

REVIEWS



BOOKS

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GÜNTHER G. BAUER, TRANSLATED BY RAY FLANAGAN

MOZART: A GREAT LOVER OF GAMES

Bad Honnef: Karl Heinrich Bock, 2006

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A carnivalesque impulse repeatedly finds expression in Mozart's life and works. Various documents, most of them directly accessible to study, bear witness to his remarkable capacity for inventing personal entertainments. Foremost among these are the *Bäse-Briefe*, with their rhetorical trick-work, his facetious entries in Nannerl's *Tagebuch*, accounts of practical jokes played on friends, and, as one might expect, a number of jests attached to a musical context, including the 'obscene' canons, the pantomime with music performed during a masked assembly, κ446, the comical trio for soprano, tenor and bass with strings 'Liebes Mandel, wo ist's Bandel?', κ441, and the satire on poor musicianship *Ein musikalischer Spaß*, κ522.

However, when it comes to Mozart's involvement with the established pastimes of his day – competitive play governed by well-defined rules and aims – the documentary record, with a few exceptions, offers little substantive evidence. This is hardly surprising: play is by definition a lived experience, and written records are hardly ever kept. In his book Günther Bauer takes up this challenge and attempts a comprehensive reconstruction of Mozart's gaming environment. The present English translation will bring his valuable discoveries to the attention of a wider readership.

A games manual first published in the year of Mozart's birth makes a telling assertion: 'Taking part in games is such a common practice today, and in better circles such a necessary accomplishment, that one can hardly claim to be a proper society person if one is totally inexperienced in the art of playing' (224). Games did indeed form a permanent accompaniment to daily existence in eighteenth-century Austria, and Bauer investigates closely the principal types known to Mozart: (1) the games of Mozart's childhood, (2) shaft-shooting in Salzburg, (3) card games, (4) billiards and skittles, (5) party games, (6) festivities and masquerade balls and (7) lotto.

Since almost nothing can be said with any certainty about Mozart's nursery games, Bauer offers an analysis of the educational games Leopold employed with his grandson and presents a fascinating list of toys available for purchase in 1791. He also evokes the outdoor games probably enjoyed by Wolfgang and Nannerl, folk melodies they may have sung, the children they may have played with, the places they may have played in and the kinds of distraction that may have enlivened the long carriage journeys of their youth. In this chapter, and indeed throughout the book, readers may not warm to recurring qualifications (as so much necessarily remains uncertain) and the occasional unwarranted use of strong assertions (doubtlessly a result of the author's understandable enthusiasm). Footnotes often refer us to the author's previous articles rather than directly to a source, making it unclear what evidential support is being provided. In the main, however, Bauer's speculative reconstructions are entirely plausible.

The second chapter, one of the most satisfying, provides a very full picture of shaft-shooting in Salzburg. A winter game played indoors on Sundays and holidays, shaft-shooting involved firing darts from airguns at



painted wooden target discs, which often bore ribald illustrations and verses provided in rotation by members of the shooting company. Shooting was invariably followed by card-playing sessions and, from time to time, by group outings to the theatre or to masquerades. The rituals and nomenclature of this communal entertainment – frequently evoked in the Mozart family correspondence and Nannerl's diary – are made fully intelligible here and two features stand out in particular: a variety of shaft-shooting prizes meant that there was never just one winner, while the conversational ambience fostered camaraderie between the sexes during a period when a certain segregation was still the norm.

Existing records imply that Mozart was an enthusiastic card player. But did he ever take part in high-stakes gambling? And, if so, was this because he enjoyed risk-taking or simply because such gambling was an almost mandatory activity in the affluent circles he frequented? The topic of Mozart and gambling is always likely to remain controversial. On the basis of the evidence adduced by Bauer, including a review of opinions on Mozart's finances and reflections on the infamous 'Zettel' (a slip of paper bearing cryptic annotations in Mozart's hand), all that can safely be concluded is the following: it is *certain* that Mozart regularly played cards for small stakes when in Salzburg and during travels; it is *likely* that he continued playing such games when living independently in Vienna; and it is *possible* that he won and lost large sums of money playing illegal games of chance during his Viennese decade.

It is well known that Mozart possessed his own billiards table – a sign of commitment and also of prestige – and Bauer gives us a particularly interesting section on the billiards room in Mozart's final residence. Bauer suggests, however, that Constanze's support for the posthumous view of Mozart as 'passionate player of billiards' was motivated by a wish to distract attention from his passion for less acceptable games. Fashionable, health-promoting and 'scientific', billiards was considered a noble pastime. But any consideration of the playing of billiards at this time still evokes the idea of gambling, as betting on the games of professionals in coffee houses was a common pursuit. In any case, as Bauer makes abundantly clear, all games were played for money. That convention extended also to outdoor skittles, a less onerous summer game, which, by law, even servants were allowed to play. The game was frequently enjoyed by Mozart during the Salzburg period (interestingly, the garden of the Dancemaster's house had its own small skittle alley), later in Vienna (see the horn duos K487 inscribed 'Vienna, 27 July 1786, during a game of skittles') and also in Prague (in the run-up to *Don Giovanni*, according to Georg Nikolaus von Nissen's biography of Mozart).

