

## On The Economics of Musical Composition in Mozart's Vienna

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**Abstract.** The article provides historical evidence suggesting that a substantial element in the explanation of the profusion of talented composers in the 18th century Habsburg empire was the fragmentation of the state into many near-independent states, each with its own court seeking entertainment and prestige through new musical offerings. The resulting profusion of jobs attracted people into the profession and provided hearings for their work. The article also examines the data on Mozart's finances and using a rough translation of 18th century Austrian currency into current dollars supports recent revisionist findings that, with the exception of several years, he was relatively well off.

**Key words:** Employment opportunities for composers, patronage versus market income, Mozart's earnings, Mozart's expenses

"Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid/Some heart once pregnant with  
celestial fire,/Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,/Or wak'd  
to extasy the living lyre."

Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*

"'Aren't the myriad of princely [German] courts,' asked Leibnitz in 1679,  
'a glorious means to allow so many people to distinguish themselves who  
would otherwise remain lying in the dust?'"

(Vierhaus, 1988, p. 39).

"Believe me, my sole purpose is to make as much money as possible; for  
after good health it is the best thing to have."

Mozart to his father, Vienna, April 4, 1781

(Anderson, 1938, Vol. 3, p. 1072)

The primary object of this paper is to help to explain the extraordinary confluence of composers whose activities centered in Vienna around Mozart's time. These included Gluck, Haydn, Dittersdorf, Salieri, Beethoven and, of course, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. We will suggest some possible reasons for this phenomenon and the underlying economic causes which had a profound effect on music and musicians, entailing some descriptive materials on the economic and political climate characterizing Mozart's period of residence in Vienna – the decade 1781–1791. Finally, we have been unable to resist some discussion of several recent revisionist targets, in particular the denial by a number of scholars of the widely held vision of a Mozart beset by grinding poverty.

Our central purpose, however, is an attempt to help account for the period's extraordinary abundance of musical talent. Why at the end of the eighteenth century? Why in the Holy Roman Empire and the associated lands (the Germanic states, Bohemia, Hungary and Italy)?

Obviously, economic and political conditions cannot create talent, but they certainly can either inhibit it or provide opportunities for its exercise. Our main hypothesis is intended to narrow the pertinent geography – to help account for the striking level of composing activity emanating from Germany and Italy. This hypothesis suggests that the political division of the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg possessions into numerous petty states worked to produce the circumstances (notably substantial demand and a profusion of jobs) that help to explain the profusion of musical productivity. It is our secondary hypothesis that in the Empire, as in England and France, the rising prosperity of the eighteenth century – the first stirrings of the industrial revolution and associated developments such as the rise in the wealth and position of the small body of the bourgeoisie as consumers of culture – contributed to the demand that underlay the creation of a free market in musical composition. Through this development, demand helped to elicit supply.

While much private support continued, the composer was beginning to emerge from a state of servitude to take control of his own professional life. By the second half of the eighteenth century demand for the work of the composer derived from the two sources: continued patronage of royalty and nobility, and the emerging free market. The resulting availability of employment opportunities served to attract into the profession many who would otherwise have sought to earn a living elsewhere. Among this profusion of composers many, predictably, proved to have no outstanding talent. But among the group there were the few who, as the poet put it, might otherwise have been “born to blush unseen and waste their sweetness on the desert air.”

## 1. The Period and Its Circumstances

### 1.1. THE EXTRAORDINARY DECADE

The last ten years of Mozart's life, the period when he lived in Vienna, is arguably one of the most dramatic in history. It encompassed the end of the American Revolution, the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, the widely accepted date of the beginnings of the industrial revolution in England (including the development of Watt's improved steam engine), and the first years of the French Revolution. Its intellectual life was shaped by such luminaries as Rousseau, Voltaire, Franklin, Hume, Samuel Johnson, Adam Smith, Goethe and Schiller.

Germany (as a result of its fragmentation, as we will suggest) had a comparative advantage in the supply of two products: composers and royalty. It contributed a striking number of European monarchs of great ability, domineering personalities with at least nominal allegiance to the ideas of the Enlightenment: Gustav III of

Sweden,<sup>1</sup> Catherine the Great of Russia, Frederick the Great of Prussia and, by no means least, Joseph II of Austria, Mozart's emperor. But that was by no means all. George III of England derived from Hanover, as everyone knows, and while Louis XVI<sup>2</sup> was obviously not (primarily) Teutonic, the queen of France, Marie Antoinette, was the younger sister of Emperor Joseph II.

Despite their great inherited power, their efforts to hold together a liberalized modification of the old order were to be undermined by the French Revolution and other disturbing circumstances. The enlightened rulers sought to preserve their vestiges of absolute power by using the bourgeoisie as a counterpoise to the aristocracy, whose influence they sought to curtail. The bourgeoisie, somewhat expanded and enriched by the first stirrings of the Industrial Revolution, though still very small in numbers by modern standards (see below), used this opportunity to acquire for themselves benefits suited to the wealth they were accumulating.

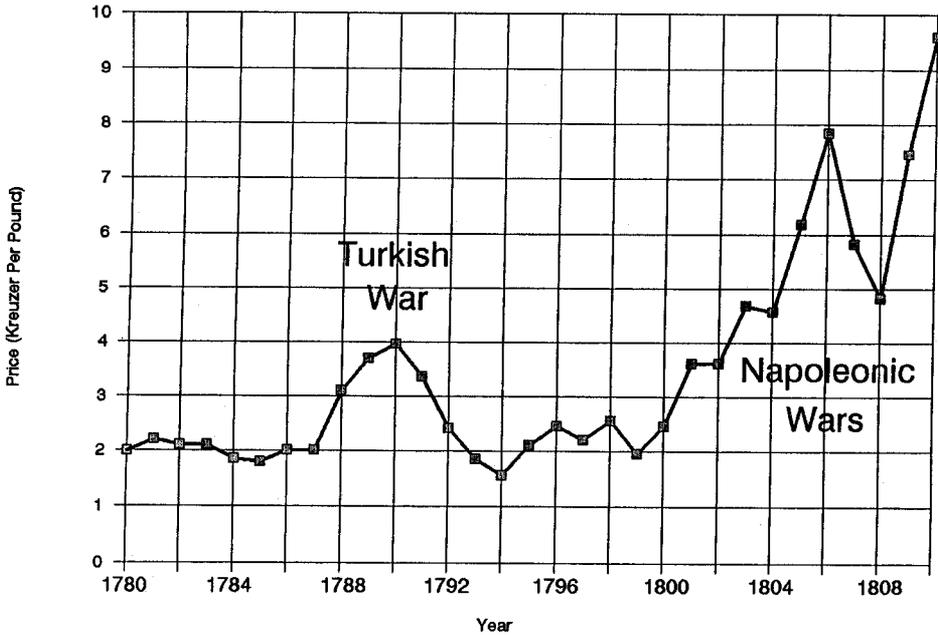
## 1.2. PROSPERITY OF THE HABSBURG TERRITORIES

Economic historians suggest that in the 18th century considerable portions of the Habsburg territories, and the Austrian lands in particular, which included Vienna, were highly prosperous at the end of the 18th century, at least in relative terms. Their per-capita incomes were probably well ahead of those of Brandenburg (Prussia), and very likely higher than that of France. Only England and the low countries may have been in a superior position. Prosperity brought great wealth to well-placed members of the nobility and the small group constituting the upper bourgeoisie of Vienna and the nearby territories, among them Hungary and Bohemia (including Prague). They spent liberally, running their courts and mansions in a lavish style which included the services of many composers and performers. At the same time, because real wages, and those of musicians in particular, were relatively low, a given real expenditure could purchase much more than today in the way of musician service. This is a matter to which we will return presently.

## 1.3. JOSEPH II – THE HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR

Mozart's Emperor, Joseph II, was perhaps the most enlightened of the "enlightened despots" of the era (see e.g., Padover, 1934). Like Frederick the Great, he was a dedicated amateur performer of chamber music, but, unlike the latter, Joseph admired German culture and sought to promote it, for example, through his efforts to encourage German opera at the expense of the fashionable opera of Italy.

