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About Leopold Mozart's Pedagogical Principles*

Irina P. Susidko[1] ✉, Pavel V. Lutsker[2]

[1,2]Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, Russian Federation
[1,2]State Institute for Art Studies, Moscow, Russian Federation
[1]i.susidko@gnesin-academy.ru ✉, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2343-7726
[2]p.lucker@gnesin-academy.ru, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4456-4460

Abstract. The basis for the article has been served by a fragment of the monograph *Mozart and His Time* (2008) written by the authors of this article. The center of attention for this study lies in the principles of the pedagogical style of Leopold Mozart, who was able to create the conditions for the intensive development of his son's ingenious musical abilities. The authors highlight the broad cultural thesaurus of Mozart the elder, his knowledge of various languages, the exact sciences and the natural sciences, which made it possible for him to teach by himself the basics of the school subjects to his children. Special attention in the article is devoted to Leopold Mozart's treatise *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (1756). The present book provides a perspective not only of musical pedagogy of that time, but also of the personal qualities of the elder Mozart as an instructor. While demonstrating an exceptional pedagogical sensibility and far-sightedness, Leopold Mozart assumed that teaching music and the different sciences at the first stage is inseparable from play. Although the documents according to which it would be possible to judge of the upbringing of his son during the latter's infancy are absent, an extrinsic characterization of these methods is established in the article on the basis of his correspondence with Nannerl during the years when Leopold ended up having to provide for his grandson. The authors also examine Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's pedagogical practice, proving the impact of his father's principles of upbringing on it.

Keywords: Leopold Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, musical education, musical upbringing, pedagogical principles, *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* by Leopold Mozart

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Translated by Elizabeth Wilson.

Introduction

Leopold Mozart possessed God-given gifts as a teacher, and in this perhaps, lay his greatest talent and his main life work. One may make as many judgements as one likes about his personal qualities and defects, and one may agree with Alfred Einstein that not all his features are equally attractive. [1, p. 23] But one cannot take away from Leopold the great skill in used in bringing up his son, allowing his gifts to freely flourish and to develop organically. Wolfgang was undoubtedly predisposed to be a *wunderkind*, but that he became one is very much the merit of his father.

Mozart the elder had received an university education, knew his Latin and Greek, spoke French, Italian and English and was instructed in history, maths, geometry, physics, chemistry, mineralogy, biology and astronomy, [2, p. 12] in other words he was an enlightened person. He preferred not to send his children away to school or put them into the hands of private teachers: neither Nannerl nor Wolfgang had any other teacher but their father. It was he who taught them the basis of the various sciences, and after ascertaining their musical gifts, took them away from the provincial world of Salzburg and introduced them to the wider European scene. Few of his circle would have been able to so fully acquaint their offspring with the culture and nature of different countries, achieving this through travel rather than merely from books.

Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing as a Mirror of Leopold Mozart's Personality

Leopold possessed a musical and pedagogical authority of the highest order. His *Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing* published in the year of his son's birth (1756),[1] stands beside the best methodological text books of the time, following Johann Joachim Quantz's *On playing the Flute* (1752) and C. P. E. Bach's *Essay on the True Art of playing Keyboard Instruments* (1753). In his labour Mozart shows himself as a true son of the 18th century; persuasive in advocating the close connection between performance technique and expression, he gives a mass of information on general musical subjects as well as more specialised advice as to the niceties of violin playing (for more about this see: [3; 4; 5]). One cannot but agree with Abert's judgement: "*The Violin School* is at the same time a school of musical thought." [6, p. 63] It is of interest not only because it allows us to form a concept of music teaching of the time, but, no less than the correspondence, it helps us reconstruct Leopold's personality, to form an image of him as instructor and teacher.

To judge by his *Treatise*, Mozart the elder had an exceptionally strong temperament, and when he wanted his way he did not stand on ceremony in expressing himself. Amongst many other such passages, this is an example:

> For what can be more insipid than the playing of one who has not confidence to attack the violin boldly, but scarce touches the strings with the bow…; and makes so artificial and whispering a sound right up against the bridge of the violin that only the hissing of a note here and there is heard and the listener knows not what is meant thereby; for everything is merely like unto a dream? [7, p. 96]

A careful reader will surely discover that at certain times Mozart in his Treatise coincides almost word for word with the treatises of Quantz and Bach. But while Bach remains

[1] Ten years later it was translated into Dutch and published in The Hague; a Russian translation appeared in 1804.

