

John Miller's Master Class on the Mozart Bassoon Concerto K191

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There is a little bit of interesting history about the Mozart *Bassoon Concerto*. First of all you may or may not know he was very young when he wrote it. You may have also heard that it is one of a set - a presumed set - of three or maybe four bassoon *Concertos*. No traces have been found of the other ones. This one (K191) is authentic beyond any question. But even at that, authentic as it may be, there is no manuscript. We have nothing in his handwriting except his own mention of the *Concerto* and that it existed in his theme book. What everyone has had to rely upon is an early printed edition published not many years after Mozart died. This edition was done by a publishing firm called André. This is fortunate for us because the firm of André was noted for being faithful to Mozart's manuscripts. How do we know that? Well, many of the pieces published by André still exist in the manuscripts. Some musicologists have had the chance to refer the printed editions to the original manuscripts. With André as the publisher we have something we can suspect is pretty close to the original.

In the last few years a new Mozart edition came out which is a reprinting and rethinking of everything that Mozart wrote. It is called the *Neue Mozart Ausgabe* (the *New Mozart Edition*), was printed in Germany, and is usually abbreviated *NMA* in print. The *Bassoon Concerto* benefited from being republished and rethought as part of this edition. There are not many changes from the old Breitkopf edition, which came out after the first scholarly edition of Mozart's composition. There have been, however, a couple of editorial changes in the newer edition.

What we have today as a result of this newer Mozart edition are two bassoon and piano versions, which are both highly accurate. They are essentially the same as what you would get in the score of the *New Mozart Edition*. Bärenreiter prints one of the editions, which is a company that publishes much of the music from the new Mozart edition. That one has no editor, so it just presents the material that is in the score. Then there is a Universal edition, which Milan Turkovic has edited. That edition is also based on the new score plus it includes Mr. Turkovic's ideas for some of the player possibilities and some of the player choices that have to be made. He clearly shows every change he makes and every mark or articulation or dynamic that departs from the original. He also writes about how he interprets each ornament or grace note. So either one

of these editions or the old Breitkopf edition are good choices. If you do get the Breitkopf edition and you want an authentic performance, however, you should consult the new publications to set right a couple of things. Most of the changes are extremely minor, but one of them is important since it sounds so different to us. I will get to that later.

You will notice in the examples below that I have the first movement presented in three different editions. This first is the Universal edition (Figure 1), the second is the Guetter edition (Figure 2), and the third is my edited version of the Breitkopf edition (Figure 3). The Universal edition is the bassoon part taken from the *New Mozart Edition* score. The Breitkopf edition has my markings and choice of interpretation and performance variables. The Guetter edition is what is considered now to be an old-fashioned or editorialized version. I included that one because I want to talk about what people do in printed editions and what you need to observe. It also gives me a chance to address what is better about some printed editions and why they are better.

The Guetter edition was published two generations ago, in the 1920s. The famous principal bassoonist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, **Walter Guetter**, prepared it for his performance with Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Performances of that piece were quite rare in those days; it was unusual for a bassoon to play a solo at all. Even the Mozart *Concerto*, as popular and famous as it is today, was not very well known and most people had no interest in hearing it. It didn't appear very often in concerts of symphony orchestras. So this was a big event, and in honor of it Guetter made an edition of the *Concerto*, which was published by the German firm Hoffmeister. For some reason the publisher's name did not appear on the music. No one ever knew who published it. The modern version of this edition does, however, have the name of Hoffmeister on it now.

Walter Guetter did what was very common at the time when he published it. Certainly we can't fault him for this, for it was standard practice by all players and musicologists. He took the part and arranged it the way he thought it should be done. That included taking ornaments and writing them out as notes. It also included changing notes and writing new ones if he liked them better. He put in his own decorations or ornaments, without indicating that they weren't Mozart's. A couple

of changes he made are indicated in his preface, which is in the piano part. If you don't look at the piano part or you just have a copy of the bassoon part you could think that the edition is the *Concerto* as Mozart wrote it. But it really isn't. There are far too many things in the part that are just the result of someone's personal taste or choice. This is what is potentially harmful about the edition. It keeps us from Mozart's true intentions.

When we look at the Universal edition (Fig. 1) and compare it to Guetter's edition (Fig. 2) you immediately see some of the differences. Look at the dynamics and crescendos in the Guetter edition. Note how they differ from the original. That is just the beginning. If you check carefully, you will also find many different renderings of notes. Look at the opening theme in measures 38 and 39. In the Guetter edition you would never know that there are grace notes. Even though it is spelled out the way that most people would play it today, you might make a completely different choice of articulations or a different choice of phrasing or accents if you knew how it was written originally. So this is the kind of thing that we can gain by looking at the original, *Urtext* version of any composition.

