

Issues in classical music interpretation

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Summary

The goal of this open letter is to discuss the possibility of issues in the interpretation of classical music, with the main concern of the thesis being that Adagio's movements in Mozart music are currently played way too slow. The issues discussed here, related to our understanding of classical music, spans from the Baroque era (J. S. Bach), to the Classical era (Mozart, Haydn, etc.), all the way up to the beginning of the Romantic era (Beethoven and Schubert), and possibly beyond this time period (before the Baroque era, and after Schubert). We also discuss other deeper and serious issues regarding notably ornamentation and tempo fluctuation in W. A. Mozart and F. Schubert.

Dear musicians, and dear musicologists,

I am writing this open paper to share with you some of my concerns about our current understanding of classical music. I would like to state here that I do not speak as a musicologist, and that any truth about the issues discussed in this paper will have to be ultimately checked by musicologist experts. I therefore speak here informally, and only as a musician, and any statement made in this paper should be treated with caution, as my musicology knowledge is very limited. This paper will be succinct, as time does not allow me to do the necessary documentary research on the matter.

I have good reason to believe that our current understanding of classical musical is wrong, and that the main era of concern is definitely the period around W. A. Mozart. As stated in the abstract, the issues that I have discovered about Mozart's music in late 2020, if they are correct, have profound effects on our interpretation of classical music, and not just for the classical era, as the issues span to the Baroque era, and goes to the Romantic era, up until approximately Schubert. It is possible that these issues go beyond this timeframe.

The main thesis that will be asserted in this paper, is that **the meaning of the "Adagio" marking in Mozart music is primarily metronomic**, and that the interpretative part is minimal. Currently, musicians see the Adagio or Largo word in the score, and decide that the composer means that the piece should be played slowly and gently. The thesis that I will defend here is that in some edge cases, these *Adagio* in Mozart have to be played, in our current way of speaking, as *Presto*. I believe

that the Romantic era composers have misinterpreted Mozart music, and that that error started to happen at approximately 1840, possibly starting with Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner. The late Romantic era composers have a different understanding of the word *Adagio*. When Dvořák composes his Largo for the New World Symphony, his understanding of the word “Largo” or “Adagio” is the same as our current understanding.

If the reader is not convinced by the arguments stated here, I shall present here the most convincing proof, in my opinion, of this misinterpretation. The most striking example of that issue, is, ironically enough, in the 1st movement of the Piano Sonata no. 11 by W. A. Mozart (K. 331 / 300i), the “Turkish March” sonata, probably the most famous piece of music of all of classical music, that even ordinary people know.

W. A. Mozart – Piano Sonata no. 11 (K. 331 / 300i)

While it might seem surprising to the casual reader that such a striking example could be found in this most famous piece by Mozart, I should anecdotally note here that the original autograph of that Sonata was found only in 2014 in Budapest, and that some errors were apparently discovered in the first edition of the sonata.

Here is the thesis:

- The 1st movement of this sonata is a theme and variation in A Major.
- There is one theme and 6 variations.
- The theme is marked *Andante grazioso*. The first 4 variations don't have any tempo indications, the 5th variation is marked *Adagio*, and the last variation is marked *Allegro*.
- The theme has 18 measures. The first 5 variations have 18 measures as well. The last variation has 18 measures + 8 measures of coda.

The first 4 variations are supposed to be played *Andante*, just like the theme. The last variation is supposed to be played twice as fast (*Allegro*), but because the time signature has twice more beats per measure, it compensates. Therefore, the timing of the theme and all variations (except the 5th, which will be discussed below) is pretty much the same (without the coda in the last variation).

The main subject of discussion here is the 5th variation. Currently, pianists and musicologists believe that the 5th variation is supposed to be played slowly. Musicologists believe that this sonata somehow breaks the classical form of the sonata, as a sonata is supposed to have a fast 1st movement, a slow 2nd movement, and a fast 3rd movement. Musicologists believe that the composer went over the

common way of the classical era of composing sonatas, and is one of the many reasons why W. A. Mozart is considered a precursor of the Romantic era.

The thesis that I would like to defend here, is that it is possible that this Sonata does not actually break the common way of the sonata form of the classical era. It is possible that this 5th variation is not a slow variation, but a virtuosic variation. It means that this variation should be played very fast.

VAR. V
Adagio

*) Var.IV: Zur Notation der 2. Hälfte von T.16 (linke Hand) vgl. Krit. Bericht.

Fig. 1: NMA

It seems evident to me that asserting that this variation should be played slowly is dubious for many reasons. The left hand of this 5th variation begins with a repeated Alberti bass, written in 32nd

notes. The right hand also has 32nd notes, and at the end of this variation, it even has a phrase with 64th (!) notes.



*) T. 16, rechte Hand, Oberstimme: Drittlezte Note in den Vorlagen irrtümlich d^{''} statt h[']; vgl. Vorwort.

