

## **The Carriers of the Enlightenment: Mozart and Rousseau in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Europe**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to investigate how the Enlightenment is expressed in music in 18<sup>th</sup>-TK4<sub>[SK2]</sub> century Europe. This investigation will begin by looking at the effects of Enlightenment on the writings of social thinkers, writers and the works of art by certain painters. The works and ideas of Condorcet, Voltaire and Swift as well as the artwork of Hogarth and David will be discussed. The main focus, however, will be on the influence of the Enlightenment on music, concentrating on Mozart and Rousseau. Music is an integral part of society because it reflects social norms and attitudes (connections). To that extent, the Enlightenment has a definite impact on all of Europe - politically and socially. Thus, the importance of studying this relationship becomes relevant in tracing the development of music to its present stage.

**Key words:** 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe • enlightenment • music • sociology

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Enlightenment spirit promoted the equality of men and gave rise to scientific inquiry, which grew out of the 17<sup>th</sup> century rationalism (Johnson, *et al*, 1994). All of the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers saw themselves as continuing the work of the great 17<sup>th</sup> century pioneers - Descartes, Leibnitz, Newton and Locke - who had developed methods of rational and empirical inquiry and had demonstrated the possibility of a world re-made by the application of knowledge for human benefit. The philosophers believed that science could reveal nature as it truly was and showed how it could be controlled and manipulated (Berlin, 1956). For example, Locke, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, regarded the human mind as a blank slate. Locke attacked the theory of King's divine rights and argued that sovereignty did not reside in the state but with the people. He recommended practical learning. His curriculum included mathematics, history, physical education and a conversational learning of foreign languages, especially French. Locke's beliefs in practical learning provided an incentive to extend scientific methods into every field of study, thus laying the groundwork for the development of the modern social sciences.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans experienced the beginning of an age of knowledge, reasoning and great scientific achievement. Their views toward new discoveries and advancements were optimistic. People began to turn to science for a better understanding of their world and their society (Anchor, 1967). A movement of the intellectuals dared to prove all the aspects in life scientifically (Kant, 1915). The middle class's authority rose while they were shaking off the ancient shackles of superstition, intolerance and fear, as the men and women of reason championed the ideals of freedom. Writers, painters and musicians no longer aimed their art exclusively at one social group (Cunningham, 1997). Numerous works reflected the spirit of the times: Winckelman's *History of Ancient Art*, the French *Encyclopedie* with contributions by such literary personae such as Voltaire and Rousseau, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Boswell's *Life of Johnson* and Malthus's *Essay*

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*on Population*. Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Condorcet, d'Alembert and others all invoked the principles of reason for the purposes of attacking the existing order and propagating the rights of the ordinary individual to the "pursuit of happiness" (Cunningham, *et al*, 1997). The social philosophers of the French Enlightenment concentrated their intellects on examination and criticism of the actions of men in society. Their humanistic concern focused on man in this world as well as the possibilities of change and improvement of the position of the individual in society. They strived to increase freedom and liberation from the forces of tradition, superstition and tyranny that had oppressed people in the past (Horowitz, 1954).

These philosophers popularized the most advanced thinking of the time concerning man and his social relationships and established the legitimacy of the quest for understanding of men's social actions in all their dimensions: ethical, social, economic and political. For example, German philosopher Immanuel Kant proclaimed the motto of the Enlightenment: "Dare to know: Have the courage to use your own intelligence" (Kant, 1915). Voltaire (1963) imagined an enlightened great man of reason who inhabits a world governed by purely rational principles. He also (1986) criticized the political and ecclesiastical institutions of France. Voltaire rejected everything irrational and incomprehensible and called upon his contemporaries to act against intolerance, dictatorship and superstition. Likewise, Diderot (1966) used his *Encyclopédie* as a powerful propaganda weapon against church authority, the superstition, conservatism and semi-feudal social forms of the time.

## THE CARRIERS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

This part of the study explores the works and ideas of Condorcet, Voltaire, Swift Hogarth, and David. The influence of the Enlightenment on music, concentrating on Mozart and Rousseau will also be analyzed.

