

# The Chronology of Mozart's Works

by Robert D. Levin

From the outset, Mozart research has been chronologically oriented. This is because we have considerable documentary information on the dates that a majority of works were composed. This stems from three sources:

1. The autograph manuscripts. Many of them bear a date – the year; the month and year; or the day, month, and year.
2. The family correspondence. Much of this has survived intact. It cites many works precisely enough to provide accurate dating information.
3. Most valuable of all, Mozart's thematic catalogue of his works, a document begun in 1784 and continued until shortly before his death. The opening measures of each work appear, together with the scoring and a date.

Enough was known of these documents over a century ago for Otto Jahn, the first scholarly Mozart biographer, to have relied upon them in the preparation of his epoch-making biography. When he learned that Ludwig Ritter von Köchel was planning a chronological catalogue of Mozart's works, Jahn turned over all relevant files to Köchel.

The first edition of Köchel's catalogue appeared in 1862. In his foreword, Köchel explained how he had prepared the catalogue, stating how many works were dated by Mozart in one of the three sources and how many he had to date by conjecture. The numbers in this catalogue, which runs to 626 entries plus an appendix (*Anhang*) of lost, fragmentary, and dubious/spurious works, are still in common use today.

Over the years previously unknown works and documents have come to light, lost works have resurfaced, and new perspectives and methods have led to a reevaluation of Köchel's initial datings. The second edition of the catalogue, edited by Paul Graf von Waldersee in 1905, made a small number of changes and additions to the catalogue, but left its basic shape unchanged. In particular, Waldersee declined to reorder works whose chronological ordering by Köchel was proven incorrect. He felt that such inaccuracies were preferable to the confusion of a new chronological listing. This view was overturned within several years. First, T  odor de Wyzewa and Georges de Saint-Foix published in 1912 the first two volumes of a vast, detailed "Essay in Critical Biography;" the third (1936), fourth (1939), and fifth (1946) volumes were completed by Saint-Foix after Wyzewa's death. Wyzewa and Saint-Foix deduced new documentary and stylistic elements to create a new chronological listing ^ their "Nouveau Classement." This listing never won general acceptance, but it greatly influenced Alfred Einstein, who edited the third edition of the K  chel catalogue (1937).

*This essay is copyright   1986/1991/2006 by the author — continues to next page.*

Einstein thoroughly reordered Köchel's catalogue, incorporating many of Wyzewa and Saint-Foix's redatings as well as his own. His solution to the confusion of renumbering was to use a combination of numbers plus letters (placing a new K. 494a between K. 494 and K. 495, for example). Einstein also incorporated all known lost works and fragments into the main listings for the first time; Köchel had included a few of these, but had consigned most of them to the *Anhang*. In so doing, Einstein had to deal with a corpus of undated material. The conjectures he made were based upon his personal intuition and his working methods, which hypothesized that fragments could be "twin works" to finished compositions of identical scoring, or belong to the same "circle of thoughts" as other completed works. Einstein's knowledge of Mozart was truly extraordinary, but there are limits to how far intuition can bridge documentary gaps.

The next revision of the Köchel catalogue was published in 1964. It was called the sixth edition, because unaltered reprints of the third edition, as revised by Einstein in 1948, were issued as the fourth and fifth editions. Prepared by a triumvirate of editors (Alexander Weinmann, Franz Giegling, and Gerd Sievers) with the help of additional consultants, it maintained Einstein's format of numbers plus letters, shifting around a certain number of works in the light of new data, and it reorganized the appendices into six new categories (A: Mozart's autograph copies of works by others; B: transcriptions by others of Mozart works; C: dubious and spurious works, numbered within a system of work categories designed for the New Mozart Edition (*Neue Mozart-Ausgabe*), which had begun publication in 1955; D: complete works editions of Mozart; E: the publishers of Mozart's music during his lifetime; F: facsimiles of Mozart manuscripts preserved in the Photogramm-Archiv in Vienna). The changes made by the editors of the sixth edition, like those by Einstein, often devolve from subjective musical taste. For instance, one work consigned to the dubious list was characterized as "Mozartian, but hardly by Mozart."

