

Understanding musical scores

oufuturelearnmusicalscorevid1026

[PIANO PLAYING]

NAOMI:

Alexander, I'd like to ask you a little bit about how you use the score when you're preparing for a performance. Can you explain a little bit about what you do with the score?

ALEXANDER:

Well, in this particular case, Mozart variations, I think what is difficult in Mozart is how to control all those textures and these really small materials, because there's not many notes in there. You just go--

[PIANO PLAYING]

And then the variation, what he does, he starts to go around the main tunes of the theme--

[PIANO PLAYING]

NAOMI:

So you're really digging into the texture of the piece and sorting out where the important theme is and where the unimportant sections are?

ALEXANDER:

Yes. I think the analysis is quite important, especially when it comes to a variations form, because it can be quite important for the concept of the piece to see what exactly he's doing and why is he doing that?

NAOMI:

Do you ever think about the structure when you're learning the piece? Is that part of your learning process?

ALEXANDER:

Yeah, I think so. I think in some cases, it might not be very important. But with Viennese classical style, I think it's always very important to define the structure and to see where things go, where the themes start, where it ends. And of course, with variations, I think it's particularly important.

NAOMI:

So each time you get to a new variation, you're trying to find where the theme is and how that fits into the structure, as a whole?

ALEXANDER:

Yes. Well here, in this particular case, it is pretty obvious actually. He writes the first variation in Paris. So we've got variation one and two. And in the first one, he does this part around the theme, which is--

[PIANO PLAYING]

--while keeping the left hand the same, obviously. And then what he does in the second one, he moves a part into the left hand, keeping the theme in the right one.

[PIANO PLAYING]

So it creates this kind of first part. And then he does the same with a second pair of variations.

NAOMI:

So as you perform it, are you thinking about the balance between your hands? Are you thinking about how one needs to be maybe more important than the other?

ALEXANDER:

Yes, always. I think it's very important.

NAOMI:

What about in a variation, like variation five, where they seem to be so interlocked together?

ALEXANDER:

Well, yeah. Variation five is a different case. It has some new material actually. And I think that-- well, he does this rest obviously, if you can see here. The melody, I think, is divided between two hands quite equally.

[PIANO PLAYING]

So while the right hand is doing this, the left is doing-- so it replies. And I think it creates a dialogue.

[PIANO PLAYING]

And then they come all together.

[PIANO PLAYING]

NAOMI:

It's got that cheeky character in it, yes.

ALEXANDER:

Yeah, very Mozart.

NAOMI:

So you really are using the score to develop your own interpretation. You're using the score to give you cues, in a way.

ALEXANDER:

Yes. It might be easier to read the notes, but it might be quite hard to read all the intentions that the composer had, because particularly with Mozart, he never wrote. If you look at the score, it's quite clean. There's not many slurs. And he didn't write any dynamics usually.

NAOMI:

So this is a case of a score that leaves out quite a lot of detail, and you, as a performer, have to enrich it yourself?

ALEXANDER:

Yes. They didn't put any dynamics. But it was just the feature of the time. I think what he was doing, he was thinking that just the performers are smart enough to give everything the music needs themselves and to just add the interpretation and other things.

NAOMI:

Thanks for explaining that. That's really useful. I think this is a really good example of a score that tells us quite a lot, but then leaves us all to think about it a bit more ourselves, and we have to go and come up with an interpretation. So thank you for sharing.

ALEXANDER:

Yeah, absolutely.