Joseph's remarkable measures of liberalism included an attempt to introduce universal and compulsory education, virtual abolition of censorship, steps toward the ending of serfdom, (near) abolition of the death penalty and elimination of the most oppressive restrictions upon Protestants and Jews. Had the Emperor not had a fatal attraction to military activity (probably stimulated by admiration and envy of Frederick the Great), for which he apparently had little talent, he might have been



Source: Morrow p.115. File: WeinInf

(Note: one florin = 60 kreuzer)

Fig. 1. Vienna: bread prices, 1780–1810.

remembered universally as a prime contributor to the spread of the rule of law and modern standards of freedom and public welfare. Unfortunately, the Turkish War, his Vietnam, proved fatal to him, to his achievements and to his reputation. The war was, incidentally, probably in part responsible for Mozart's financial difficulties during his two very troubled years, 1789–1790 (the years when Mozart repeatedly sought to borrow money), his income having been made precarious when the Emperor and part of the music-supporting nobility left Vienna (at least some for the front). Concurrently, a sharp but short-lived inflation, which may have doubled prices (see Figure 1), is likely to have cut severely into the purchasing power of Mozart's income.<sup>3</sup>

Despite his enlightenment Joseph retained a degree of despotism. He felt it appropriate to intervene in a variety of activities in ways that hardly contributed to his popularity. Though he intended to abolish the death penalty, when a nobleman was found to have killed an old woman for her wealth, Joseph condemned the murderer to an execution medieval in its cruelty. He prohibited ballet during opera performances (though he was persuaded, apparently by Da Ponte, to make an exception for *The Marriage of Figaro*). He forbade the wearing of corsets for reasons of health, and for the same reason promulgated the highly-unpopular restrictions on burial practices which, apparently, form the basis for the legend that

Mozart was given a "pauper's burial," a subject we will go into in slightly more detail later.

Characteristically prudent in his expenditures, Joseph seems to have had a strong desire to keep Mozart in Vienna, but to do so at the lowest possible expense. So while he rewarded Mozart with commissions and a stipend, they seem not to have been overly generous.

#### 1.4. EMERGENCE OF THE MARKET FOR MUSICAL SERVICES

Mozart's Vienna decade is noteworthy as a period of transition in the economics of music and, in particular, of composition. It was part of the changeover from the universal system of private patronage to the beginnings of a market mechanism under which the product of the composer and the performer became a commodity that could be bought and sold, the prices ranging from niggardly to spectacularly generous, depending on what the composer or performer could command in the market place. Mozart was among the first in Vienna to turn his talents as composer and virtuoso pianist into a commodity. He usually composed on commission or to advance his career, and he seldom composed without a commercial incentive.<sup>4</sup>

Haydn was perhaps the most telling example of the transition. When he was freed from Esterhazy patronage upon the death of his sponsor, his income leaped from the modest level at which it had been held for many years to the spectacular earnings he received in England (sweetened by the honors conferred upon him by the ancient universities). By our calculations, the British market mechanism made him the equivalent of a 1990 millionaire in the United States (for details on our methods of currency translation see the appendices to this paper). When Mozart died in 1791 arrangements were being made for him to follow Haydn to London, where he might well have had the opportunity to add considerably to his earnings.<sup>5</sup>

Some profound changes helped to make such musical entrepreneurship feasible at this time. One was the gradual replacement of the old *Kapelle* arrangement by hired, professional musicians, a replacement which had begun approximately with the Seven Years War (1756–1763). Under the old system the musical demands of a noble household were supplied by a cadre of household servants led by a *Kapellmeister*, who was little more than a servant himself. Working, probably, for a royal or noble patron or a prince of the church, he was responsible for all musical activities – composing, performing, overseeing musicians, giving musical instruction, and so on. His compositions were not his own property but belonged to his master, and he had to seek permission to accept outside commissions or even to resign from the service of the master. Sometimes he had additional assignments, as when even as famous a *Kapellmeister* as Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf is believed to have had to wait on tables every other night (Moore, 1987, p. 66).

The reasons for the decline of this system may have been rooted in fashion as well as economics. Early in the eighteenth century the most aristocratic patrons

of music had established *Kapellen* in their own households, in which servant-musicians were organized to provide all musical needs including the most elaborate productions.<sup>6</sup>

The *Kapelle* system was largely replaced in the latter part of the eighteenth century when it became fashionable to maintain only smaller *Harmonien* to be augmented by hired musicians. Concurrently there emerged dilettante concerts in which amateurs (often members of the highest aristocracy) performed in private salons along with professional musicians hired for the occasion, sometimes of the caliber of Mozart himself.

The imperial court had abandoned its reliance on the *Kapelle* under Maria Theresa and limited its support of music mainly to opera. Moore comments: "... it seems that a particular source of prestige when adopted by a given social class quickly lost its prestige among the next higher social class. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Imperial court could outshine the private musical performances of aristocratic households only in the area of full-scale opera productions; therefore, the Imperial court virtually abandoned those forms of music that no longer represented its special status. Were the four music-loving emperors who preceded Maria Theresa born music-lovers, or were they conditioned to love music by the fact that they reigned during a period when the Imperial court could command musical resources far superior to those of the aristocracy in general?" (Moore, 1987, p. 100).

While the long process of the decay of royal theaters and the disbanding of large private musical establishments proceeded, those composers and musicians who were partially or entirely displaced declared themselves for hire. They earned their livings in new ways. Public concerts featuring their own works and charging admission began to be organized either by the composer for his own benefit or by one of the new public concert societies. Musicians also gave lessons, had their own works published for sale to the public and accepted commissions and part-time employment.

Publication also began to expand, though so slowly that significant proceeds seem to have largely benefited Mozart's estate rather than himself. The popularity of the new "galant" style of composition, as opposed to the difficult contrapuntal style, increased the feasibility of amateur musical performance. This led to a great demand for published compositions of varying levels of difficulty. The emergence of the music-publishing industry facilitated wide dissemination of the composer's product. The composer, of course, profited from the sale of his work, for which he was often compensated by fixed payment by the publisher. The new publication arrangement also served to advertise the composer's work at home and abroad.

This was the situation when Mozart, having figuratively thumbed his nose at Salzburg's Prince Archbishop and been physically booted out in return, went to Vienna where he found the opportunities for support through patronage only modestly rewarding<sup>7</sup> and augmented his earnings by private enterprise with noteworthy financial success, as we shall see. By the time of Beethoven, reliance on the market

was far greater, and while he still benefited from private patronage, severe inflation had cut deeply into its value.

### 1.5. INTRODUCTION OF THE PIANOFORTE

The eighteenth century brought with it a spate of inventions – the “wave of gadgets” that underlay the industrial revolution. Musical instruments also benefited from this trend. Mozart, one of the earliest virtuoso pianists, had the advantage of improvements that were being made in keyboard instruments. Before the emergence of the pianoforte in the second half of the century, the organ, the clavichord and the harpsichord were the only keyboard instruments available. “The clavichord was simple and cheap to construct, and it allowed the player an intimate control over the intensity and quality of its sound. Sensitive gradations of tone, even a vibrato – the *bebung* – could be achieved. But the clavichord was quiet [it could hardly be heard from a few yards away], and therefore a private instrument. The harpsichord, by contrast, was sufficiently loud and brilliant for hall, theater and church, but could not produce subtle gradations of volume ...” (Ehrlich, 1990, p. 11).

Closson (1947, p. 85) reports, “From the moment that Mozart in 1777 discovered the pianos of Stein, he definitely gave up the harpsichord. Haydn did the same ... so did Beethoven.” Kellett and Naylor (1889, p. 131) concur: “... Mozart, the first world-virtuoso, the idol of the concert hall, thinking only of sound-effects in the great halls, never hesitated for a moment between clavicymbal and piano.” The piano helped to expand the market for the composer’s efforts in at least two ways. First, it facilitated concert performance and made it possible to perform before larger audiences. Second, as pianos entered an increasing number of private homes, the demand for (new) music (see below) also rose. Thus, the evolution of the technology of musical instruments was yet another influence that expanded the free market available to composers and increased the demand for their services in the second half of the eighteenth century.

### 1.6. OTHER INFLUENCES: COST, MUSICAL STYLE, PURSUIT OF PRESTIGE AND LACK OF INTEREST IN “ANCIENT MUSIC”

Low wages, as we shall see, stimulated the production of plays and the demand for playwrights’ services in renaissance London. In 18th century Germany the demand for musicians’ services, generated by the profusion of courts and princes, was also reinforced by low wages, although it is impossible to estimate the value of the perquisites that accompanied them. No doubt they varied for each individual case. At the lowest rung, a musician such as Haydn’s brother, tenor Johann Evangelist, might receive (aside from his servants’ compensation in kind) starvation wages of 60 florins per annum – roughly equivalent to a wage of \$4000 today, and half the pay of the most lowly school teacher (Braunbehrens, 1986, 1990, pp. 127, 129. For more on the currency and its purchasing power, see the Appendix to this paper).

It is, of course, dangerous to take such figures literally, since so large a proportion of the earnings of musicians and others were paid in kind – food, lodging, etc. Moreover, many musicians were paid far better. But still, if the producer were economical, musical services could be provided at far lower relative cost than today. For example, we know that in 1791 on the occasion of the coronation of Leopold II, Joseph's successor, the impresario Domenico Guardasoni undertook to produce *La Clemenza di Tito* for less than 7000 florins. This was less than 20 times the *monetary* salary of a high school teacher in Vienna at the time. Included in this sum were composer's fees, costumes, scenery, performers' salaries and candles (no minor outlay) (Robbins Landon, 1988, pp. 88–89 and 116–117). The example is not meant to deny that extravagant production could be very expensive, sometimes ruinously so to a minor ruler. (On this, see, e.g., Yorke-Long, 1954, pp. 7, 60–61, 71). However, it does mean that the activity *could* be carried out at astonishingly low cost when compared (in real terms) to the outlays required today.