I will leave it to you to examine measure by measure the other versions to see what has been changed. I singled out the **Walter Guetter** edition because I happened to have it. I learned from it, as did almost all the American bassoon players of my generation. Many also continue to learn from it and don't know that there are other editions. They don't even know that there are other cadenzas. The cadenzas in the Guetter edition aren't by Mozart, they are composed by **Walter Guetter**. There are many other cadenzas by other performers and composers. Even **Jacques Ibert** wrote a set of cadenzas for the *Mozart Bassoon Concerto*. They don't sound to us like they fit very well, but they are interesting. If you believe that the cadenzas should reflect the age in which the piece is being played

rather than how the piece might have sounded when it was written, then something like the Ibert cadenzas might appeal to you, or those by the modern Russian composer, Schnittke. You can find a very large number of different ones out there. I personally play my own cadenzas, and I always encourage my students to write their own, also. Thinking of the countless performances of the *Concerto* I have heard in the last 20 some years, I would say a good 80-90% of the performers play the **Walter Guetter** cadenzas because that is what

is in the part they own. They play everything else in the edition too. It's time that we get back to the roots and the origin of the piece.

Now let's take a look at Figure 3, my personal edition. I use the Breitkopf, but I could just as well use the Bärenreiter or the Universal editions. Look at measure 38. We have there the first trill in the *Concerto*. Immediately we have a question mark about how to do the trill. There are two main ways to do trills in all

music. If this were written after Beethoven's time there would not be many questions other than general questions about how fast to move your fingers during the trill. But before Beethoven's time we have to wonder about whether the trill starts on the note or on the note above. I can tell you right off that there isn't any rule about how to start a trill in the music of Mozart. In fact as musicological evidence now shows, there doesn't appear to be any one rule about how to play a trill in Baroque music, either. Forget what you have been told about all Baroque trills starting from above. That is no longer considered true, it is passé. There is much too much evidence for trills having been performed in many different ways in the Baroque era.

In the music of Mozart trills are a matter of conjecture. It comes down to musical instincts and taste. Quite a few well-known Mozart interpreters, particularly those I consulted before I did my 1984 recording of the work - Neville Marriner, Alfred Brendel, and Joseph Silverstein and the like, hold a similar opinion



Figure 1. Universal Edition of the Opening to the Mozart Bassoon Solo, mm. 35-42.



Figure 2. Guetter's Edition of the Opening to the Mozart Bassoon Solo, mm 35-42.

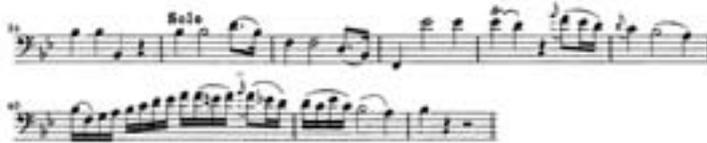


Figure 3. Breitkopf Edition with Miller's Markings to the Opening of the Mozart Bassoon Solo, mm 34-42.

that the trills have to be decided on a case by case basis according to what sounds good. You can not make a general rule about what will sound good. I have my own reasons for starting this one on the main note because I see it as a continuation of the line, the two E \flat s, from the measure before. When I hear the E \flat repeated again after the syncopation it seems to resolve to an E \flat and I don't want the tone F to appear and break that line. When I was younger I always started the trill from the F, but I was under a mistaken idea that you had to start all trills in Mozart and the Baroque period from above. Once I was freed from the idea, my musical instincts showed me that the E \flat should predominate here. There is no reason for a dissonance on the F or a disturbance to the line.

Then we get to that curious little figure of a small sixteenth tied into an eighth and two sixteenths in that same measure. This is not subject to normal rules of interpreting Baroque ornaments. It appears frequently in Haydn, Mozart, Stamitz, and other composers of the Classical period. For this figure there is a generally accepted formula or rule, which is to make four sixteenth notes. Usually I articulate these figures based on the particular passage, not a specific rule. Here I play four slurred sixteenths.

In measure 39 I treat the small note as robbing the following note of half its value. This is one of the rules for interpreting these ornamental notes taken from books written in the period: C. P. E. Bach (J. S. Bach's son), Leopold Mozart (W. A. Mozart's father), and also the famous flute player Johann Joachim Quantz. Quantz explained this as being a kind of *appoggiatura* that robs half the value of the note following it. In many cases this sounds good and makes sense.

