

Mozart today: contemporary perceptions of Mozart

In his opening address at the conference “Mozart today: contemporary perceptions of Mozart” held on 13 and 14 October 2016 in Mozarthaus Vienna, a member of Wien Holding, director Gerhard Vitek invoked the two areas that were to be a constant focus in the reports from different perspectives that were to follow: on the one hand, the manifest fascination and veneration of an artistic genius as expressed in the various anniversary commemorations emanating from the prevailing educated middle-class tradition, and on the other hand the important role of Mozart in particular as a figurehead in marketing of all kinds. Based on his long study of the phenomenon, Gernot Gruber also pointed to Mozart’s continued popularity despite the visible decline in influence of so-called “high culture”. A major driving force behind this continued prominence, he said, was the emergence since the late 1970s of an alternative image of Mozart as an icon of popular culture in the widest sense, documented in the writing of the time (Hildesheimer) and in cinema and theatre (*Amadeus*). Since then, this traditional polarisation between the Apollonian and Dionysian image of the artist has shaped both academic and musical activity.

The academically informed performance of his works addressed in two presentations (Harald Haselmayr, Rainer Schwob with Bernadette Czapruga) and a talk with musical examples (Siegfried Mauser) was seen as a modern-day appropriation that breaks down and questions traditional (sound) patterns. Against this background, the interest generated by the spoken character of Mozart’s music derived from the “affective topoi of opera” in both new music (Mauser) and popular music (Paul Gulda) is a logical progression of – compared with the literal classical sense – an updated musical tradition. It is comparable in that regard with the sometimes radical forms of “director’s theatre” (Haselmayr), which also posits the existence or need for a concept of general validity in opposition to the updated appropriation. To that extent, the diverse expressions of present-day approaches to Mozart also give rise to a fundamental criticism of the “classical” paradigm itself, which might even be extended universally as far as the academic study (in German-language universities) of music, which sometimes overlooks the contribution of the different perceptions to the establishment of the concept itself (Volker Kalisch). By contrast, in terms of academic activity, the above-mentioned interpretation research (Schwob, Czapruga) and the digitised *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe*, now including recordings of the *Mozart Ton und Filmsammlung* (Till Reininghaus), offer clear demonstration of a broader approach to the composer that also embraces the potential of modern technology. Since Wolfgang Hildesheimer’s biography, there has also been an increasing interest in the corpus of Mozart’s writing (letters, poems, canons, etc.), which highlights the discrepancy between the traditional image passed down and the information from the writings, interpreted with the aid of more modern methodological approaches and under the influence of cultural turns (Werner Michler).

Images of Mozart in a globalised world also include biographical mangas, a medium similar to comics but with a quite different aim and significance, whose contents often reveal remarkable links with present-day perception patterns (Akiko Yamada).

Mozart as a marketing symbol was dealt with in particular in two presentations looking at the implications of the use of his name as a branding tool. From a historical perspective, Salzburg has seen an exponential increase in this practice (Monika Kröpfl, Oswald Panagl). The analysis of formal language also clearly reveals a connection with the content of the diametrically opposed traditional and popular perceptions, in other words the enduring and conservative image on the one hand, and the dynamic, fresh and revolutionary image on the other. Examples include publicity clips with Mozart’s music (Kröpfl), paralleling the use of musical quotations and arrangements in US feature films (Stefan Schmidl).

The last presentation (Manfred Wagner) dealt with the tasks and aims of modern art education and called for a new perception by museums of their function as education institutions whose potential for sensory communication of cultural values to future generations should not be underestimated. The final discussions centred mainly on the possibilities and challenges presented by Mozart’s music, once again confronting the traditional romantic and the historically informed performance styles and, with reference to the omnipresent and wholesale marketing of music, offering a fruitful contrast between the different points of view presented.