Not only the possibility of economical presentation of musical performance stimulated demand for the composers' work. The advent of the *galant* style of musical writing, with its expressiveness and avoidance of contrapuntal complexities, made attendance at operas and concerts more popular, and also facilitated amateur performance and the demand by amateurs for new compositions.

Musical activities were also sought out as a matter of honor and prestige. "Music, especially instrumental music, then, was a highly honorific indoor sport in Vienna: any Viennese understood that it was something the best people cultivated in a big way ... If music was eminently socially correct ... it would not fail to be impressive to the bevvies of newly rich and newly noble. They could think to better themselves cheaply by aping their betters, so they too assiduously cultivated their musical talents and interests" (Loesser, 1954, p. 119).

Moore quotes the letters of a Count Franz Anton von Sporck who, while professing himself a music lover, was induced to engage an opera company, "... after I learned that princess Schwarzenberg was to take a cure only a mile from here on her husband's estate ... I hoped that the illustrious princess would remain in the vicinity for the entire summer" (Moore, 1987, pp. 95–6), quoting from Freeman (1987, p. 52).

Added to the stimulation of the demand for music and musical *composition* both by genuine appreciation and the pursuit of prestige was the fact that audiences generally were prepared to listen only to *new* music, usually to works written no more than a decade earlier.<sup>8</sup>

It is true that societies of "ancient music" had been formed in London and Vienna in an effort to save the works of composers like Handel and Bach from oblivion, but these "ancient" works were only some 30 years old – closer in time to Mozart's Vienna than, say, George Gershwin is to ours. Moreover, these were esoteric activities of interest only to highly dedicated amateurs and professional musicians. It consequently required the constant efforts of living composers to supply enough *new* works to keep the market supplied.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.7. MOZART'S VIENNA – A FEW REMARKS

During Mozart's decade in Vienna, the city was probably the largest and the wealthiest in the German lands. Still, its population of nearly a quarter of a million was only about half of that of Paris and less than one-fourth of London's. Vienna, then, had somewhat fewer inhabitants than Baton Rouge or Rochester or Tampa have today. As the location of the main court of the Holy Roman Emperor the city attracted both nobility and ambitious members of the rising bourgeoisie, and that, in turn, meant business opportunities for composers, tradesmen and others who served the wealthy, as well as for others who provided goods and services to the latter in the multiplier chain of expenditure.

Vienna lagged behind other capitals in forming societies organized for the purpose of presenting public concerts, and also lacked an adequate concert hall. Instead, the Viennese depended on the two imperial theaters. The leading one was the Burgtheater, probably accommodating between 1600 and 1700 people (the Haymarket in London is reputed to have accommodated 4000), and the other, smaller, one was the Karntnertheater. "Both were under the jurisdiction, at least theoretically, of the Emperor. Their connection with concert history derives from the fact that religious practice dictated that no staged drama, spoken or sung, be presented during the Advent and Lent" (Morrow, p. 42). The practice arose of providing musical performances during those periods as a substitute for the usual presentations of drama, and, thus, in Vienna, musical performance was presented at these premises six weeks of the year, and musicians had to make do with much smaller makeshift rooms and parks for the rest of the year.

For whatever reasons, by the end of the century musical salons were the basis of musical life in Vienna. This included the significant dilettante movement in which amateurs from various social strata, including the very highest, gave musical performances and often hired professionals (Mozart among them) to participate. There was much music-making in the home at all economic levels and at gala occasions, and professional musicians were hired by those who could afford them to provide after-dinner music and other services.

The sizes of the special groups from which consumers of musical services were largely drawn have been estimated. Moore (1989, p. 34) cites Pezzl's estimate that the aristocracy constituted 1 percent of the population of Vienna, while the middle class came to 2.5 percent of the total. This means that the middle class of that time could hardly offer anything resembling a mass market for music, but it might possibly have added substantially to the audience provided by the even-smaller aristocratic portion of the population.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, when the 25-year old Mozart settled in Vienna, that city could hardly claim to be the unchallenged musical capital of Europe. Paris and London provided a greater number of lucrative musical opportunities, higher fees and were more attractive to a number of composers like Handel, Gluck and Haydn. Vienna had neither a public concert hall nor a Friends

of Music Society, but it held the advantage of proximity to the sources of supply of musical talent which at the time flowed predominantly from Italy and from the great number of German and Habsburg non-German centers (notably Hungary and Bohemia). Among the most noteworthy were places such as Berlin (where Frederick the Great employed C.P.E. Bach), Salzburg, Munich, Leipzig, Stuttgart, Prague and Mannheim, among others. Nevertheless, Vienna, as the seat of Empire, was surely the focus of musical life in the German lands, so that it is not difficult to account for the fact that most of the great composers of this part of the world eventually made their way to that city.

## 2. The Basic Hypothesis

### 2.1. THE ROLE OF GERMAN DISUNITY

We turn next to the main subject of our study – influences that led to the extraordinary profusion of composing talent in the Habsburg empire during Mozart’s period and neighboring decades. One can, of course, never determine all of *the* causes of such a phenomenon, even if such a listing were conceivable. However, it is our basic contention that the fragmentation of the Holy Roman Empire and the attendant circumstances go a considerable way toward explaining the incentives for composition in Vienna at the end of the eighteenth century.

In a sense we are suggesting that the opportunities for Gluck, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven have their origin in Canossa in 1077 when Henry IV’s submission to Pope Gregory served to perpetuate the dismemberment of Germany, and in the submission in Venice, precisely one century later, of Frederick Barbarossa to Pope Alexander, which confirmed this fate. In the eighteenth century the Holy Roman Empire included something like 1,800 more-or-less independent German states (to be contrasted with the less than 200 states on the entire planet recognized by the United Nations in 1990). It is certainly true that effective power resided in, perhaps, a half-dozen to a dozen major secular and ecclesiastical dominions, but the fact is that Germany and Italy, unlike France and the United Kingdom, were subdivided into a multitude of petty states, each with its own provincial capital, and each with its own small court in which boredom was a principal concern of the ruler, and where musical activity frequently served as the main antidote. “Each [of the many states of the Holy Roman Empire] was headed by an absolute sovereign princelet, who ... strutted about, affectionately coddling his ornamental army, his hunting apparatus, and his little orchestra ... . Of the kings and dukes, the greater and richer ones maintained their own opera establishments. These were very expensive, fancy luxuries, requiring incredibly luxurious stage machinery ... . Princelets who could not afford their own operas contented themselves with keeping little chamber orchestras” (Loesser, 1954, pp. 4–7).

Here, of course, some principalities were more equal than others. Mannheim was a major focus of musical activity with its own “style” and magnificent orches-

tra. Wittenberg and Dresden were great musical centers, and Berlin was not far behind.<sup>10</sup>

Vienna and Prague were the main centers in the Habsburg possessions. Germany, Bohemia and Hungary were flooded with composers and musicians, many, undoubtedly, very minor talents and long deservedly forgotten, but their sheer number was surely astonishing.

As was already noted, old music was almost never played, and programs consisted of newly composed music, often by the court composer. This made for an abundance of employment opportunities for a host of composers and musicians spanning the full range of ability. It is well known that many of the court musicians were treated as servants, but also, in many cases, in order to qualify for employment as a servant the candidate was expected to display some musical skills. It also seems obvious that the necessity to practice these skills, often in the company of extremely accomplished musicians, served to hone them to a higher level. It is even reported (though it may strain credulity) that in Bohemia, "Every schoolmaster was expected to compose, rehearse, and perform at least one mass each year" (Braunbehrens, 1990, 1986, p. 295).

It is our conclusion that this profusion of outlets for the work of the composer served in a manner analogous to the bush leagues in baseball today, attracting and bringing to light the prospective superstars, along with a horde of less-talented aspirants, into musical composition rather than the other, often vastly different, occupations of their ancestors. The courts that valued music the most and were willing to spend the most money picked off the best.

We can hardly claim that anything approximating proof is provided by the evidence offered here for the hypothesis that the availability of a very large number of composers' posts brought forward many practitioners of the art, among them some geniuses who might otherwise never have written any music. Yet we believe that this line of reasoning, coupled with that of the next subsections, is sufficiently persuasive to convince dispassionate observers that it constitutes a substantial part of the story.