Fig. 2: NMA

The way classical musicians currently interpret these Adagios is, in my opinion, problematic. It is not possible to lead the melody by playing that slowly, especially on an instrument like the piano. It seems more natural to me that these Adagios be played faster, one of the sole reasons being to lead the melody.

I would also like to point out that some musicians do not play the repeats in the Adagios (like this variation), as doing so would make the duration extend too much when playing that slowly. Of course, if the thesis exposed here turned out to be correct, playing these repeats would not be a problem. Currently, musicians are not playing what Mozart intended. Many musicians do not respect what is written on the score.

Some pianists may disagree with the thesis, as the measure 5 of this variation, has repeated notes on the left hand, and playing these notes would be difficult. It is possible to play those notes by alternating the fingering (or some other technique), in order to play it very fast.

It seems that the Adagio indication is simply a metronomic marking, and it means that the piece should be played at ~60 bpm for every dotted quarter note.

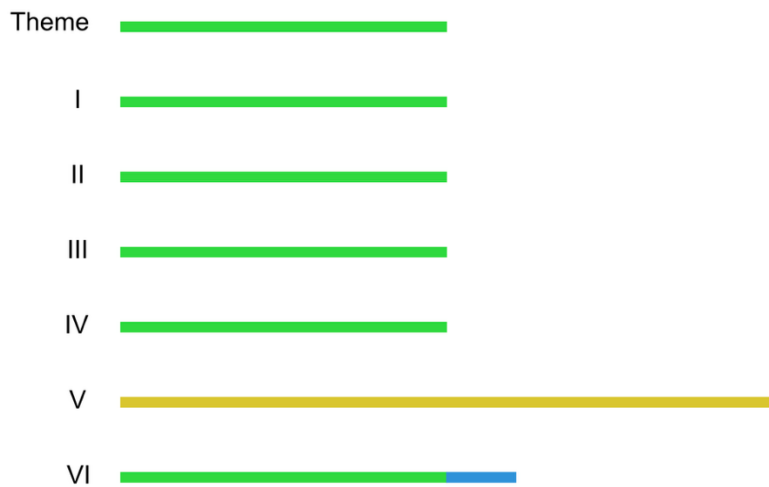
The composer put Adagio in this 5th variation, because he believed that Andante would be a little bit too fast for this variation, given all the 32nd and 64th notes. In order to lower the metronome, he simply lowered from Andante to Adagio.

Notice that on the old wooden metronomes, there are corresponding Italian terms to each bpm number. I would like to ask musicologists if the inventors of the metronome also did that back in the 19th century (putting these Italian terms on the original metronome).

If they did (?), then it was a way for them to translate the old way of doing things (the Italian terms), with the corresponding values of the newly invented metronome. When Mozart writes Adagio, it is possible that we simply need to take our metronome, and put it on Adagio.



Fig. 3: Maelzel's Metronome



The above diagram shows the issue of the 5th variation, not fitting the other variations.

The Magic Flute

I did not discover this Adagio issue by studying the 11th sonata. One could stare at this sonata for an entire life without noticing any issues. This issue was discovered after a thorough analysis of the Magic Flute opera by Mozart, and I highly encourage classical musicians to indulge themselves into Opera, in order to understand the spirit of Mozart music. Any questions musicians might have about Mozart interpretation definitely lies in the Opera.

Musicology is unfortunately problematic, as many statements that can be found in historical writings of the 18th / 19th century is often vague and contradictory.

My study of the Magic Flute went sporadically for over a year. I have come to the conclusion that the best version of the Magic Flute currently available, is in my personal opinion the 2001 Opera National de Paris (the best version is the one with Natalie Dessay, but she's not on the DVD). This 2001 version is not perfect, but there are some magical moments like with Papageno and Papagena. The people that filmed the opera also took great care with the contrasty background etc., and the sound recording has the right amount of reverberation.

I would like to present here two remarkable impressions that I had studying that opera:

- The first striking impression that I had, is that the general feeling of the opera (the comedic aspect notably, the childish Papageno character) is not compatible with our current way of playing the music of Mozart.
- The big secret that allowed me to discover the Adagio issue is a thorough study of the orchestration aspect of that opera.

I would like to extend on that second point. Many composers only study the Overtures and Mozart late symphonies, and do not want to study the orchestration of the Opera itself, which is something I can absolutely understand. Many classical musicians only want to focus on the symphonies, concertos and the overtures, as the musical writing of these pieces is often a demonstration of the technical abilities of the composer. Mozart uses this Overture to show off all his compositional skills, like counterpoint.

This way of having a very technical overture is not uncommon to American Hollywood movies. Many Hollywood composers for commercial movies (like Batman or Spider-Man etc.) often put all their effort in the Overture or the Prologue in order to demonstrate their technical abilities, and leave the best impression in the first 5 minutes of the movie. The first impression is the most important, and the composers, whether from the 18th century or from current Hollywood know that.