**2.1. Social Thinkers and Their Writings:** Condorcet (1955) claimed that reason was innate in everyone and that it was just a matter of education to bring it out to consciousness. He argued that, with proper education, a man could "judge his own and other men's actions according to his own lights" (p.182). According to Condorcet, one needs to practice the autonomy of judgment rather than the autonomy of thought. When a man reaches this state, he is enlightened; he becomes a responsible and respectable citizen of society and, thus, perfect.

While the century's writers took the ideas of the Enlightenment seriously, they also pointed out their fallacies. The Enlightenment image of a great man of reason who inhabits a world governed by purely rational principles was the object of Voltaire's satire in *Candide*. Voltaire's hero steadfastly maintains the belief that he lives in the "best of all possible worlds", while simultaneously, experiencing every disaster that could occur to him, including the great earthquake of Lisbon in 1745 (Voltaire, 1963). Throughout *Candide*, Voltaire's unlikely hero places his own "pursuit of happiness" above his political and social obligations and, in so doing, gives Voltaire a vehicle by which to criticize the customs that the Enlightenment was slowly tearing down. For example, Voltaire is able to express his strong objection to state militarism and, in particular, to the gap between the cruel reality of war and the false appearance of gallantry and heroism. In describing the carnage on the battlefield between the Arabs and Bulgarians, *Candide* confesses that he hid during the "heroic butchery." He decides to leave due to the "effects and causes" because he reasons that, if he stays, the "effect" will be his eventual dismemberment (Voltaire, p. 6).

Similar to Voltaire, Jonathan Swift expressed his political opinions through satire, with *Gulliver's Travels* being his best known work. Swift's protagonist is Lemuel Gulliver, a ship's surgeon and a reasonably educated man. Gulliver goes on four voyages that all end in disaster. During the first voyage, he is shipwrecked in the empire of Lilliput. Charmed at first, Gulliver soon learns that the people of Lilliput can be cruel and can also bear a striking resemblance to the English in both their internal relations and their relations with other countries. During the second voyage, Gulliver is abandoned by his shipmates in Brobdingnag, the kingdom of giants, who are creatures roughly ten times the size of an average Englishman. The kingdom of Brobdingnag is something of a utopia and is governed by a well-educated, enlightened prince

who personifies moral and political wisdom. In a long discussion between Gulliver and the prince, Swift has the opportunity to contrast England's political institutions with those of this imaginary kingdom. The difference reduces Gulliver to a resentful silence because he can offer no defense for some of England's most flagrant violations of human justice and dignity. On the third voyage, where Gulliver visits Laputa, the floating island, the satire becomes even stronger. The floating island, which is occupied by a higher class, is floating over another island that is mostly occupied by a lower class.

Sometimes, the King of Laputa would order to have the island lowered the island in order to crush the island under them to prove to the people that he is in charge. This could be compared to the English monarchs and their cruelty; they would often show their power by killing innocent people. At the same time, Swift, being Irish, satirizes the English who are crushing the Irish. On the last voyage, Gulliver visits the land of Yahoos and Houyhnhnms. Yahoos are humanlike creatures covered with fur. The Houyhnhnms are horses that can think and talk. Gulliver is so impressed with these intelligent creatures that he learns their language and starts to live like them. But, the Houyhnhnms take Gulliver for a Yahoo and he is banished from the island.

Knowing that the ways of his people are flawed and irrational, he finds it very difficult to return to England. The conflict between Yahoos and Houyhnhnms is similar to the conflict between the poor people and the royalty and politicians of England.

**2.2. Painters:** English painter William Hogarth can be grouped with the distinguished company of the social satirists of the eighteenth century (Fleming, 1974). Similar to Swift and Voltaire, Hogarth satirized the social conditions and customs of his time in a series of six pictures that provided a merciless exposure of the eighteenth century society (Fleming, 1974). In particular, Hogarth addressed women's right to the "pursuit of happiness" by protesting through his pictures the marriage practices of the era. In his painting, *The Marriage Contract*, one sees a gouty nobleman about to sell his family pedigree to pay off the mortgage on his family estate through his son's marriage with a merchant's daughter (Fleming, 1974).