## 2.2. ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE AVAILABILITY OF ARTISTIC OPPORTUNITY

In an era in which sons often followed the occupations of their fathers (as did Bach and his own numerous sons), what else can have led these great German composers to seek a career other than the ones traditionally followed by their forefathers? In the absence of an enormous demand for the services of composers, one might never have suspected that the son of a forester (Gluck), the son of a wheelwright and distinguished town official (Haydn) and the grandson of a bookbinder and a government official (Mozart) were potential giants of musical composition (Robbins Landon, 1989, p. 11) See also the pertinent entries in the Grove Dictionary.<sup>11</sup>

The implication is that while suitable economic circumstances are, in themselves, hardly sufficient to elicit an abundance of musical genius, they may constitute a necessary condition for this result. As we have said before, economics can hardly be the entire story, but neither can its role be denied altogether. And surely it is plausible that many of those entering the labor market would turn to careers for which they thought themselves suitable in fields where there existed opportunities.

We have already seen evidence suggesting strongly that the political fragmentation of Germany (and Italy) provided opportunities for musicians which France and England did not offer. Despite the considerable musical activity in Paris and London, much of the talent seems to have been imported. Opportunities for native musicians must have been very limited because France and the United Kingdom had no secondary cities with a thriving musical life. Lyons and Rouen were not Mannheim, and York or Bath were not Berlin. One is led to surmise that the incentive for young job seekers to turn to music were far more modest than in Germany.

The role of economics in such matters is eloquently expressed in another context by that noted defender of historical materialism, G. V. Plekhanov. He observes, "In order that a man who possesses a particular kind of talent may, by means of it, greatly influence the course of events ... the existing social order must not bar the road to the person possessing the talent which is needed and useful precisely at the given time ... . Napoleon would have died as the barely known General or Colonel Bonaparte had the old order in France existed another seventy-five years. In 1789 ... Augereau was a fencing master; Lannes was a dyer; Gouvion Saint-Cyr was an actor; Jourdan was a peddler; Bessières was a barber; Brune was a compositor; Joubert and Junot were law students; Kléber was an architect ... . Had the old order continued until our day it would never have occurred to any of us that in France at the end of the 18th century, certain actors, composers, barbers, dyers, lawyers, peddlers and fencing masters had been potential military geniuses" (Plekhanov, 1878, 1969, pp. 169–70).

### 2.3. ANALOG: THE ECONOMICS OF THEATER IN RENAISSANCE LONDON<sup>12</sup>

The case can, perhaps, be made more plausible by an analogy. The reason for the profusion of memorable composers in Germany towards the end of the 18th century clearly has its counterpart in the large number of great playwrights in London during the reigns of the first Elizabeth and James. Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare are only the most notable of these figures. Once again, economics surely cannot have created their genius, but it can be argued with some degree of plausibility that it gave them their opportunity.

The Phelps Brown-Hopkins indices<sup>13</sup> extending back to the 13th century, indicate that the plague and its decimation of the labor force raised real wages to levels unduplicated until the end of the 19th century. But with the accession of Henry VIII

there began the great Tudor inflation which lasted nearly one and a half centuries, and which eroded the purchasing power of wages, bringing them, by the decade of Shakespeare's greatest productivity, to the lowest level in the entire seven centuries covered by the statistics. Undoubtedly, wages of theater builders, costume makers and actors followed a similar pattern.

The consequence for the economics of play production was dramatic. Today it takes well over a year for a non-musical play to recoup the expenses of its production, and before World War I it required a run of less than two months to break even. However, at the time the Globe Theater was in operation if a play ran for two weeks it was a great and profitable success. Low wages made a labor-intensive activity like theatrical production relatively cheap, and the result was that the demand for new plays was enormous. Producers had to maintain a stable of playwrights. They even resorted to the services of playwriting committees which were sometimes ordered to grind out new plays in a matter of days if the previous production proved to be disappointing commercially. With so much opportunity it is easily imagined that persons in search of employment would turn to the dramatist's occupation, and that out of the large number of entrants into the craft a small number who might otherwise never have been suspected of possession of the talent would turn out to be extremely capable, in some cases even able to write for the ages.

As has been argued, a different but equally powerful set of influences stimulated the market for composers' services in the Holy Roman Empire in the second half of the eighteenth century and, arguably, led many of those in search of gainful employment to turn to this activity. We may surmise that the bulk of those who did so might well have gone into forestry, farming or bookbinding. But, surely, it was among those many that society turned up those few whose works were to endure. Thus, it is our conclusion that a crucial influence helping to explain the profusion of great composers in Vienna at the time was a combination of circumstances, perhaps the most important of which was the fragmented state of the Empire that added greatly to the number of job opportunities for composers – an ideal situation for Mozart and others to pioneer abandonment of the old retainer system and become a musical entrepreneur.

### **3. On Revisionist Views of Mozart's Circumstances**

This completes the discussion of our central topic. But we cannot end without offering some comments on the recent revisionist literature on Mozart's life and economic circumstances. Though it represents a digression for us, we think we have something pertinent to say about some of the romantic legends that have grown up about Mozart. Most of these have been dispelled by biographers like Braunbehrens (1986, 1990) and Robbins Landon (1988, 1989), and on those we will, consequently, be very brief.

## 3.1. MISCELLANEOUS LEGENDS

We have already alluded to the circumstances which inspired the tale of Mozart's "pauper's burial." Joseph II, as an enlightened ruler, decreed that for reasons of sanitation, economy and rationality, burial masses would be celebrated in Viennese churches, and the bodies then transported in (reusable) wooden boxes to mass graves outside the city limits in special carts. Not many people chose to argue with the Emperor, and it became the custom to conclude the burial service at the Church rather than to follow the funeral cart on its long trip to the mass burial ground. Only members of the highest nobility managed to avoid this sort of "pauper's burial," and so it is true that Mozart, along with the wealthy bourgeoisie, did not escape it. Incidentally, it was customary to dig the bones out of the mass graves after a number of years, depositing them in the ossuaries that tourists still visit in Vienna, so that the cemetery grounds could be used again.

The evidence also leads one to spring to the defense of Constanze against the accusation that she was a silly, uncaring woman. It is true that Mozart's father disapproved of the marriage and that her family may have been opportunists, but the deep affection displayed in Mozart's letters to her (none of her letters to him is preserved), the intelligence and care with which she oversaw posthumous publication of his works (with unwillingness to accept lucrative offers that threatened shoddy publication) and her contributions to the material for Nissen's biography of Mozart all make the traditional depiction of her extremely questionable.

Only those whose total knowledge of Mozart's life is limited to attendance at the play or movie, *Amadeus*, can believe that Salieri poisoned Mozart. Actually, when the deed was alleged to have been committed Joseph II had died, and his successor, in a great economy sweep, had fired Salieri and abolished his post, to which Mozart may conceivably once have aspired.

It is difficult to picture Mozart as an unmannered lout when we know the company he kept, which included some of the most distinguished people in Vienna. He was a Mason, a suspect liberal organization at that time. Like other artists and writers, he selected his librettos to promote the liberal ideas that found fruition in the French Revolution, testing the limits of censorship in the process. It is hard to believe that it was merely fortuitous that his librettists and sources included Da Ponte and Beaumarchais, who were often in trouble with the authorities. Incidentally, the profusion of common themes in his librettos written by different librettists, surely indicates that he must have taken a substantial role in their writing. An example is the recurrence of the revolutionary theme of the exploitation of servants by masters and the superior intelligence, leadership and/or morality of the servants (Blonde in the *Abduction*, Suzanna and Figaro in the *Marriage*, Despina in *Cosi*, and even, to some degree, Leporello and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*). Another illustration is the repeated appearance of the theme of forgiveness. The point is that these operas, all written with different librettists, are rare in their literary sophistication, something that can be accounted for only by an influence they shared in

common. They all clearly show the hand of a talented and powerful intellect, one with clear ideas about human nature, justice, marriage<sup>14</sup> and the appropriate role of humor.

We are also inclined to concur with Julia Moore's educated guess about his character, "I would describe him rather as high-spirited, energetic, hard-working, fun-loving, absolutely assured of his talent and impatient with the lesser talents of most fellow musicians, and usually buoyant in the face of adversity" (1991 p. 22).

### 3.2. MOZART'S SUPPOSED POVERTY

As we will show next, Mozart earned a good deal of money during his decade in Vienna. For some years now, it has become increasingly clear that, whether or not it placed him in the most affluent portion of the middle class – a subject still disputed – Mozart's income put him well above the poverty level (see Braunbehrens, Robbins Landon and the data provided by Moore (1989, p. 21). However, the magnitude of his earnings seems not to have been evaluated defensibly in terms of today's dollars, so that their size was not readily apparent to the reader. We will attempt to provide such a translation.

