the number devoted to Kozeluch.[2]

In the nearly 200 years that have elapsed since Burney's dicta were first published much has been said about the stylistic changes that occurred in European music during the lifetimes of Haydn and Mozart. Personalities have been studied, musical structures analyzed, idioms described. Indeed, the very concept of a "Viennese Classical School," once passionately promoted by Guido Adler and his disciples, has recently come under attack. Hans Engel no longer subscribes to the traditional designation "classical style," noting that there is "only a style of the classicists Haydn and Mozart."[3] Needless to say, one may well go a short step farther and question the very use of the term "style" in this connection. For, if style refers to the artistic manifestations of a given aesthetic attitude or complex of attitudes, one wonders what meaningful insights can possibly be expected from the lumping together of two composers born a generation apart, and, as Burney implicitly recognized, so utterly different in musical and general background and outlook. "With him," Paul Henry Lang has said of Haydn,

> music shed its courtly etiquette and playfulness to become a most personal expression, the expression of the Austrian peasant, of love of life, of the colorfulness of nature, moving about in a

> kaleidoscope of wit, humor, joy, and sorrow. From the Italians, he took the beauty of a rounded form, from the Germans their counterpoint, but with all his skill and artistry he remained the Austrian peasant.[4]

Culturally speaking, the key word in this characterization with which few would wish to quarrel is "remained." Throughout his long life Haydn never failed to assert his 18th-century heritage, even though he was himself responsible for the continuous reshaping of part of that heritage. Mozart, to be sure, was born into a milieu as typical in some ways of entrenched attitudes and customs as the establishment at Eisenstadt. Yet he emancipated himself from that milieu. Far from "remaining" anything he had once been, he literally "became" the herald of a new age, the age of the urban middle-class, hence of economic liberalism and newly gained political freedoms—indeed, of that complete transvaluation of all values subsequently associated with the Romantic movement. Haydn may have shed "courtly etiquette and playfulness in favor of a most personal expression," but he never would have thought of exposing the very depths of his inner life, as Mozart did in the hope that by thus engaging the empathy of his public he might help to change the human condition. Courtly etiquette may have given way in the course of Haydn's creative career to rationalistic human behavior, and playfulness to a more serious and responsible view of the world around him. By the same token, Haydn, as it were, never quite "lost his 18th-century cool," never used his art to question the legitimacy of the Establishment, never really abandoned music as entertainment in favor of music as philosophy. It was of Mozart, not of Haydn, that Goethe said that he should have composed *Faust*. And it was Mozart who, not unlike Beethoven and Schoenberg after him, deeply affected the shape of things human in his time through artistic deeds symbolic aesthetically of the very spirit that animated the far-reaching reforms of Emperor Joseph II and the concomitant changes in the socio-economic foundations of Austrian society.

Well over a half a century ago Werner Sombart made the useful distinction between quantitative and qualitative luxury as basic categories of socio-economically determined cultural behavior.[5] Quantitative luxury, he held, was typical of post-Renaissance European nobility, whereas qualitative luxury reflected the intermittent desire for better, rather than more

numerous, products, a desire found throughout history, it is true, but especially so among the rising middle classes of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. That these two "ideal" types may coexist at any given time, goes without saying. Conversely, history has known situations, particularly in the 18th century when the nobility of Europe was in a stage of incipient decadence, in which quantitative luxury assumed almost grotesque proportions. To cite but one of Sombart's many examples, "on February 25, 1732, the court of Saxony ordered 910 pieces of porcelain figures and vases for a single floor of the royal palace."[6]

Needless to say, such wanton display of non-productive wealth provoked much unfavorable comment throughout the 18th century, often in essential agreement with Sombart who regarded the enormous increase in the manufacture, importation, and purchase of non-essential goods above all as a direct outgrowth of the epochal "victory of the female," that of queens and aristocratic wives no less than mistresses of all types and origins.