Likewise, Jacques-Louis David had shown an aptitude for painting historical events. One of his most famous is that of *The Oath of the Horatii*. In this painting, David depicted precisely what the French Revolution came to represent. The painting illustrated three brothers declaring that they would fight to their death as champions of their city against that of a rival city, for the common good of the people (Crow, 1978). The subject of *The Oath of the Horatii* was dedication and sacrifice.

This same theme was presented in David's portrayal of Marat. David showed Marat who sacrificed his life for the people of his country. In his hand Marat holds a letter. In the letter, Corday pleaded for assistance. This is an historical inaccuracy by David, showing the problems of representing the past, as this particular letter was never actually shown to Marat. It was only to be used by Corday to gain access to Marat if her first attempt to see him should fail. It is the distortion and manipulation of the facts such as these that artists used to further a particular point of view or cause. Lying beside Marat, there also lays an assignat upon a wooden crate; the assignat reads "You will give this assignat to that mother of five children whose husband died defending the fatherland." This document "near" Marat's hand is the unanswerable document of his saintliness. This document furthers David's attempts to portray Marat as a hero who was genuinely concerned with the plight of the people of France.

**2.3. Music:** In the Age of the Enlightenment, a collective patronage of concert halls replaced the previous system that had restricted music to the court circle (Fleming, 1974). The old patronage system was changing in the direction of pleasing a middle-class audience. Reflecting the increasingly egalitarian nature of times, musicians, such as Mozart and Rousseau, broke away from their aristocratic patrons and struck out on their own. The rise of public concerts, the spread of commercial opera houses, the growth of music publishing and the increased number of musical pieces composed and played were all direct effects of the changing musical times. Thus, the Enlightenment, the question of inclusion becomes

“No longer even simply... [a] question of [people] belonging to a human community in general, but rather that of [their] membership of a certain ‘we,’ a we corresponding to a cultural ensemble characteristic of [their] own contemporaneity” (Gane and John 1993).

The music of the 18<sup>th</sup> century reflected the changes in society, switching from the emphasis on Baroque styles to the Classicism of Mozart and Rousseau. Classicism in music refers to the dynamic musical language developed on the thematic structure imposed by the tonality of the major-minor system (Machlis, 1970). The Classical period of music coordinated harmony, melody, rhythm and orchestration more effectively than earlier periods of music. During the Classical era, the social function of music began to change from the earlier aristocratic and religious connections toward more public and secular activities associated with the middle class (Landon, 1970). Unlike the concertos of the Baroque period, the classic era mainly emphasized the solo concerto. The choice of the solo instrument, however, was somewhat broader than in the Baroque era (Krehbiel, 1898). In keeping with the thinking of the time, the music followed strict, logical rules in its structure and design, but, within that framework, the free expression of the composer’s emotions conjured up images that encompassed the depth and breadth of human emotions and sentiment. The composers used energetic and orchestral color in a thematic way. The use of rhythm, including periodic structure and harmonic rhythm, gave definition to large-scale forms and the use of modulation built longer spans (Fleming, 1974).

**2.3.1. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791):** The life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart coincided with the dramatic changes in history. He was caught in a world in transition and he was too intelligent and talented to dilute his artistic vision for monetary gain. Mozart was influenced by the ideas of his day and, in turn, he influenced the growing political and sociological status of the bourgeoisie as well as the ultimate downfall of the aristocracy. As the generally acknowledged master of the 18<sup>th</sup> century dramatic opera, he incorporated sociological and political themes into his works. His works were widely popular among the middle class and he influenced his audience, contributing to the changing attitudes of the time, including the women’s issue.

Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* represents a maturation of his musical and political sensibilities. This work is based on Beaumarchais’s writings, which were banned by the imperial police for its controversial content (Lacouture, 1991). Beaumarchais, who supplemented his income as a playwright by supplying arms to the American revolutionaries, wrote his play as a manifesto that attacked the privileges of the nobility and served as an egalitarian statement for the middle class. *The Marriage of Figaro* foreshadowed the movements of the Enlightenment (Lacouture, 1991). The message of the opera is plain, showing that one’s noble origin is no longer sufficient for establishing the correctness of one’s actions. Thus, the success of this opera illustrates Mozart’s philosophy that the Enlightenment was not the sole property of Europe but belonged to the world.