It is true that there were periods when Mozart was in financial difficulties. In part, as we will see, this was attributable to his high standard of living. In addition, the two years (about 1789 to 1790) in which he seems to have been seriously strapped coincided with an expensive illness of Constanze's and a period probably characterized by high inflation and reduced demand for musical services by the court and that part of the nobility who were occupied with the Turkish War. Clearly, the inflation considerably (if temporarily) reduced the purchasing power of Mozart's earnings (see Figure 1, which shows the price of bread, as reported by Morrow (1984) for the period 1780 to 1810, including all of Mozart's time of residence in Vienna).<sup>15</sup>

Steptoe, in his review of the evidence (1984), also notes that in the years when Mozart appears to have been in financial trouble he suffered a sharp drop in the number of his concert appearances, which may well be, to some degree, attributable to the dispersion of the court and the fall in demand resulting from the war. There may also have been a general drop in Mozart's popularity caused, perhaps, by overexposure on the Viennese concert stage, as Steptoe proposes. Certainly Mozart undertook several onerous trips between 1785 and 1791, possibly to duplicate his Viennese success in other cities. Unfortunately, they seem to have been only mildly remunerative if at all.

It is noteworthy that by 1791, Mozart's last year, Constanze was apparently no longer taking the cure, the Turkish war was over, prices appear to have returned to their pre-war level and the documented part of Mozart's income was higher than its 1783–91 average. Offers were arriving from England and Russia and honorary pensions were being gathered to attract him to Amsterdam and Hungary

(Braunbehrens, p. 141). Had he but lived, his financial troubles might possibly soon have vanished<sup>16</sup> (perhaps only to rise again during the terrible inflation of the Napoleonic wars, as happened to Haydn and Beethoven).

### 3.3. MOZART'S FINANCIAL STATE: TRANSLATING 1780S AUSTRIAN CURRENCY INTO CURRENT DOLLARS

Before going into more detail on Mozart's income and expenditures we must try to arrive at an understanding of what those figures mean in terms comprehensible to us today. There is no really accurate way to translate the currency of another land in another era into money here and now. The most obvious reason is that people have changed their requirements and patterns of consumption. They now buy very different combinations of things whose relative prices vary greatly.

Specialists have designed methods that do the job in a rough and ready manner. Part 1 of the Appendix to this article describes two such methods which yield two different numbers, each with a legitimate and significant interpretation.

The first simply corrects for the change over time in the price level, which has risen considerably since 1786 (the mid-point of Mozart's residence in Vienna), so that it takes many more dollars or pounds today to buy a given bundle of goods than it would have in 1786. Moreover, the contents of a representative market basket have changed, and some effort must be made to take this into account. Our appendix calculation indicates that the 2,500 florin estimate of Mozart's average income in his Viennese period, which we believe to be quite conservative, would have enabled him to purchase a bundle of goods whose 1990 equivalent would cost somewhere near \$25,000 today (see part 2 of the Appendix). That is hardly great wealth, though it is not abject poverty either. But it neglects the fact that in those days Europe was far poorer than it is today, and so the purchasing power of almost everyone was far lower than that of his or her 20th century counterpart.

To deal with this fact, the second method of calculation undertakes a comparison of the *hierarchy* of earnings in Mozart's time and the present. Even the 1700 florins, which was the average of Mozart's documented earnings alone, came to more than five times the 300 florin money income that was the top of the scale for a high school teacher at that time. If we assume that the average teacher received as much again in kind (such payments were common practice then), and that Mozart received absolutely no such nonmonetary remuneration,<sup>17</sup> the *known and documented portion* of Mozart's income alone would have come to more than 2.8 times ( $1,700 = (2.8) \times (600)$ , approximately) that of the teacher. Thus, if Mozart were to be in the same income position relative to a New York City high school teacher today (whose top salary is \$50,000), he would have to earn more than 2.8 times that amount, or nearly \$150,000 per annum! This comparison cannot be taken to be more than a suggestive guess, but it illustrates that our second translation of Mozart's income into today's dollars is based on a comparison of Mozart's income with earnings of others in Vienna at the time. It also suggests that Mozart's earnings

put him well into the bracket of the middle class of his Vienna, when, according to Pezzl's guidebook, the 1786 budget of a typical middle class bachelor (actually, a rather impecunious middle-class bachelor) amounted to some 550 florins, that is, well under 25 percent of our (we think conservative) guess about Mozart's average income (see below). There is an abundance of other evidence that supports this general conclusion, though the numbers just suggested should not be accepted as more than gross approximations. Yet it is important to note that there has just emerged, through the capable scholarship of Dr. Moore a re-revisionist position that holds that the recent studies that have concluded that Mozart's income was substantial, constitute an exaggeration, if not worse.

It is reasonable to surmise that Mozart, like so many businessmen today, experienced cash flow problems. No doubt he was pressed for payment for expenditures connected with his musical activities, and we know that at least some of his receipts came in very slowly. He had probably borrowed a substantial amount while establishing himself in Vienna and for various other purposes, though it is interesting that he did not leave a particularly large burden of debt on his death – less than 2000 gulden (Braunbehrens, p. 424). By his final year, however, his finances appear to have been under somewhat better control,<sup>18</sup> and he had reason to expect in the next year to follow Haydn to London, where the latter had been able to earn far more than Mozart earned in Vienna, even in his most prosperous periods.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.4. MORE ON MOZART'S INCOME

Over a century ago, Jahn (1856–9) provided the then currently known evidence on Mozart's recorded earnings during his decade in Vienna (for a careful review of what is known and what is not known about Mozart's income, see Steptoe). Jahn's figures on Mozart's income, are all (more or less) documented and, apparently, were not disputed until very recently. After Braunbehrens took them over as the basis for his calculations, Moore examined the figures more critically, and took issue with such things as the inclusion of Mozart's borrowings as income, and the inclusion as 1791 income of a 2000 florin figure that Mozart mentions as an expected receipt in a letter seeking to borrow money, a receipt for which absolutely no confirming evidence appears to exist. Because of Moore's careful scholarship our calculations are based on her figures rather than Braunbehrens'.<sup>20</sup>

These figures must be interpreted with considerable caution because they represent only the documented portion of Mozart's actual income. In addition, these figures represent only gross income, with no deductions for professional expenses (see below). Many sources of income, including publication fees, payments for lessons, private concerts, payments for the composition of some of his operas and so on, have been omitted because we do not know the precise amounts he received for them. However, for many of the omitted items we do know the customary fees and the amounts Mozart had received for other similar activities. For example, we know that for *Figaro* he was paid 100 ducats or 425 florins (equivalent, roughly

to a wage of \$30,000 in 1989).<sup>21</sup> Yet, because we do not know his fee for the *Abduction*, this fee is here very conservatively treated as though it was zero.

The jagged curve in Figure 2 reports, year by year, just the *documented* and, hence, known income received by Mozart. Its considerable volatility is probably attributable to the haphazard nature of the information that survives as much as to changes in the market for his services. Even if we consider only this known part of his income, we find that it averaged some 1,700 florins per year (the wage equivalent of about 120,000 1990 dollars), and surpassed 2,000 florins (or 140,000 in 1990 dollars) in three of the nine years depicted in the graph.

Braunbehrens calculates that if we add to these figures reasonable evaluations of his undocumented income, his average earnings during his Vienna years are conservatively estimated at 3,000–4,000 florins per annum.<sup>22</sup>

We adopt a far more conservative guess, for purposes of comparison. We assume (without evidence) that no more than two thirds of his total income is included explicitly in the documentation provided by the surviving papers, and therefore comes to some 2,500 florins.

The purchasing power of our estimate of Mozart's average income – the 2500 florins – is estimated by the crude methods available for the purpose to be about that of \$25,000 today, but measured in terms of the ratio of 1786 Viennese wages to today's wages in the U.S., it amounted to approximately<sup>23</sup> \$175,000 relative to the average U.S. wage in 1989 (for the evidence, see the appendices).

It should be emphasized, however, that these figures can, at best, be accepted as reasonable estimates of Mozart's *gross* income, because they do not deduct unavoidable professional expenses, whose magnitude has proved very difficult to estimate (see the discussion of his expenses, below.)

Mozart had five principal sources of income: patronage, performance, music lessons, publication, and commissions. His income from patronage in Vienna was limited – principally the sinecure stipend, 800 florins per year, granted by the Emperor in 1787. The grant came late in Mozart's life, and the amount, though hardly negligible, was far smaller than others, such as Gluck, had received.

A large part of Mozart's income was probably earned as virtuoso pianist. He played often at the all-important "... private salons ... where most of the music making took place," and where "Mozart ... maintained a dizzying schedule of private appearances at his zenith in the mid 1980's" (Morrow, pp. 37–8). Payment was at the discretion of the host and probably varied greatly. He composed 26 pianoforte concertos for performance at his own concerts which are considered to be among his greatest works. He organized subscription series of three or four concerts or more, at least sometimes aided by, perhaps, the first private impresarios, Philipp Jacques Martin and Ignaz Schuppanzigh. Such concerts were held in the inadequate private facilities that existed in Vienna. Mozart claimed to have 174 subscribers for one such projected series, and his series of six concerts in the Mehlgrube attracted 150 subscribers (Morrow, pp. 56–7). They may have been extremely lucrative.