restrained and dignified in the manner of a mentor, Leopold is vigorous and inventive in his brilliant and sometimes almost virulent characterisations. Here is Bach on virtuosi: "…a mistaken prejudice is the view that the chief virtue of piano-playing — is agility." And again: "Even the most brilliant dexterity cannot claim to have great merit in the playing of those musicians able to stimulate profound emotions." [8, p. 290–291] Such a manner of expression conveys not so much criticism but a gentle reproach, a circumstantial pedagogical aphorism. Mozart expresses himself differently: where there is no characterisation, there is an opulent image; where there is no aphorism, we are given a proverb. On violinists and lovers of the tremolo, he speaks of "performers (…) who tremble consistently on each note as if they had the palsy." [7, p. 203] Or on ineffective composers: "There exist, unfortunately, enough of such would-be composers, who themselves either will not indicate the style of a good performance, or 'put a patch by the side of the hole'."[2] And again: "Many a would-be composer is thrilled with delight and plumes himself anew when he hears his musical Galimatias played by good performers who know how to produce the effect (of which he himself never dreamed) in the right place." [Ibid., p. 215] Here Leopold is so scathing, that we should hardly wonder at the reason for his son's no less witty and uncompromising assessment of his colleagues.

The Principles of Leopold Mozart's Upbringing: Learning through Play

Another of his qualities was the ability to grasp precisely what was needed to educate each pupil. Leopold was convinced that a teacher must develop the skills of a pupil gradually, and demand constant, intensive practice. This notwithstanding the view of certain parents, who were only too glad if their ward could "but scratch out a few minuets. Yea, many a time the parents or other guardians wish to hear that sort of untimely little dance at an early stage, and then think miracles have happened, and how well the money for the lessons has been spent." [Ibid., p. 61] He enthusiastically applied all these principles to the professional education of his own children, getting them used, easily and without coercion, to daily practice. He wrote about this with great pride to Lorenz Hagenauer from Munich in 1766:

> God, (who has been far too good to me, a miserable sinner,) has bestowed such talents on my children that, apart from my duty as a father, they alone would spur me on to sacrifice everything to their successful development. Every moment I lose is lost for ever. And if I ever guessed how precious for youth is time, I realize it now. You know that my children are accustomed to work. But if with the excuse that one thing prevents another they were to accustom themselves to hours of idleness, my whole plan would crumble to pieces. [9, p. 232][3]

Nevertheless Leopold's method and the way he applied it to his own children was far from the idea of mere banal training. Because of his lively nature and susceptibility, Wolfgang was not the kind of child who would have reacted well to a monotonous practice routine. Leopold possessed an incredibly acute awareness and sensitivity in his pedagogical approach, and at the beginning he made sure that the study of music and science was never disassociated from play.

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[2] A tailor's expression and means a person, who does not understand his craft. The patch must be set over the hole! [7, p. 124].

[3] Letter dated 15th November 1766.

Documents that would allow us to learn more about Leopold's relationship to his son in the first years of his life are sorely lacking. Almost all the sources, including the reminiscences of Nannerl, and Schatner's famous letter written at her request in 1792, begin their story with Wolfgang at the age of three. Yet there are also the letters that Leopold wrote to Nannerl in 1786–1787, when she gave him her son, Leopold (named after his grandfather) to bring up.[4] The little Leopold spent the first two years of his life in his grandfather's house. Leopold's relationship to his grandson was in no way merely limited to a guardianship of the infant. At sixty six years of age, all the wiser for his long life experience, it would seem that he enjoyed a second youth while looking after his grandson, giving him an upbringing and teaching him[5]:

January 1786, the boy is six months old. "Leopoldl kisses you in reply, smiles, sputters, and is often so joyful. His peasant farmyard[6] is filling up, now he has a horse and knight, with a beautiful red silk ribbon attached. There is a whistle on the horse's rump."

A week later. "Leopoldl is in great form, everybody suspects that he is teething, a little too early perhaps <…>, usually he is very jolly and plays with his old Tarot cards."

Summer of 1786, the boy is one year old. "Leopoldl is healthy, and I allowed him to be taken today to Herr Schidenhofen (after his numerous requests), where he played with the other children for two hours most happily and with the greatest of pleasure."

Two days later. "Leopolderl played figures with the small girl with great enjoyment. Because of the doll Salome Musch,[7] which we found in the attic, was not to his liking, he threw it away. But he warmed greatly to the little girl; and in this he is like his father and grandfather, it is a natural thing."

Two months later. "Leopoldl is sitting opposite me and playing… with his horses and his skittles, and so on and so on; he his contented and calm while I write."

End of November 1786. "Happy little Leopolderl, who is reading *bla bla bla* in his little book, and kisses you."