In addition to an overview of board games, riddles (including Mozart's own Carnival riddles), guessing games and fortune-telling entertainments, the chapter on party games offers a good contextualization of the 'calf-measuring' incident that caused a disagreement between Mozart and his future wife (see his letter of 29 April 1782). Constanze, in Mozart's absence, had consented to having her calves measured by a young man during a game of forfeits. Although she had freely told her sisters about it without embarrassment, we can better understand Mozart's concern when we are reminded that women, who did not wear underclothes at that time, were effectively naked from the knee up under their dresses. In such circumstances, measuring calves could become a somewhat risqué procedure.

Bauer next surveys the world of the fancy-dress ball. He addresses the expenses involved in both organizing and attending public balls (also discussing balls in coffee houses and private residences), explores the full range of popular costume types and amply quotes from contemporary regulations and reports (with special insights being provided by the 1752 Ball Statutes of Vienna). This section is completed by a summary analysis of the Mozart family's attendance at masquerades and some brief comments on the music Mozart wrote for such celebrations.

The final chapter provides a brief history of the lotto in late eighteenth-century Europe, including mention of the 1770 Salzburg lotto scandal, regulatory decrees and numerous quotations from contemporary documents evoking the darker side of the gaming world. Bauer argues that Mozart, at the very least, was interested in public lotteries and may occasionally have entered them himself. The few references to lotto in existing documents are examined – Bauer speculates that jottings on some scores may be lottery numbers – and supplemented by an evocative photograph of a lotto set designed for the home (such as the Mozarts may have used in the summer of 1783).



Many of the illustrations throughout the book deserve special mention: photographs of authentic playing cards and other games equipment, engravings depicting blind-man's buff, billiards sessions, skittle alleys, card-playing, lottery draws and a 'Magic Flute' board game from 1793. These function as an important complement to the bittersweet scenes from French genre painting commonly put forward as standard representations of play in eighteenth-century pictorial art.

Games certainly contributed to social advancement and to psychological well-being, but they were also a form of 'thought in action'. Indeed, one of the games manuals cited by Bauer defends card-playing as a purposeful activity: 'One is confronted with one's own passions and learns how to control them. One discovers ... how to come to quick and appropriate decisions ... [and] one develops the habit of noticing everything, devising strategies and carrying out plans of action' (147). Readers might wish that Bauer had included fuller descriptions of the playing strategies for each of the card games Mozart played regularly (tarot, tresette, schmierer, ombre, brandeln). One would then be better placed to ascertain whether game-playing as a cognitive activity influenced Mozart's creative process in any way.

Needless to say, Bauer is to be congratulated for having single-handedly brought a new sub-discipline of Mozart studies into being. Moreover, his book implicitly throws into question the validity of any future account of Mozart and his times that does not acknowledge the fundamental importance of the sphere of play.

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HAYDN AND THE PERFORMANCE OF RHETORIC

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'Haydn ... is never going to wind up on the cover of any book about philosophy. And no one ever called Beethoven a "clever orator"', notes Mark Evan Bonds in his contribution to this collection of essays on Haydn and his musical rhetoric (127–128). True, old stereotypes die hard, but if the Haydn experts featured in this book have anything to do with it, both of Bonds's assertions might be productively revisited in the near future. 'Rhetoric' in Haydn's music, these scholars argue, needs to be understood in terms that are interdisciplinary, intertextual and multivalent. Thus the work of Haydn as 'clever orator' can encompass the expression of concepts such as fantasy, suppressed desire and the grotesque. As one might expect, the eleven essays that make up this volume deal with metaphors of language and discourse as they relate to music. Yet the terms in which metaphors such as oration and conversation are understood and applied are far from simplistic.

Perhaps the most imaginative essay in the collection, though something of a *primus inter pares* in this respect, is Elisabeth Le Guin's opening piece, 'A Visit to the Salon de Parnasse'. This essay *en forme d'une conversation* places our twenty-first-century subject in the salon of Madame Suzanne Necker, in the august company of Denis Diderot, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Germaine de Staël, together with the Viennese commentators Johann Pezzl, Caroline Pichler and the Freiherr Adolph Knigge. In these enviable circumstances, Le Guin can discuss the very notion of a 'rhetoric of conversation' and can consider how this might apply to a test case: Haydn's Trio in A flat major, HXV:14. While the reader might find it disconcerting to encounter familiar terms from such works as Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues* in the course of this conversation, the quotations are so expertly combined that one finds oneself excusing Rousseau and others