How much did he earn at public concerts? Again Morrow's careful scholarship comes to our aid: "Generalizing ... is impossible ... . If the circumstances were right, one performance could bring in 1,000–1,500 gulden [florins] or more (two to three times the court orchestra concert master's annual salary). Even a half-empty hall at Jahn's (the concert hall of the Court Caterer in the Himmelpfortgasse (Gate of Heaven Road)) would have brought in 400 gulden and left *ca.* 250 gulden after expenses. The situation in Vienna offered musicians a good chance to make money, if they had the business sense and the talent to take advantage of it" (Morrow, p. 146).

We have more evidence on how much Mozart could earn at his peak as concert performer. His father, in a letter to his daughter on February 16, 1785, wrote of "... his first subscription concert, where there was a vast concourse of people of rank. Each person pays one souverain d'or (13½ gulden) or 3 ducats [\$900 in today's wage equivalent] for the 6 Lenten concerts ... for the use of the room he pays only *one half a souverain d'or*" (quoted in Robbins Landon, 1989, p. 125).

It was the opinion of Jahn that Mozart did not earn much from publication of his works: "... the music trade of the day was small and insignificant; indeed, the first impulse was given to it by the publication of an edition of all Mozart's works soon after his death. During his life ... compositions were more often copied than printed; and the composer was obliged to keep careful watch lest copies should be distributed which were ... never paid for." He points out that such caution was not in Mozart's nature, but adds, "He was careful only of his concertos ... not allowing any one to play them who chose" (Jahn, 1891, 1970, p. 293). Certainly his letters reflect this view.

Mozart insisted on the high price for lessons of 6 ducats (some \$1800 in 1989 wage equivalent) for 12 lessons to be given every day. The work was limited to the winter season and was a highly undependable source of income. Some teachers, e.g., Clementi, charged more than Mozart for lessons, but Mozart's fee was far above the norm (Stephoe, p. 197). It is possible that he resorted to private teaching when he was in great need of money. It may have been his principal source of income before the premiere of *The Abduction* in 1782, his first great popular success.

For composition Mozart also received fees toward the high end of the scale of customary fees, e.g., normally 100 ducats per opera. He probably sometimes received more, but not as much as Paisiello at his most popular.

### 3.5. ON MOZART'S EXPENDITURES

As Mozart, so to speak, ran his own business, it is interesting to learn his professional expenses. One component may have been the necessity of adequate premises. Robbins Landon writes: "In Vienna, at that time [1784], Mozart's name was on every tongue ... . It was a heady success, also financially, and the Mozarts urgently required a new and much larger apartment, where they could accommodate the

constant presence of copyists, pupils and the complicated organization needed to deal with academy concerts, subscription invitations, and so on ... The move was to be made ... to splendid, very expensive, and spacious quarters, for which the rent was 460 gulden [florins] p.a. [per annum] (compared with the 150 gulden for his previous flat)" (Robbins Landon, 1989, pp. 119–120). That is, he was now paying a rent equivalent to \$30,000, measured in 1989 U.S. wages. It should be said that rents in Vienna were very high, and this was less than rents paid by many of Mozart's friends – highly compensated actors, opera singers, members of the nobility and the wealthy bourgeoisie. Keeping up with them must have been a strain on the Mozart budget.

Pianos were also costly. Mozart reports that Stein's price for his higher-quality pianos was no "... less than three hundred gulden ... [over \$20,000 in wage equivalent]" (letter of October 17, 1777, as quoted in King, 1955, p. 243). This was the same as his father's base annual income. Mozart also undoubtedly increased the outlay on his pianoforte further by having it fitted with a complicated pedal board "... built like the pianoforte, with similar hammers, dampers, etc., but the keys are much enlarged and so disposed that they can be played with the feet" (King, p. 245, quoting an 1806 description).

As we have seen, there is no reason to suggest that Mozart was economical in most of his outlays. Jahn refers to his "thoughtless liberality." His love of costly clothing was probably carried to extremes. On April 16, 1785, Leopold writes to his daughter that Madame Lange and Wolfgang had intended going with him to Munich, but nothing was likely to come of it, "although each of them have now had six pairs of shoes made, which are all standing there now."

Bär (1978) carefully reviews much more such evidence, both on Mozart's outlays and on expenditure patterns in Vienna at the time. He concludes that the family must have been spending approximately at the rate of 2000 florins per year. However, he does not include medical expenses (including Constanze's six pregnancies), maintenance of a horse, attendance at the theater (of which Mozart was extremely fond), books and musical scores, among other things.

The itemization of Mozart's estate, which there is good reason to believe was deliberately undervalued (in accord with current custom), also suggests that his expenditures were rather generous. His estate contained many suits of expensive clothing, many porcelain figures and boxes, a billiard table, and four couches with matching upholstered chairs that normally appeared only in the estates of the very rich.<sup>24</sup>

He was certainly a liberal spender in some ways, but it does not follow that such outlays were excessive in light of his income level, and certainly not compared to those of his friends and acquaintances. On Mozart's death he left debts of less than 2,000 gulden, not a huge amount for one who had been so liberal a spender. Perhaps he paid off some of his debts when the money rolled in again in 1791. It may be illuminating to end with Steptoe's summation: "The financial difficulties Mozart encountered later in his life were almost inevitable for an artist reliant on

irregular sources, who was in ill-health and somewhat unpopular at the same time. It is not necessary to infer that Mozart and Constanze were profligate or (as is often claimed without evidence) that Mozart gambled his income away in order to account for their predicament. She in particular has received an excessive degree of blame. Her supposed thriftlessness and caprice are hard to reconcile with her financial shrewdness as a widow" (p. 200).

#### 4. Concluding Comment

It would appear that it was not Vienna, but its hinterlands, to which one should assign the bulk of the credit for the emergence of so great a number of great composers. Vienna usually attracted them from other parts of Germany after the first stages of their career paths had been completed. Probably no one explanation can account for the extraordinary profusion of Germanic composition that spanned the end of one century and the beginning of another, but it is difficult to believe that the political fragmentation of the country and the associated proliferation of job opportunities for musicians had little or no role in attracting into the profession many persons who otherwise might have gone elsewhere, and in helping to ferret out those among the recruits who displayed unusual ability.

#### 5. Appendix – Method of Conversion: 1786 Pounds to 1989 Dollars, With Some Notes on Mozart's Income, 1781–1791<sup>25</sup>

##### A.1. TRANSLATION OF 1786 CURRENCY INTO 1989 TERMS

The task of interpreting Mozart's eighteenth century income into today's terms cannot be carried out unambiguously, given the vast differences in consumption patterns and living standards. Two different conversions of 1786 pounds to 1989 dollars will be used here to present a fuller picture.

The first of these is a comparison of the *purchasing power* of a unit of currency today with that of the eighteenth century, using the Phelps Brown-Hopkins index for a market basket of consumables for the years 1786 through 1950 in southern England. This is then extended to 1989 using the United Kingdom GDP deflator as reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Finally, the resulting 1989 *British pound* figure (taking 1786 = 100) is converted to dollars using the BLS purchasing-power-parity (PPP) exchange rate between pounds and dollars, as calculated by the BLS. The figure obtained in this way is an estimate of the number of 1989 U.S. dollars required to purchase a market basket of consumer goods that is roughly equivalent to a market basket that could have bought for one pound in southern England in 1786. This figure will be used to calculate the 1989 *purchasing power* of Mozart's income.

Also offered is a second pound-dollar conversion which estimates an *earnings equivalent* comparison. This takes into account both the change in the purchasing power of money and, in addition, the rise in average standards of living. It gives

us the ratio of the number of dollars earned by a "typical" worker in 1989 to the comparable earnings figure for 1786. It does so by adding to the information used in the calculations of the preceding paragraph an estimate of the rise in real wages in England over the two hundred and four years in question. To estimate that rise in real wages we start, once again, with the Phelps Brown-Hopkins data, this time using their index of real building wages, and then bring their figures up to date with the aid of BLS data for the UK. Since real wages are estimated, on this calculation, to have risen by a factor of 7.2 over the period,<sup>26</sup> the figure in the preceding paragraph is simply multiplied by this factor. The result is almost certainly an underestimate, since use of the PPP exchange-rate figure ignores the fact that US 1989 real wages were substantially higher than the British, and so have risen even more in relation to 1786 British wages. This second approach to 1989 dollar translation of a 1786 pound is to be interpreted as the number of dollars an American must earn in 1989 to be in the same relative position, vis-a-vis an "average worker," that the earner of one pound sterling would have been in England in 1786. This figure will be used to determine in 1989 terms where Mozart's income placed him in the hierarchy of earnings in Vienna in about 1786.