December 1786. "Leopoldl is well, and is singing from music."

January 1787. "Leopoldl is merry, and shouts "Mo Mo," when he sees his bowl with yellow turnip (Merren), which he likes eating best. He sends you a kiss. He can distinctly annunciate his *As* and *Bs*, and I play with him by teaching him letters not in their usual order, but those which are easiest for him to say. When I tell him about God and ask "Have you already prayed?", he points to the crucifix over the door and begins 'praying': *bla bla bla.*"

Mid January 1787. "Leopoldl is keeping well, and is very jolly; if he holds on to something, he can stand quite freely. <…> In the evening, when he doesn't want to go to bed, I say I am going off to lie down in his bed and leave the room. Then he rushes to overtake me, and when he is tucked up in bed, he smiles with delight since he has managed to trick me."

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[4] Leopold Alios Pantaleon (1785–1840) later became a government official, and served for the most part in the Tyrol. He had a daughter (his son died soon after being christened) and two grandchildren who were born only after his death.

[5] These facts are described most fully in the monograph by G. G Bauer. [10] We use his exposition of these facts as a basis.

[6] A toy carved from wood.

[7] Salome Musch was Nannerl's favourite doll, which received its exotic name in honour of the old cook who served the Mozart family.

The end of January 1787. "Leopoldl kisses you, and he can already say: Nana — Nandel, Bü — little book [Büchl], Mo — Moor [Mohren], Ge — money [Geld], Wa — carriage [Wagen]." [10, p. 23–25]

And so, the little Leopold had lots of toys, horses carved from wood, figures, dolls, whistles, skittles, balls. And besides that, a pack of Tarot cards, which, together with other cards decorated with drawings of birds witches and so forth, served in those times as a rather idiosyncratic substitute for children's picture-books. It is quite likely that in his infancy Wolfgang too also looked at cards with images of diverse animals, birds, dancing buffoons, witches on broomsticks. Leopold gave them to his grandson when he was one and a half years old, whereas such toys are usually given to children at a later age. At 18 months the boy is "reading" a book, and is singing "from the music"! Of course, this could not be real reading or singing. But through engaging in play Leopold was able to encourage his grandson's gradual development through imitation, "reading" and "writing" just like his Grandad. And of course, a child growing up in a musician's house will have also been given manuscript paper. An experienced teacher, who is methodical and persistent will observe the child's progress in pronouncing different sounds, and then in transforming them into meaningful syllables. Yet at the same time there is nothing forced, everything remains within the boundaries of a game, as if it was all "by the way." Leopold the elder was an acute observer: Leopoldl plays with pleasure, with enjoyment, cheerfully; he is merry and happy — just like his grandfather!

Such precious evidence of this early contact between Leopold and his grandson allows us to assume that Wolfgang's upbringing followed similar lines. Of course, Leopold in the middle of the 1750s was unable to give so much time and attention to his son as he was to his grandson, for then he was in service and had little time left over work. But the general principles employed were, without doubt, the same. Proof of this can be found in the way Wolfgang absorbed the ABCs of various branches of knowledge, as well as his and the way he instantly absorbed music in his first piano lessons. For as strict and methodological a teacher as Leopold was while teaching more grown-up students, for children he was ready to sacrifice all his principles so as to render their musical studies as easy and joyful as possible. In the small, but always clean and tidy apartment in Hagenauer's house, where the Mozart family lodged Wolfgang was allowed to scribble numbers to his heart's content all over the furniture, walls and floor. The boy couldn't wait to play in the evening, and indeed, his wishes were granted! We find in Nannerl's notebook such comments as "Wolgangerl wrote this minuet at 9.30 this evening." Even clearing away his toys — to the accompaniment of a March — became a fun activity, and what is more one filled with musical sense. Schachtner recalled that "any child whose hands were empty had to make up for it by either singing or playing a March on the violin." [5, p. 64]

Thus, it was undoubtedly thanks to his father that Wolfgang found learning so easy and pleasurable. In early childhood the act of playing created a truly sound psychological basis for learning, and furthermore through play the boy was able to achieve things of great complexity at an exceptionally intense and quick rate. Otherwise, he and Nannerl would hardly have been able to gain mastery of languages, of musical theory and not only practice, to study mathematics (Wolfgang specially loved Maths, and particularly asked his sister to send to Italy a textbook with arithmetical exercises), geography, history, literature, as well as starting to read books and getting to know the theatre. And all this was against the background of long concert tours, and incessant travelling and moving from place to place.