I want to digress to original material and instruction books written in the 18th century. The people who found these writings during the Nineteenth and first half of the Twentieth centuries regarded them as holy scriptures like the Bible or the Koran, and attempted to extract generalities about performance practices from them. But as more writings were uncovered it became apparent that different composers were telling you different things, just like they do today. One of the most amazing things to me is that Quantz and C. P. E. Bach, two musicians who played together in the same room in the same palace where Frederick the Great resided, wrote books that disagreed on many things. If they didn't agree, having worked for the same monarch in the same time period, how could composers thousands of miles apart and/or generations apart during a period of 150 years or so all be expected to agree on trills, or grace notes, or anything, for that matter! This makes it harder for us since we have no guarantee that we will be right or wrong, but it is better to be like a jazz musician and be free about it, rather than trying to slavishly follow a rule that probably

didn't exist anyway. Be that as it may, we still know that some things were commonly done, such as the pattern of the four sixteenths in measure 38.

When I first learned about these books of instructions, these original works on how to play ornaments, I found that they were difficult to assess. The writers were not logicians or scientists but creative artists trying to write down complicated systems. They don't always present things consistently, they don't always explain things well. I struggled with this. When I applied the rules, a lot of things sounded awful, especially in French music. When I was younger I did it anyway - I played it as given in the books. At least to the best of my ability; at least what I could figure out. Now I think a more important rule is that if it sounds bad, don't do it. If it really doesn't sound good to you, then look for another way to interpret the ornament, look for another way to work it out. Don't do it because some composer said to do it this way or because you think there is some rule requiring you to do it this way.

Now let's go on to measure 40. Here again we have that funny little pattern on the fourth beat. And this time I bring out a little more of what I think that pattern means. I think the ornament is done to show weight of musical importance on a note. I don't mean an accent like a sting or a percussive twang or anything like that, but a weight that can be done with time, with a slight elongation. That's how I usually chose to differentiate this kind of passage from four written-out sixteenth notes. So I dwell a little bit on the G. I stretch it out a bit. In measure 38 I am also doing it, but it doesn't show up as much since it is not in a string of sixteenth notes, and I don't do it quite as much for that reason. I feel that the written *appoggiatura* wants to have some attention drawn to it.

Now we get to the passage in measures 45 and 46 (and a similar one in 112 and 113). In the **Walter Guetter** edition there are slurs on the second and third sixteenth notes (Figure 4). It has almost become



Figure 4. Guetter's Edition, mm. 45-50.

the standard or required way to play this passage in the United States. Most teachers active today in this country were taught by teachers who used the **Walter Guetter** edition. I will tell you a little bit of practical information that I learned from the first 25 times I played this *Concerto*, up to about 10 or 15 years ago. Even though I have abandoned the edition, I have still kept some of the ideas about how to play certain passages. So I always kept that slur from the second to third sixteenth notes. Many times, even with good professional orchestras, I noticed the violins jumping in early. They were misplacing the beat by a sixteenth

note. I would go home and practice, but when people hear it they misplace the beat because the articulation doesn't fit the passage. I always play it all tongued now (Figure 5). I have not had any trouble since. I think this is a better way to execute the passage. It avoids the jarring rhythmic effect, and it is better for the listener. There are probably other ways you can articulate this as well.

In measure 50 there is a new problem: one I find interesting and fascinating (Figure 5). This measure



Figure 5. Breitkopf Edition with Miller's Markings, mm. 45-50.

shows two different trills in the same measure. One is on a Bb and another on a C. One trill has a turn and the other one doesn't. Both sound OK with turns on the end and most people play them that way. I used to play every trill in the concerto with a turn on the end until not too long ago. But then I stopped to consider the implications. Who is to say that Mozart wanted a turn at the end of all the trills? If we do that, aren't we guaranteeing that there is no way Mozart could write a trill without a turn? If we play them whether he writes them or not we are taking away some of Mozart's freedom. There is not an obvious pattern here. Mozart probably had his reasons because he wrote them that way. I feel that we should at least take the most obvious evidence: that some trills have them and some don't. I play the turns where they are written. On all the trills that don't have turns I don't play turns except on important cadences. You do a lot of special things at cadences: vary tempos, introduce dissonance, ornament, write in cadenzas, and other things. It was assumed that you would do these special things so the composer usually did not bother to notate how you should perform the cadence. So I play a trill at the end of the first half of the movement, the end of the movement, or the end of a cadenza with a turn even if it did not have a turn written in the music. But in a neutral area I accept what Mozart wrote. So I don't put the turn on the bare trill and I do on the other one.