The pertinent data are given in Table I.

Thus, we conclude that the number of 1989 pounds equivalent to one 1786 pound equals

$$\begin{aligned} \text{in purchasing power: } & (3.76) \times (14.3) = 53.9 \\ \text{in relative wage: } & (53.9) \times (3.1) \times (2.3) = 388. \end{aligned}$$

We then obtain via a pound-dollar translation: 1989 dollar equivalent of a 1786 pound (at PPP 1989 exchange rate 0.6161 pounds per dollar) equals

$$\begin{aligned} \text{in purchasing power: } & 53.9/0.6161 = \$87.50; \\ \text{in relative wage: } & 388/0.6161 = \$630. \end{aligned}$$

To sum up the results of the two approaches, one British pound in 1786 could purchase a bundle of goods equivalent to one worth about \$87.50 today; and to be in the same place in the earnings hierarchy as the earner of one pound in 1786, one must earn (approximately) \$630 today.

To evaluate today's dollar equivalent of Austrian money in Mozart's time we took 9 Viennese florins (gulden) to have been equivalent to one pound during that period.

According to the authoritative information supplied by Professor John J. McCusker (Department of History, University of Maryland), to whom we are deeply grateful, this is consistent with the reports in the Viennese financial press of the day, and is approximately the figure given by Ruelle (1798, p. 425). Robbins Landon uses 10 florins to the pound, while Braunbehrens uses 8, so the figure selected here falls precisely between the two.

TABLE I. Data for calculation of 1989 dollar equivalent of 1786 pound

	Price of market basket		Real wage	
	Phelps Brown-Hopkins Index	BLS Index	Phelps Brown-Hopkins Index	BLS Index
1786	839.0	NA	58.0	NA
1950	3155.0	18.3	180.0	53.3
<i>Ratio</i> (1950/1786)	4.76		3.1	
1989	NA	262.4	NA	123.9
<i>Ratio</i> (1989/1950)		14.3		2.3

TABLE II. Translation of 1786 Austrian currency into 1989 dollars

	1 florin =	1 ducat =
In Purchasing Power	\$10 (approx)	\$45 (approx)
In Wage Equivalent	\$70 (approx)	\$300 (approx)

This meant that the ducat, worth about 4.5 florins, was equivalent to half of a British pound. This readily gives us the 1989 dollar translations of one florin and one ducat, respectively, that is shown in Table II.

## A.2. MOZART'S INCOME IN 1989 TERMS

Mozart's average annual documented income during his years 1783–91 in Vienna has been calculated from Moore's data (1989, p. 21) to have been a bit more than 1711 florins.

Our reason for omission of the years 1791–92 has already been described.

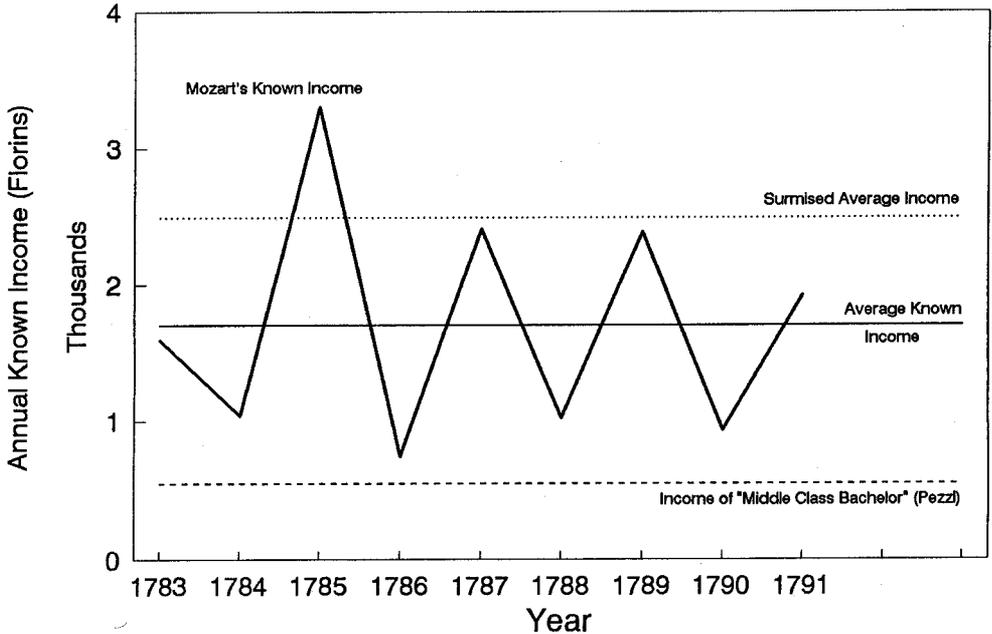
Guessing that no more than 2/3 of his total income is listed in surviving documents, we have estimated his total income to have averaged 2500 florins. This can be translated into 1989 dollars, very approximately, with the aid of the figures in Table II, yielding:

1989 purchasing power, Mozart's estimated average annual income:

\$25,000;

1989 real wage equivalent of that income: \$175,000.

If the guess at Mozart's average annual income is considered too shaky, one can perform a similar calculation upon the average of Mozart's known income figures as reported by Moore. As we have seen, for the years 1783–91 this is somewhat in excess of 1700 florins. Performing the same calculations as before, this figure translates into a 1989 purchasing power of \$17,000, and a real wage equivalent of



Source: Moore [1989]. File: mozmoore 14 Feb. '92

Fig. 2. Mozart's *known* income, 1783–1791 (Moore's calculations, omitting undocumented income).

about \$120,000. This clear underestimate of Mozart's income does not amount to vast wealth, but it is surely far from grinding poverty.

Figure 2 shows Mozart's *known* income, year by year, during his last nine years in Vienna. The data are the numbers provided by Moore (1989, p. 21) and generally constitute a downward revision of the data first documented by Otto Jahn in his 1856–59 biography of Mozart. Also included in the graph for purposes of comparison, are three horizontal lines. The lowest shows Pezzi's estimate of the annual income required by a (lower) middle class bachelor. The middle line is the average of the known income figures reported by Moore for the years in question. The top line depicts our guess about the magnitude of Mozart's average income, documented and undocumented.

## Notes

- \* The authors are, respectively, professor of economics at Princeton and New York Universities, and president of Consultants in Industry Economics, Inc. We are deeply grateful for comments and suggestions to Edward T. Cone, Timothy Guinnane, Richard Kapp, Arno Mayer, John J. McCusker and Maynard Solomon. We are particularly indebted to Dr. Julia Moore, who saved us from some embarrassing mistakes on matters musical or historical – fields in which our standing is strictly that of amateurs (both in the original and current senses of the word). Of

course, none of these can be held responsible for our conclusions, and Dr. Moore in particular takes a different view from ourselves on Mozart's finances. None of the work reported here is based on direct archival study and it undertakes only to explore the implications of the published materials. This paper was originally prepared for the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, which has published an abbreviated version and with whose kind permission this article is published. We are also very much indebted to New York University's C.V. Starr Center for Applied Economics for facilitating our work on this paper.