Just as Leopold was severe, and sometimes despotic and categorical when it came to morals, ethics or matters of everyday life, so conversely in his musical instruction to Wolfgang he showed himself to be both sensitive and tactful. This is most evident in the way he taught composition to his son. More likely than not, his Wolfgang's first little compositions were simply written-down versions of his improvisations. Thereafter followed small pieces where Leopold's intervention is more obvious, a fact acknowledged by all those writing about the "early" Mozart. The way he learnt composition in its various stages is of interest in itself, but the issue of greater importance is why should Leopold have written down the first "opuses" exactly as the "author" wanted? Why, in these fragile beginnings did he not instead try to show his son how to compose "correctly"? Most probably because he thought that the child should believe in his own worth, understanding that in principle any such initiative was in itself important, and that the boy's music had the same right to be recorded as that of "real" compositions by adult composers.

Even if the legend of the four year old Wolfgang composing a concerto does not hold water, it at least deserved to be invented, since it fits in so well with Leopold's pedagogical approach, where play and imitation were the two cornerstones. Therefore, the imitation of a serious compositional work (the writing of a score), even if it somehow reminds us of Leopoldl's "reading" and "prayers" (*bla bla bla*), would have allowed the father to see a good indication of his son's prospective talents.

When Wolfgang had accrued sufficient experience to start learning independently and absorb the widest range of musical influence, Leopold removed himself from his role of teacher. The *London notebook* is just another example of his wisdom (for more about this see: [11]). Of course, errors were made in the notebook, and in a series of things one could even say that Wolfgang had regressed a few steps. Nevertheless, Leopold did not retouch the sketches or interfere, he didn't make as much as one remark, allowing his son the chance to repeat the experience gained in his first pieces, but now at a completely different level — through writing down his improvisations and sketches, but now all on his own. This does not exclude the fact that Wolfgang might need his father's help in the future. But very gradually Leopold restrains his pedagogical involvement and withdraws into the shadows, exchanging the role of teacher for that of agent or manager.

From around 1768 when Wolfgang started receiving his first commissions for opera, first in Vienna and then in Italy, Leopold was only involved in the business side of these projects, following the reactions of the singers and instrumentalists, resisting intrigues and defending the interests of his son.[8] The most difficult situation occurred in Vienna during work on the *La Finta Semplice* (*The Feigned Simpleton*) in 1768:

> In order to convince the public of what it really amounts to, I decided to do some thing entirely out of the ordinary, that is, to get Wolfgang to write an opera for the theatre. Can you not imagine what a turmoil secretly arose amongst those composers? What? To-day we are to see a Gluck and to-morrow a boy of twelve seated at the harpsichord and conducting his own opera? Yes, despite all those who envy him! I have even won Gluck over to our side, though, I admit, only to this extent that, though he is not quite whole-hearted, he has decided not to let it be noticed; for our patrons are his also. In order to make our position safe in regard to the actors, who usually

[8] About Leopold Mozart's role in organizing Wolfgang's performances in 1764–1765 see: [12].

> cause the composer most annoyance, I have taken up the matter with them and one of them has given me all the suggestions for the work. But to tell you the truth, it was the Emperor himself who first gave me the idea of getting little Wolfgang to write an opera. For he asked the boy twice whether he would like to compose an opera and conduct it himself? [9, p. 257][9]

One feels Leopold's iron grip in the organisational planning, for which he displayed an inherent talent. In the heat of the moment, he even took credit for the idea of writing an opera for Vienna, although he then curbed his instincts, and indicated Joseph II as originator of the project. Leopold had it all worked out. He won Gluck, the most influential of Mozart's potential enemies, over to his side, he made contact with all the performers, in other words he did everything that a composer usually does himself, tasks which the youthful Wolfgang was most likely unable to handle. It is true that not all his manoeuvres were crowned with success. Evil-wishers and the envious continued their attack, criticising the music and blaming Wolfgang for his poor knowledge of Italian, accusing his Father of having composed the work for him. Leopold had to energetically counteract these accusations by promoting his son's case, making use of techniques akin to today's PR:

> As soon as I heard this, I made it quite clear in the most eminent quarters that Hasse, the father of music, and the great Metastasio had stated that the slanderers who spread this report should go to them and hear out of their own mouths that thirty operas have been performed in Vienna, which in no respect can touch the opera of this boy… I asked someone to take any portion of the works of Metastasio, open the book and put before little Wolfgang the first aria which he should hit upon. Wolfgang took up his pen and with the most amazing rapidity wrote, without hesitation and in the presence of several eminent persons, the music for this aria for several instruments. [9, p. 271][10]