Subsequently, new works resurfaced while missing manuscripts have continued to turn up. A large part of the holdings of the Prussian State Library that vanished in 1945 have turned up, safe and sound, in Kraków, Poland. A fragmentary Larghetto and Allegro for Two Pianos was found in Czechoslovakia in 1962; symphonies known only from a catalogue listing their opening themes surfaced in West Germany and Denmark (the authenticity of the Denmark work is contested); and a remarkable modulating prelude for piano had been published from two separated and previously uncollated sources. In spite of the enormous destruction wrought by revolution and war since Mozart's death, we can probably expect to make acquaintance with further hitherto unknown compositions in the future.

Meanwhile, musicology has moved towards scientific criteria as dating methods. In Mozart scholarship, two musicologists have made outstanding contributions to the discipline: Wolfgang Plath and Alan Tyson. Plath's studies of Mozart's handwriting showed that minute, subtle changes of calligraphy can provide accurate clues to dating. Tyson has investigated paper types used by Mozart. Paper was expensive in the eighteenth century and was bought in small batches. Watermarks and idiosyncrasies of staff drawing, margins, etc., allow individual paper types to be distinguished from one another. For example, if Mozart wrote eight works on a given paper, and five of them are dated within a given period, we can presume that the others probably come from the same period. (The only exception might be a work written on an odd leaf of paper that could have remain unused over time.)

Copyright ©1986/1991/2006 by the author — continues to next page.

Plath and Tyson's work, conducted independently, showed remarkable unanimity in redating works by as much as ten years. Their research mandates a new edition of the Köchel catalogue. Although this may be some time in coming, the fruits of their ongoing research allow both specialists and the general public to evolve a more enlightened view of Mozart's development. To discover, for example, that Mozart's four completed horn concertos, once dated 1782 (No. 1), 1783 (No. 2), 1784 (No. 3), and 1786 (No. 4) are now ordered 1783 ("No. 2"), 1786 ("No. 4"), 1787 ("No. 3"), and 1790-91 ("No. 1") forces a major adjustment upon scholars, performers, and listeners. A work formerly thought to mark a turning point in Mozart's evolution will not fulfil that function if it turns out to have been composed eight years later. These continue to be exciting years for Mozart research; many of the recent changes of chronology are reflected in WHRB's Mozart Orgy.

Robert D. Levin ©

*Robert Levin is Dwight P. Robinson, Jr. Professor of the Humanities at Harvard. One of today's foremost Mozart scholars, he has written about Mozart in innumerable publications, including the Mozart Jahrbuch, and has completed a number of the works Mozart left in fragmentary form, including the Requiem (commissioned by the International Bach Academy, Stuttgart, Germany and premiered there in 1991) and the C-minor Mass (commissioned by Carnegie Hall and premiered there last year). Some of them, including his revision of the Symphonie Concertante, K. 297B (on which his monograph has been published by Pendragon Press), will be heard during this Orgy®.*

*Mr. Levin is also a noted keyboard artist, performing solo and with ensembles in Europe, America, Australia and Asia on the harpsichord, fortepiano, and modern piano. His Boston performances include appearances with the Boston Symphony Orchestra (most recently the world premiere of Yehudi Wyner's piano concerto, Chiavi in mano), the Handel and Haydn Society, the Gardner Museum and Harvard's Sanders Theatre and Paine Hall. Mr. Levin's recordings include the complete Bach keyboard concertos, English Suites and the Well-Tempered Clavier (on five instruments) for Hänssler, the complete Beethoven concertos for Deutsche Grammophon Archiv (with the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique and John Eliot Gardiner), a Mozart concerto cycle for Decca (with the Academy of Ancient Music and Christopher Hogwood), numerous chamber works and two Mozart concertos with the New York Philomusica and a series of duo recordings with violist Kim Kashkashian for ECM. He has just embarked on a Mozart piano sonata cycle for SONY/BMG.*

*This essay is copyright ©1986/1991/2006 by the author.*

WHRB is deeply grateful to Professor Levin for his many contributions to many of our projects, especially our Bach and Mozart Orgies ®, and in particular for his continuing advice and expertise on Mozart beginning with his activities as a member of the station, of which he was Program Director as an undergraduate. The first version of this essay appeared 20 years ago in our Program Guide, and Professor Levin has been gracious in his permission to reprint it, with some revisions, for our major Mozart undertakings.