1. The assassination victim of *Un Ballo in Maschera*.
2. Of course, royal marriage patterns made it difficult to say of any monarch that he had no significant amount of German blood. Among the ancestors of Louis XVI there was, for example, Anne of Austria, wife of Louis XIII and mother of the Sun King, she whose association with the Duke of Buckingham is the focus of *The Three Musketeers*.
3. Figure 1 is based only on the price of bread, *faute de mieux*, as a crude indicator of inflation. Moore's excellent index of food and rent prices (probably as accurate as the surviving data permit), which she used in her analysis of Beethoven's income, does not begin until 1790. The use of bread prices is particularly dangerous because some governments in Europe at that time placed controls on the price of bread to forestall disorder and revolution. This suggests that the rise in bread prices during the Turkish War probably provides an *underestimate* of the general rate of the war inflation, with the government permitting a doubling in bread prices only when it could no longer hold them back. This suggestive use of bread price is the only way that figure is used in the current paper, its purpose being to apply Moore's cogent argument about Beethoven to Mozart – that one cannot understand his real income without taking into account the role of inflation..
4. His letters affirm this repeatedly, as in the quotation at the beginning of this article. However, such statements may well exaggerate Mozart's dedication to money making, perhaps having been intended to reassure his father and to stem the flow of stern fatherly advice. Professor Edward T. Cone reminds us that Mozart wrote pieces for his own family: four-hand sonatas that he played with his sister, violin sonatas that he played with his wife and pieces he wrote for his pupils. Thus, as is to be expected, his objective was not quite undeviatingly pecuniary.
5. Still, this oft repeated report may be viewed with some skepticism, given the lack of attention to Mozart's music in London at this period. According to McVeigh Haydn had tried repeatedly but unsuccessfully to convince the English of Mozart's greatness (McVeigh, 1993, p. 127).
6. Below, we report the evaluation by Moore who concludes that aristocratic and bourgeois demand for musical composition and performance was as much, and perhaps more, a matter of ostentation and the pursuit of status and prestige, as it was of appreciation of the arts.
7. However, in 1787, he was appointed to the post of Imperial Chamber Musician, largely a sinecure, at a fairly generous stipend of 800 florins per annum.
8. The expected impermanence of musical works is underscored by the fact that they were often written with particular performers in mind. There are many examples in Mozart's writings, and he was known to criticize performances because they were not given by the performer for whom the composer intended them. He describes his attendance at a Holzhauer opera in Mannheim thus: *The prima donna*, Madame Wending, "... is always indisposed and, what is more, the opera was not written for her, but for a certain Danzi, who is at present in England; consequently it is not suited to her voice, but is too high for her" (Mozart to his father, November, 14–16, 1777; Anderson, 1938, Vol. 2, pp. 549–50).
9. By Mozart's Viennese period "ancient musick" had begun to acquire some status in London with Paris and Berlin lagging behind. "In the year 1700 [in London] it would have seemed more than mildly ludicrous to put on regular public concerts offering only music more than twenty or so years old ... . Yet in 1776 a group of noblemen founded just such a musical society, the proudly backward-looking Concert of Ancient Music ... . In 1784 its august directors put on a grand festival in honour of George Frederick Handel, then twenty-five years in his grave, that brought 525 musicians and over four and a half thousand listeners to Westminster Abbey and seized the attention of newspapers from Boston to Berlin. Ancient music now rivalled the modern; old works had acquired a certain chic ... . [Yet, up until then in England] Works were composed, used, and discarded ... *La musique ancienne* did not become rooted in French musical

life as ancient music did in British concerts [and in Vienna the movement was represented by Swieten's] private readings." (Weber, 1992, pp. 1-4).

10. On all this see, e.g., York-Long (1954).
11. None of this is meant to suggest that any of these composers suffered from a deprived childhood (Gluck's forester father seems, for example, to have been prosperous), but only that their occupations were radically different from those of their forebears.
12. This section is based on material provided in Baumol and Oates (1972).
13. The Phelps Brown-Hopkins indices of real wages and prices are a carefully constructed and widely used set of statistics based on the records of building wages and prices recorded in manors in southern England and in the ancient universities.
14. "People of noble birth must never marry from inclination or love, but only from interest and all kinds of secondary considerations. Again, it would not at all suit a grandee to love his wife after she had done her duty and brought into the world a bouncing son and heir. But we poor humble people can not only choose a wife whom we love and who loves us, but we may, can and do take such a one, because we are neither noble, nor highly born, nor aristocratic, nor rich ... ." (Mozart to his father, February 7, 1778; Anderson 1938, Vol. 2, pp. 690-91).
15. The figures are in kreuzer per pound of bread; a florin was equivalent to 60 kreuzer. By our calculation, bread sold at a wage equivalent of about two 1989 dollars per pound. That is, an average income earner in Mozart's Vienna worked about the same time to earn a pound of bread as it requires an average American worker to earn two dollars today. The data in the graph are taken from Morrow in her extremely illuminating dissertation. On the dangers of use of the controlled price of bread as an index of the general price level see note 3, above.  
Incidentally, because it ends in 1810, the graph only begins to show how much more serious was the inflation with which Beethoven had to deal. It was only after 1810 that Austrian prices really exploded (perhaps more than 30-fold between 1795 and 1817), and the bankrupt Austrian government debased its currency on a five-to-one ratio in 1812 (see Moore's (1987) very careful analysis). Naturally, this severely eroded the 4000 florin annual stipend that had been granted to him in 1899 by the Archduke and two princes. Like many others at the time, Beethoven resorted to the courts and sued the creditors of the bankrupt Prince Lobkowitz and the estate of the dead Prince Kinsky. In 1815 he was awarded partial adjustment for the debasement of the currency by the government (but no adjustment for the severe inflationary erosion, see Moore, e.g., pp. 3, 126-27). All of this evidence supports Moore's contention that Beethoven's financial problems were very real and severe. It certainly suggests that there is as little basis for the widespread skepticism on Beethoven's financial complaints as there is for the equally common view that Mozart was chronically impoverished.
16. Mozart was well aware of the bitter irony in the fact that this all came too late. During his final illness, according to his first biographer (Georg Nikolaus Nissen, Constanze's second husband), Mozart wrote, "... now ... when I could compose freely and independently whatever my heart dictates! I must leave my family ... in that moment when I would be in a better condition to care for them ... ." (Robbins Landon, 1988, p. 153, who cites Nissen, 1828).
17. As a matter of fact Mozart *did* receive some nonmonetary income which at least in earlier years was likely to have been substantial. Thus, Moore (1989 p. 22 note 10) cites Angermüller's report that "The Mozart family returned from their European concert tour of 1763-6 with nine gold watches, 12 gold snuff boxes, countless gold rings with precious stones, earrings, necklaces, miscellaneous gold objects and *galanterie* clothing worth perhaps 12,000 fl[orins]."
18. However, a document has turned up indicating that only a month before his death, Mozart was sued by Count Lischinowsky, later a patron of Beethoven, for the considerable sum of 1435 florins and 32 kreuzer. The claims of either side in this case, or its outcome (if it ever did reach a hearing) are unknown, since all other documents related to the case have disappeared. On this see Brauneis (1991).
19. The known income of Mozart's last year, 1925 florins, is well above the average. However, he was still plagued by debt and he may have lost a costly lawsuit, so that while the future seems to have looked promising, as already noted, his financial difficulties undoubtedly were not quite over.

20. Still, it should be noted that for the years 1783–1791 Moore's figures total only 11 percent less than Braunbehrens' – his average annual figure for the known portion of Mozart's income during those years is 1928 florins, while hers is 1711. We use her figures for only the years 1783–91, ignoring 1791–92, the first two years of Mozart's residence in Vienna. We think the available information is so poor that the known portion of his income for those years must be a ludicrous underestimate of his actual income. For example, no payments are recorded for *Idomeneo* (1781) or *the Abduction* (1782), so nothing is included in Moore's figures for those years.
21. Since standards of living in the eighteenth century were far lower than now, this amount provided far less in terms of purchasing power – probably something in excess of \$4000 today.
22. Kraemer proposes a figure well above 10,000 florins for Mozart's annual income, but that far exceeds every carefully calculated estimate, and from the evidence it seems highly implausible. Steptoe's estimate is that the average figure was slightly *less* than 3000 florins (1984, p. 198). However, this number excludes earnings from private performances, which were probably not negligible. In any event, since just the documented portion of his income averages nearly 2000 florins, it is implausible that the total was far below 3000 florins.
23. That is, the ratio (1700 florins/ estimated Viennese wage in 1786) is approximately equal to (\$175,000/ average U.S. wage in 1989). The factor (seven) by which we multiply the estimate of Mozart's purchasing power (25,000 in 1989 dollars) to arrive at the wage equivalent is demonstrably and deliberately exceedingly conservative. It assumes that the average real income of an American in 1989 is seven times as high as that of an inhabitant of Vienna two centuries earlier. Yet, careful calculations by economic historians indicate that 1989 average U.S. real income was some eight times as great as it was in 1870, for which some considerable evidence, including surviving family budgets, is available. In sum, we are proceeding on the absurdly conservative assumption that the average standard of living in eighteenth century Vienna was higher than that in the U.S. in 1870. Clearly, exaggeration of the estimate of average income in 1789 Vienna serves to *reduce* the calculated figure for Mozart's relative income – that is, to arrive at a more defensible figure a multiplier considerably higher than seven should undoubtedly have been used to bring it up to its modern U.S. wage equivalent.
24. Beethoven's estate included only one couch. But that is not all we can learn from a comparison of the two estates. According to Moore (pp. 452–454), Mozart's clothing and furniture were valued, respectively, at 55 and 229 florin of 1781, while the corresponding figures for Beethoven were only 37 and 57 florins of 1827. But this vastly underestimates the true difference because it ignores the probably more than twentyfold inflation in prices that occurred between 1791 and 1827. When corrected for this, in 1827 florins we must estimate the value of the clothing in Mozart's estate at over 1100 florins and his furniture at more than 4500 florins of 1827, that is, more than 80 times as great a value as Beethoven's.
25. We are extremely grateful to Timothy Guinnane and John J. McCusker for their very valuable help in the preparation of this Appendix.
26. Real annual wages have almost certainly risen far more slowly than output per worker, since the number of hours worked per year has probably fallen some 40 percent in just the past hundred years.

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