Leopold's managerial activities display the same vivid talent and temperament as were inherent in his teaching. He always knew with certainty exactly what was essential to his son at each given moment. And in the professional sphere he rarely set a foot wrong, for he was guided by a sincere belief in Wolfgang's unique gifts:

> And if it is ever to be my duty to convince the world of this miracle, it is so now, when people are ridiculing whatever is called a miracle and denying all miracles. Therefore they must be convinced. And was it not a great joy and a tremendous victory for me to hear a Voltairian say to me in amazement: "Now for once in my life I have seen a miracle; and this is the first!" [Ibid., p. 272][11]

The Pedagogical Practice of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and the Source of Its Influence

Later, in his adult years, after starting his own teaching practice, Wolfgang would continuously appeal to Leopold's experience. During his trip to Paris, he wrote — not without pride — that his advice in regard to the musical education of young daughters was listened to attentively by their fathers (Johann Andreas Stein, Christian Cannabich, Johann Karl von Branca, Joseph Konrad von Hamm and others). "She is now at least half my pupil," "in learning with me, she will be able to play well and accurately," "he now asks my advice in all matters,"

[9] Letter dated 30 January 1768.

[10] Letter dated 30 July 1768.

[11] Letter dated 30 July 1768.

"for an amateur she plays rather well, and that is really thanks to me" — these remarks, to be found in Mozart's letters, leave one in no doubt that he strove to attain his father's level in his pedagogical activity, even if he never attempted to hide how teaching heavily weighed on him. In answer to Leopold's exhortations to set off for Paris as soon as possible, he rather accurately sums up his chances in the French capital:

> I will be unable to get any employment there apart from teaching, and I was not born for such work. I have a fine example right here in Mannheim. I could have two pupils. I went to each of their homes three times; then I did not find one of them there, although he should have been waiting for me. I am very willing to give lessons out of kindness, especially when I see that genius, joyfulness and pleasure can be gained from my teaching. But when one has to appear at a house at a particular hour or wait for a pupil at home, I simply cannot bear to do it, however much I might earn. I find it absolutely intolerable. [13, p. 264][12]

Nevertheless, Wolfgang had by necessity to take up private teaching (he was not free from this occupation for the rest of his life), and whether willingly or not he was bound to recall his father's lessons. The act of play could be a panacea even when working with pupils far less gifted than he was himself. Teaching the daughter of Duke de Guines, a good harpist whose father wished to have her instructed in composition, Mozart attempted several different approaches:

> Amongst other things it entered my head to compose a really simple Minuet and see if she could write a variation. All was in vain. Well, I thought to myself, she simply doesn't know where to begin. So I then made a variation of the first bar, and told her to continue in the same vein, sticking to this *idèe*. At last she was able to do something. When she had completed it, I asked her if she would not like to try to start something by herself. Just the main voice, the melody. She thought about it for a whole quarter of an hour, but nothing came of it. Then I wrote 4 bars of a Minuet and told her: "Look what an ass I am: I started a Minuet and can't even finish the first part. Please be so kind as to complete it." [Ibid., p. 357][13]

And so to start with, an attempt at normal instruction following the principle "Do as I do." This task however requires independent solutions, and soon steered the pupil into a dead-end. Then Wolfgang suggests an exercise well known to all teachers — to complete an already-started composition. So as to diffuse the atmosphere after the young Duchess' painful and evidently unsuccessful attempts to invent something on her own, Mozart facilitates the task by adding a playful twist to the situation. All this is reminiscent of the methods from Leopold's didactic arsenal, which he used to persuade his little grandson to go off to bed. Of course, in associating with a pupil from the upper echelons of society, the jestful situation inevitably acquires a hint of conventional gallantry, but nevertheless the approach remains basically the same. It is hard to say how much Wolfgang's negative relationship to teaching was conditioned exclusively by his inner impulses and tendencies. He willingly gave advice on teaching methods even to those who actually had not asked for it, and was passionate in his teaching of Aloysia Weber, even though he could have spent the time otherwise with the girl with whom he was in love; all this goes to prove that he indeed possessed a pedagogical talent inherited from his father. Only he was never blessed with the good fortune to have a student of his own calibre.

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[12] Letter dated 7 February 1778.

[13] Letter dated 14 May 1778.

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Information about the authors:

Irina P. Susidko — Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor, Head of the Department of Analytical Musicology, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music; Leading Researcher at the Department of Classical Western Art, State Institute for Art Studies, Moscow, Russian Federation.

Pavel V. Lutsker — Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor of the Department of Analytical Musicology, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music; Leading Researcher at the Department of Classical Western Art, State Institute for Art Studies, Moscow, Russian Federation.

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