This leads us to the long passage between measures 51-54 (Figure 6) and the analogous passage between



Figure 6. Breitkopf Edition with Miller's Markings, mm. 51-53.

measures 120 and 124. I can tell you from my own

experience that I worked for many years to perfect the way I did those trills by beginning from above and finishing with a turn on every one of them as "smooth as silk." You can hear this on my recording. I kept this pattern because I had learned it so thoroughly and practiced it for so many years that I was very proud of how I could do those trills. Now I just begin on the note without any upper note and end with a turn connecting them to the next passage. Suddenly this gives it a lot of release, while the other way is very smooth and romanticized. I have changed my opinion about this.

This is what the interpretation of music is all about. You can't freeze an interpretation. Things start to die if you say it has to be one way forever and that is the way everyone else should do it too. This is another reason not to have these editions where everything is printed out. They should not even be valid for their own editors after a while, let alone for generations of players all over the world.

Look at measure 57 (Figure 7). Take a look at the



Figure 7. A Comparison of m. 57 in the Universal (A), Breitkopf (B), and Guetter (C) Editions.

Universal edition, m. 57. Look at Guetter's edition and my markings in the Breitkopf edition in the same measure. In Guetter's edition you wouldn't have the faintest idea of where it came from. It doesn't look at all like the original. In addition the Guetter edition has a wrong note, which is one of the few cases where the old Mozart edition deviated from the original publication. Some editor in the 19th century thought it sounded smoother to make it a B \sharp instead of a B \flat in the turn. This is what most of us have grown up hearing. That is what sounds right to us until we have done it enough times that the B \flat sounds right. At first it sounded wrong to me, too. So, I started asking people who knew a lot about Mozart's music to comment on this figure. They assured me that there are many examples of the same tonality in turns in other works of Mozart's. It is not that rare. The turn appears this way twice in the concerto in two different movements. It is not likely to be a mistake.

In the next theme we have a whole string of those four sixteenth-note groups, which you can articulate however you want (Figure 8). We get to measure 64 where there is a new kind of grace note pattern. It looks like there are three acceptable ways to do it. You have a choice



Figure 8. Breitkopf Edition with Miller's Markings, mm. 59-71.



Figure 9. Breitkopf Edition with Miller's Markings, mm. 80-85.

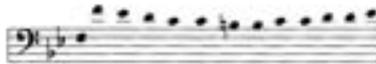


Figure 10. Skeletal line in mm. 80-83.



Figure 11. Universal Edition, mm. 90-93.



Figure 12. Universal Edition, mm. 94-101.

here. You can play even eighth notes, you can play a snap which is a sixteenth and dotted eighth (which is the way I like it), or you can do the opposite - dotted eighth and sixteenth. Then we come up to the melismatic section leading to the first major cadence of the piece, measures 67-68 (Figure 8). There has been a traditional way to play this passage in the United States, and I also gather it is a tradition as well in Europe, judging from recordings. The tradition is to play the sixteenths with two slurred and two tongued notes. I played it that way for many years. However, when I asked people what they thought about how it sounds, many said that the bassoon sounds unpleasant when there is too much tonguing of adjacent notes. When the bassoon jumps - wider leaps - the tonguing sounds good and people like it. In close passage work

I know that bassoonists think that it sounds very impressive and brilliant. But listeners don't like it as much as we think. Therefore I took the example of several European bassoonists (**Maurice Allard** and **Thom DeKlerk**) before me who recorded this passage, and the similar one at the end, with slurs. I converted it to groups of four slurred notes. You gain a lot of advantages by this. Even when the orchestra is thinned out, it doesn't take much to cover up the bassoon when it is playing busy passage work. If you slur you can project this passage and the one at the end of the movement much better; the notes last longer and they have more carrying power.

Look at the next solo starting in measure 80 (Figure 9). We come to ambiguous markings in measure 82 in my edition. In measure 82 I have two different kinds of slurs written on beats 1 and 3. The one underneath is the one I actually play: tongue the first note and slur the next three. I only put the other slur on top to remind me to not make the tongued note too short. My sense of that passage is that it is a melody line within the sixteenth notes that lie within the notes that are tongued. The first C, then the C at the end of beat 2, then the D at the beginning of beat 3, and then the D at the end of beat 4. The skeleton of the melodic line, the part that should be delineated, should be brought out (Figure 10). I chose this articulation so that I have melodic notes and accompanying notes. The

accompanying notes are slurred and the melodic notes are tongued.