In this opera, Mozart also addresses women’s position in society, which was an issue that not many of his fellow composers considered important.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> <sup>[SK4]</sup> (TK4)<sub>[SK5]</sub> century, very little was accomplished toward the issue of women’s rights. Women were being held down by their limited knowledge and education. They lacked the educational and economic resources that would allow them to challenge patriarchal society. As the industrial revolution came around, more men began to leave work at the house. Factories became abundant and male workers were wanted. This development left society with the idea that women belonged in the house and that their rights were limited while men were to take jobs in public and to act independently (Wahl, 1999). It is interesting to note that, in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Figaro proclaims this opinion as he impatiently tries to assert his authority over Suzanna; however, Suzanna, just like Figaro, proclaims her independence (Lacouture, 1991). The enlightened understanding of human nature emphasized the right to self-expression and Mozart extends this view to women, demonstrating it in Suzanna’s demand to think freely and to express herself without censorship or fear of repression.

**2.3.2. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778):** French social theorist and musician Jean Jacques Rousseau (1950) discussed the social functioning of people from the standpoint of an underlying assumption of the rational nature of man's cognition. Rousseau showed the faults of the monarchy and urged people to create a political situation in which the common man would have as much sovereignty as possible. Rousseau wished for a society where everyone gets what he or she needs, no more, no less. He claimed that the general will is always correct; according to him to follow the general will means to ensure a wholistic society. He urged for a social pact that required voluntary and unanimous agreement of all of the individuals in the society. According to Rousseau, the general will alone could direct the state to achieve the common good. He believed that the conflict between private interests made civil societies a necessity, but that it was the harmony between them that has made civil societies possible. He pointed out that the commonality of interests allowed for a social bond and he concluded that without a social bond the society could never exist.

Rousseau advocated his ideas not only by writing but also by composing. His music played a crucial role in the French Revolution. The French monarchy abused the natural human rights. Since people did not have freedom, they wanted to be liberated from the French monarchy. Rousseau personally criticized the monarchy and social inequality. He said that all humans were the same and that they should be equal to one another (Rousseau, 1965). Even in his musical pieces, Rousseau developed a case for civil liberty and helped prepare the ideological background of the French Revolution by defending the popular will against the rule of the monarchy. One of his pieces, *The Village Prophet* (1752), is a perfect verbal and musical illustration of sociological interpretation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century ideas in France. Rousseau gave us this opera as a social evidence for an upcoming revolution. Its first theme represents a fatherland, the ground where the man has his roots. The second theme explains why people should fight for their liberty. Finally, Rousseau concludes by re-articulating the first theme that everyone should become part of the common will (Paquette, 1989).

## CONCLUSIONS

The Enlightenment period was a time of extreme changes in many aspects and not limited to only science, technology, religion and human attitude, but also music. Music played a crucial role in expressing the ideas of the Enlightenment through sounds. The music of the time exhibited a strong desire for knowledge, a belief in rational thought and willingness to exchange new ideas. Music became a tool for non-verbal communication between the middle-class and the thinkers of the time, which helped people to solve problems and gain confidence in themselves. Thus, we can say that music helped give birth to the modern world.

Many great thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have emphasized the importance of music. For example, Comte (1972) stated that "music is the most social of all arts" (p.317). Simmel (1968) and Weber (1958, trans.) discussed the same view in their theoretical writings. According to Fulcher (1979), "Both Saint Simon and Fourier ...sought not to obliterate but to harmonize classes, which meant that each [individual] must be happy...emotionally stable and aware of its role" (p.28). Both Saint Simon and Fourier believed that music would bring the sensual balance in individuals and create harmony between people.

It is truly crucial to think about all the roles that music has played, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, we can conclude that music has been a significant participant in the process of human development. It predicts moods, dictates thoughts and emotions, yields prevalent physical effects and aids social development. Music prevails in its universality and in its importance to the cognitive and intellectual growth of people from different cultures and societies.

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