

Mozart Effect

Interpretation and integral recording of Mozart's piano Sonatas ("Aulicus")

Sebastiano Brusco

The Mozart Effect is a scientific theory developed by physicians Gordon Shaw e Frances Rauscher in 1993. They determined that listening to Mozart's music can induce a short-term improvement in the performance of mental tasks defined as spatial-temporal reasoning. Sebastiano Brusco's research uses this premise to demonstrate how Mozart's music has an enhanced effect on an audience.

Brusco's playing technique is characterized by authenticity and expressiveness prior to his arrival at the keyboard. This originates from an inner need to communicate the spirituality of music, rather than superficially spectacularize the performance.

In Mozart's piano music, Brusco has found space for freeing the personality of the interpreter, often caged in rigid and unchallenged academic practices of execution. Such rigidity has transformed Mozart's Sonatas, in the opinion of the public, into minor and frivolous pieces, closer to Rococo mannerism rather than to the *Don Giovanni* or the *Requiem*. Brusco has revealed that by employing a lower *diapason* tuning, instead of the one currently in use, he is able to enhance the directions of the harmonic paths that shape the Sonatas. He choose to employ the scientific tuning of 432 Hertz, which is thought to have been used by Mozart and used in the historical period in which the Sonatas were written, rather than today's 440-442 Hz or higher.

SEBASTIANO BRUSCO



Brusco's interpretation is characterised by in-depth study and his research of refined authenticity and originality. He has built his personality by following and elaborating on the teaching of schools which use interpretative flexibility. He trained with the historical Italian piano schools of Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli (directly from his disciple Ennio Pastorino), Alfredo Casella (with the direct line of Lya de Barberiis) and Aldo Ciccolini, with whom he was a student for 8 years.

THE PIANO SONATAS

Sebastiano Brusco is currently creating a CD recording set of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's eighteen piano sonatas. Through this significant endeavour, Brusco follows an aesthetic vision that enables the chamber music aspect of the Sonatas to acquire emotional depth and imaginative intensity. This is especially useful when compared to current interpretations that focus on structure and spectacle.



We could define Brusco's vision as post-modern, in that it transcends the last century's futuristic and anti-romantic trend after having assimilated it. The conventional interpretations often stem from a crystallized aesthetic on a standardised "mozartian" practice, characteristic of the late Baroque. Mozart's aim in the Sonatas, rather than to highlight the pianist's skills (Mozart labelled "mechanicus" whoever played with such intent), was to captivate his audience with his composer's genius, in order to obtain commissions for Operas, at that time the greatest ambition for a musician.

Mozart's music does not originate through instrumental improvisation - as with romantic pianism - but directly from his mind: only after having written it, the composer verified it on the keyboard. Brusco's aim is the re-creation of this imagined sound by evoking the human voice or an ensemble of strings or wind instruments, beyond the sound of the piano itself.

In Brusco's interpretation we perceive the intention to imitate the softness of melodrama voices, amplifying the dramatic theatricality. His daring freedom, if compared to current practices, is nonetheless perfectly in line with his artistic vision.



Brusco makes use of the modern piano's full potential: the timbres, the colours and the use of the pedals, offering an original Mozart without betraying his classical spirit. The care in the use of the pedal and the "classic" clarity seem to arise from a need of purity, not from a scholastic setting. For this purpose his performance on a modern piano fully achieves the aim of imitating the orchestral and vocal melodies, which are the essence of Brusco's research.

Although its sound is less crystalline than in a vintage fortepiano, the modern piano allows a distinct and softer outcome, at the same time harmonious and captivating.

For this reason Brusco prefers a softer tuning in order to enhance his contemplative and spiritual vision, rather than the dynamic-spectacle approach of contemporary virtuoso pianists. He adopted the "Scientific Tuning" with the LA at 432 Hertz, instead of the currently adopted 440-442 Hertz. The latter fits in with a modern need of power and impact in large concert halls in order to keep the public's attention alive, a public easily distracted by a different pace of life, especially when compared to the late eighteenth century audiences.

In conclusion, Sebastiano Brusco's recording endeavour arouses great interest with critics and public alike because for the first time all the eighteen Mozart Sonatas are recorded with a modern piano tuned at 432 Hertz. This tuning has been debated upon for many years, and is supported by a wide-ranging philosophical and scientific literature about the potential benefits on the mind.

Lorenzo Tozzi

THE SCIENTIFIC TUNING

In photography the so called 'white point' corresponds to 5000K, which is the temperature of the sun and the light that the human eye reads as white light. In the same way as cameras can be set to a specific colour temperature, in music any instrument needs to be tuned using as a starting point that is the A.

The scientific tuning of the tempered scale consists of 432 vibrations per second at a multiple of 8Hz (C). This corresponds to the frequency of electron vibration which is prevalent throughout the universe.

A curiosity.

In 1884, it was **Giuseppe Verdi** himself who obtained from the government's musical commission a decree that would normalize the diapason to an LA of 432 oscillations per second, now exhibited at the G. Verdi Conservatory in Milan. Verdi wrote a letter to the committee, claiming: "Since the normal diapason was adopted in France (at the time it was 435Hz), I suggested that the example be followed, also by us; so I formally asked the orchestras of different cities of Italy, among others that of La Scala, to lower the chorister (diapason) and to conform to the normal French. If the musical Commission established by our Government believes, for mathematical needs, to reduce the 435 vibrations of the French chorister in 432, the difference is so small, almost imperceptible to the ear, which I adhere willingly. It would be serious, very serious mistake, to adopt as proposed from Rome, a tuning fork of 450 vibrations.

I am also of opinion with you that the lowering of the chorister does not detract from the sound and the brio of the performance; but on the contrary, it gives something nobler, fuller and majestic that could not give the screams of a too acute choir. For my part, I would like a single choir to be adopted all over the musical world. The musical language is universal: why then the note that has the name LA in Paris or in Milan should become a B flat in Rome? "...