18th-century music reflected the craving for quantitative luxury not only in the unprecedented proliferation of musical activity, especially in the field of opera, but also in intrinsically musical terms. A case in point is the Italian grand aria which dominated the musical scene in the first half of the 18th century through sheer force of numbers, as well as the dazzling vocal display that marked any properly executed *da capo*. The emergence of the instrumental virtuoso was, of course, a related phenomenon.

Where the spirit of the *ancien régime* continued to prevail, as in France, official patronage tended to perpetuate quantitative luxury in virtually all forms of artistic manifestation. Conversely, opposition to the regime relied increasingly on political confrontation through cultural dissent. As early as the 1760's d'Alembert found that there were people in France who suspected a republican behind every devotee of opera buffa.[7] About a decade later Rousseau, the erstwhile promoter of Italian opera buffa, was converted to the Gluckist cause when he realized that Gluck's *Iphigénie*'s represented but another link in the chain of cultural reappraisals that decided the outcome of the Revolution before it actually occurred.

By the time France underwent the full impact of the teachings of the *philosophes*, so sublimely reflected in the art of Gluck, Austria was already in the throes of a socio-cultural revolution instigated by an Emperor who declared in 1781: "I have made

philosophy the legislator of my Empire."[8] In fact, some of the trenchant reforms wrought by Joseph II originated in the 1760's and '70's when he ruled together with his mother, the Empress Maria Theresa. But, whereas then the Russian ambassador, Prince Galitzin, witnessed the confiscation of his set of the complete works of Voltaire, now the anti-clerical Frenchman's views determined imperial decrees, and the "Baroque" tastes of the Empress yielded to "beautiful simplicity" in music, her son's favorite art, no less than in fashion.

The solitary reign of Joseph II lasted no more than a decade, but that decade, from 1780 to 1790, shook the very structure of Austrian society. Before the first full year of his autocratic reign had passed, the Emperor who believed that "great actions should be carried out with a single stroke" had put all religious orders under the jurisdiction of the dioceses and directed their bishops to swear allegiance directly and only to the Crown. In the summer and fall of 1781 decrees were issued guaranteeing universal religious freedom and, additionally, granting civil rights to the Jews whose banking and trading activities were so essential to the Emperor's industrial plans. Almost immediately, unproductive members of the upper ranks of society found themselves cut off from their traditional pensions. And other badly needed social reforms followed shortly, including the abolishment of serfdom and feudal dues, the prohibition of judicial torture, and the establishment of proper appeal procedures. Not so dramatic perhaps, but of direct relevance to the ensuing shift from quantitative to qualitative luxury, were the radical reductions in the budget of the court, the concomitant emphasis on industrial expansion and foreign trade, and above all novel administrative and managerial arrangements that favored those members of the aristocracy who were willing and able to make positive contributions to Joseph's "white revolution."[9]

Neither in the material nor in the artistic sense did the Emperor and his aristocratic collaborators wish to abolish luxury *per se*; rather, here as there, they sought to encourage quality over quantity, the individual over the mass. It was, therefore, surely no mere coincidence that prompted Mozart, exasperated by his archbishop's deeply rooted quantitative conceptions, to make his permanent home in Vienna precisely in 1781, the first year of what political historians have come to identify as the Josephian era. "We are old friends already,"

the Emperor said to Mozart when they first met, "and I shall be delighted if it be in my power to render you any service."[10] That Mozart's hopes of composing a libretto written by the Emperor himself came to naught is of very little significance in comparison with the historical fact that Joseph's sincere desire to render service to all of his subjects set an example of service that was quickly emulated by every layer of Vienna's bulging population and contributed immensely to the general leveling of traditional class differences. If France was ruled by the last *grande cocotte*, her brother, the Austrian Emperor, had neither wife nor mistress. A modest man whose health was declining fast, he found satisfaction not in ostentatious display of wealth or power but in real accomplishment as his people's first servant. And the general climate of personal dignity he sought to create quite naturally favored an artistic approach that was emotionally intense yet opposed to excesses of any sort. That well-informed, ever alert musical correspondent and political liberal, Johann Friedrich Reichardt, recalled nearly twenty years after the Emperor's death:

> He is moderate, simple, labors tirelessly, has himself an eye and a hand for everything; urges his nation emphatically in speeches and in print to fulfill its patriotic duties; cares for it with truly imperial magnanimity and generosity; creates excellently furnished hospitals for many thousands, establishes schools for physicians as well as veterinarians in all of his German and Italian hereditary lands; travels in all of them repeatedly with very little display in order to supervise personally the execution of his decrees. He beautifies the capital, enriches it and the daily growing, limitless suburbs with fine buildings, countless factories, liberates the homes of the bourgeoisie from the burden of the imperial court imposition according to which until then one floor of every house had to remain free at the court's disposal; he opens all castles and parks to all the people, enhances them and prepares them with proper expense and taste for the most comfortable enjoyment of the public. Everything under the jurisdiction of the police undergoes improvements. He imports some of the most famous artists to grace the public theaters and with the help of one of the greatest actors and artistic connoisseurs of his time, Schröder, gives the national stage a perfection previously unattained anywhere. He forms an excellent Italian opera for the public furtherance of singing and artistic taste. In him every art, every science, of whose value he is persuaded, has found a patron saint.[11]

Not the least among the many ways in which the liberal cosmopolitan atmosphere in Joseph's Vienna benefited music

was the increase in musical activity in the palatial homes of the city's affluent as soon as the curtailment of court patronage took effect. Since material conditions, both physical and financial, virtually excluded operatic performances even in the most lavish of aristocratic residences, instrumental music received an unprecedented boost in prestige. But to some extent this newly enhanced role of instrumental music was also due to the ethnic backgrounds of the principal families involved, many of whom hailed from Hungary and Bohemia. "It has been said," Charles Burney observed in the 1770's, "that the Bohemian nobility keep musicians in their houses: but in keeping servants it is impossible to do otherwise, as all the children of the peasants and trades people, in every town and village throughout the kingdom of Bohemia are taught music in the common reading schools, except in Prague, where, indeed, it is no part of school-learning; the musicians being brought thither from the country."[12]

The significance of non-Austrians (in the narrow sense of the term) in the creation of material and aesthetic conditions conducive to the kind of qualitative luxury embodied in the music of the Viennese classical composers can hardly be overemphasized. It was Prince Galitzin who engaged Mozart for all of his concerts in the winter of 1782, and during the next season Mozart played regularly also at Counts Johann Eszterhazy and Zichy. Between February 26 and April 3, 1784, i.e. in five weeks, Mozart by his own accounting played five times at Galitzin's and nine times at Eszterhazy's. As Otto Jahn pointed out a long time ago, these aristocratic soirées represented Mozart's greatest source of income. And when Baron van Swieten became the center of serious musical activity, especially through his Sunday morning concerts at the court library, his associates included Counts Apponyi, Batthyany, Franz Esterhazy and, inevitably, those fanatic music lovers, the brothers-in-law Lobkowitz and Schwarzenberg.

The summer concerts at the *Augarten* initiated in 1782, which included Mozart as performer and/or composer from the outset, attracted a growing audience from the upper middle class sector, as did all subscription concerts held in public places. When Mozart, nearly two years after the first *Augarten* season, reported to his father that he had enrolled one hundred subscribers for three concerts at six gulden each, he listed also several wealthy Jewish families who vied with the landed

aristocracy from Bohemia and Hungary for leadership in the conversion process from quantitative to qualitative luxury.[13] Indeed, the qualitative development of music, "the favorite art of the middle class, the form in which it can express its emotional life more directly, and with less hindrance than any other,"[14] could not but profit from an enlightened despotism that deprecated lavish personal patronage while encouraging "pre-democratic" values and creating the conditions necessary for the artistic amalgamation of the diverse tastes and musical practices of the various socio-economic and ethnic groups that populated Joseph's vast multi-national realm. That his reforms left their marks well into the 19th century, even though some of the restrictions he had sought to abolish forever were eventually reinstated, is confirmed by Reichardt who wrote in 1809:

> In the mild and imperceptible gradations from the higher princely nobility, with an annual income of a million, a half million, or a quarter of a million gulden, to the lesser courtly nobility, with an income of a hundred thousand gulden or over, from thence to the petty new nobility, who not infrequently have and spend as much, if not still more—the bankers and great landowners and manufacturers are included here; and so on through the bourgeoisie proper down to the well-to-do petite bourgeoisie; in the way that all the great public diversions and amusements are enjoyed by all classes without any abrupt divisions or offending distinctions—in these respects, Vienna is again quite alone among the great cities of Europe.[15]

After the Congress of Vienna, as Prince Metternich began to impose his particular brand of authoritarianism on the Empire, the city in which Mozart had settled in 1781, Haydn in 1789, and Beethoven in 1792, re-dedicated itself to the quantitative luxury of what Eduard Hanslick so bitterly denounced as "the musical bric-a-brac typical of a period of intellectual inactivity and the greatest political degeneration in Austria."[16] In the days of Joseph II, when power made a first attempt to serve the people, Mozart assembled on stage three different strata of society, each represented by a different band but all enjoying themselves in the same ballroom at the invitation of an aristocratic host who welcomes his guests in the name of liberty. Half a century later, once again mere servants of power, the people of Vienna had little choice but to dance their troubles away to the tunes of Joseph Lanner and Johann Strauss father. Generations were to pass before the gradual restoration of qualitative luxury in a

climate of relative personal freedom and social equality produced conditions favorable to the formation of another, hardly less differentiated, "Viennese School."

NOTES

[1] Burney, Charles, *A General History of Music* (London, 1789), 2:958.

This article is based on the author's paper read at the AMS National Meeting, New Haven, December, 1968.

[2] *Ibid.*, 960.

[3] Hans Engel, "Sources of the Classical Idiom," *International Musicological Society, Report of the Eighth Congress, New York, 1961* (Kassel, 1961), 1:285. See also his "Haydn, Mozart und die Klassik," *Mozart Jahrbuch* (1959), 51.

[4] Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* (New York, 1941), 625.

[5] Werner Sombart, *Luxus und Kapitalismus* (Munich and Leipzig, 1913), 71.

[6] *Ibid.*, 94.

[7] Cf. Romain Rolland, *Musiciens d'autrefois*, 3rd rev. ed. (Paris, 1912), 213.

[8] The pertinent letter to Cardinal Herzan, the imperial minister in Rome, is quoted in R. W. Harris, *Absolutism and Enlightenment, 1660–1789* (New York, 1966), 221.

[9] The term "white revolution," coined by the present Shah of Iran, would seem to fit Joseph II's revolutionary reforms admirably.

[10] Cf. *The Letters of Mozart and his Family*, transl. and annotated by Emily Anderson (New York, 1966), 2:745.

[11] Johann Friedrich Reichardt, *Vertraute Briefe Geschrieben auf einer Reise nach Wien und den Österreichischen Staaten zu Ende des Jahres 1808 und zu Anfang 1809*, ed. by Gustav Gugitz (Munich, 1915), 2:168–69.

[12] Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces* (London, 1775), 11–12.

[13] For Mozart's own complete listing of subscribers see *The Letters of Mozart . . .*, 870–72.

[14] Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art* (New York, 1958), 3:82.

[15] This particular excerpt from Reichardt's previously cited letter appears in *Source Readings in Music History*, transl. and annotated by Oliver Strunk (New York, 1950), 730.

[16] Eduard Hanslick, *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien* (Vienna, 1869), 367.