In measures 89 through 93 in the Universal Edition the articulation of the sixteenths is two slurred and two slurred (Figure 11). This is in the original - the first publication. In some modern versions you will see two slurred and two tongued. Most of the slurs in our performances are ones we write in ourselves, which was the custom in the 18th century. They didn't put in all the slurs that a person would use; they left a lot up to the player. When a composer puts them in, I figure they are something the composer specifically wants. Unless I have some really strong reason why that doesn't work for me I feel I should do it as written.

Measure 95 gives us an ornament that only comes up once in the whole concerto (Figure 12). In the Guetter



Figure 13. Guetter Edition,
mm. 94 and 95.



Figure 14. Breitkopf Edition with Miller's markings, mm. 131-133.

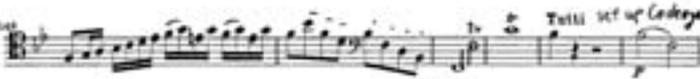


Figure 15. Breitkopf Edition with Miller's markings, mm. 148-153.

edition in measure 95 you will see an example of going as far astray as you can possibly go from what is original (Figure 13). That is the kind of thing you have to really watch out for. This ornament is an upward-leaping grace note which, according to Frederick Neumann, should be executed with a singer's portamento. It is a liquid slur between the two notes, out of time and out of rhythm, and usually before the beat. It doesn't have to be a sixteenth or an eighth. You try to make it sound vocal. If you use the **Walter Guetter** edition, that possibility is gone.

At the end of the cadence in measure 97 there is room for some more decision making (Figure 12). What are we going to put there? Here there are two fermatas that appear in the first publication. **Milan Turkovic** has recently chosen to put a cadenza on the first one and leave the second blank. Traditionally it has been done the opposite way. There is another option without a cadenza. I just do a flourish during the first fermata and then play a connecting scale during the second, coming back to the orchestra tutti. This is an *Eingang*, a lead in or a bridge, which can be anything from a couple of notes to a few measures. To do nothing would not be historically stylistic.

Now we are back to the return of the opening theme. There is a note in **Milan Turkovic's** edition that the articulations differ between the two appearances of this theme in the old André printed edition. Editors in the past figured it was a mistake and fixed up the two articulations to be the same. It was customary among the past few generations of musicologists to assume that inconsistencies were mistakes of either the composer or the printer. Turkovic's view and also the modern outlook are to stop fixing and correcting everything to make it consistent. They know now that everything that is not consistent is not necessarily a mistake. What it really amounts to is that geniuses are not as regimented as scientists and musicologists. Composers are usually in the genius category and so they may not do things that

always make sense to a scientist or a musicologist. All of this notwithstanding, I do play it the same way both times! I am using my artistic freedom to do so, but Turkovic is right in pointing out that Mozart may have wanted it different the second time around. I might, however, in the future make it quite different the second time around, more than just one altered slur. People who have gone back and studied Mozart's letters have found that he liked variety, spontaneity, and what he called "gusto" in performances. He valued freedom more than we would suspect today, and we should not feel compelled to play things the same way each time they appear.

I will point out the one place I make an echo in the first movement. An echo is another tried and true expressive device, which was used most often in Baroque music. I only do it once in the piece in measures 132 and 133 (Figure 14).

About the Ab-Bb trill in measure 145 and the Eb trill in measure 66: if you are going fast enough I recommend that you only trill one time or two at most. This plus the fast 32nd notes will then sound sufficient. Both trills are difficult to do and if you try to do too much with them they will sound sloppy and slow you down. Keep them on the short side as stylized trills.

In measure 149 we have something interesting from the old edition. There were dots on the last four eighth notes. This is something I would have never thought to do. Before having seen this I would have played rather long eighth notes. But I am sure these dots were not put in there by mistake, they were meant to be there. So now I play the top four notes long and get gradually shorter as I go down (Figure 15).

In measures 150 and measure 69 there are whole notes before the final trills. Most people like to do something with these whole notes because it sounds boring to play a long, bare whole note at these cadences. What I do is to divide them up into halves and play a half note and then trill. In measure 69 I trill on the same C, the lower C if I am trilling the lower G. If trilling high G I trill the octave C. In measure 150 I play the half note on the low F and then go up to trill open F before the final C trill at the end of the movement (Figure 15).

There isn't enough time to discuss the entire concerto, but the first movement is the most difficult, and the one that you will find yourself called upon to play most frequently, especially if you take auditions for summer music festivals, scholarships, competitions, or orchestral positions. I hope that what we have examined today will help you to approach the music and make some informed decisions about this single most important work in the entire repertory of the bassoon.