Unfortunately, it is precisely in studying the rest of the opera (something most composers don't want to do, and again, I certainly understand that), that one can pierce through the mysteries of the composer persona. Music is not just about symphonic perfection: the opera has to last more than two hours, and being a great composer is not just writing overtures. Being a great composer is also being able to last more than two and a half hours of music, even if the technicalities don't follow the overture. Professional people will understand when I say how excruciatingly hard it is to finish a project in time. You usually start ten projects at a time and don't get anything finished. The music needs to be done no matter what.

The best impression that one can have of this historical Mozart figure is, in my opinion, by studying the orchestration of the opera, and to try and compose even short orchestrations like Mozart, in very limited time. The main aspect that is never discussed by musicians or musicologists, is that the way of writing of that opera feels, at time, "commercial" in some aspect, which somehow breaks the romanticized interpretation of the Mozart's persona that the later Romantic composers had (like Schumann). It seems to me that the way of the orchestration, and the "professional" aspect of it, feels like W. A. Mozart was probably a rather professional and discreet person in real life.

This "commercial" aspect feels intriguing. My musicology knowledge is poor, and I don't know what kind of relations Mozart had with the industry people around him, like for instance the music engraving people (from Artaria or Breitkopf & Härtel). About engraving, I will just say that one needs to understand that engraving music demands a lot of efforts (more than printing a book), and

it would be interesting to hear musicologists explain how the scores were engraved in Mozart's time, and if he ever got to meet the engravers.

Counterpoint importance in orchestration

I would also like to discuss here about the importance of counterpoint in orchestration. Many composers and orchestrators will agree that the secret to good orchestration is definitely counterpoint. When we talk about counterpoint, we often think about the fugues by J. S. Bach, but it is not what I mean.

One of the challenges of composing for the orchestra is that vertical and chord writing may sound great for acoustically complex instruments like the piano or guitar, but it does not sound good for the orchestra (especially instruments with purer acoustics like the woodwinds). Many musicians believe that Mozart studied counterpoint (and studied J. S. Bach) because he wanted to write pieces like the final of the Jupiter Symphony. I would like to state here that as an enthusiast composer, I believe the main reason Mozart was studying counterpoint, is not for the final of the Jupiter Symphony, but primarily because he wanted to have his opera sound “professional”. Musicians who work in the industry, whether orchestral composers, or even pop music producers, will understand exactly what I mean when I say that Mozart wanted to sound “professional” and compete in some way to other opera composers. In my opinion, counterpoint is one of the key ingredients that can make the orchestra sound “professional”. This issue about the difficulty of counterpoint in orchestral writing is common to all composers, including our historical composers, obviously.

Musicians will say that what I say here is blatantly obvious (of course counterpoint is important in music composing). I want to make the distinction here about what we think of when we say “counterpoint”. This counterpoint thing that I am talking about here is not exactly the same as what we usually think of when we talk about counterpoint.

One other important feature that I would like to point out is the background elements, like the one at the very end of the Magic Flute. Mozart put the 2nd violins in the background that play 16th notes. These kinds of features in the Magic Flute feel “commercial” to me, which surprised me. It led me to believe that there may be issues with Mozart slow movements.

It should be understood that all these orchestration issues that I'm talking about may not seem like they are linked to the question of tempo (acoustics, etc.). But they are: orchestration is easier when things are moving fast, and when instruments play in a good tempo. Playing in a tempo that is too slow destroys the coherence of the orchestra. The orchestra starts to not sound like an orchestra, but like the individual instruments (violin, viola, etc.) which is exactly the opposite of what orchestrators want. The only purpose of the orchestrators is to make the orchestra sound like a whole unity, and not individual instruments. Good tempo is one of the techniques that can definitely help for that.

Allegro

The musical score is written in 2/4 time and marked 'Allegro'. It consists of several systems of staves. The top system shows the flute part with a melodic line and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment includes a prominent sixteenth-note figure in the second violin part. The score ends with the instruction '- bracht!' repeated for several staves.

Fig. 4: very ending of Mozart's Magic Flute. Notice the 2nd violin's 16th notes. NMA

F. Schubert: Piano Sonata in C minor, D.958

If one were to acknowledge the thesis exposed here, then the way of playing Franz Schubert music may seem as problematic as Mozart, probably even more.

The 2nd movement of the D.958 sonata is marked *Adagio*. Pianists currently play that movement slowly. I would like to put here a page of that Adagio, which will speak volume (quite literally).

The image shows a page of musical notation for the 2nd movement of Franz Schubert's Piano Sonata in C minor, D.958. The score is in C minor and 4/4 time, marked *Adagio*. It consists of six systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The measures are numbered 27, 30, 33, 36, 39, and 42. The notation includes various dynamics such as *pp*, *cresc.*, *decresc.*, *sfz*, *p*, *ffz*, and *legato*. There are also performance instructions like *simile* and *rit.*. The score features complex textures with many chords and triplets. A footnote at the bottom reads: *) Takt 29 ff, beide Systeme: die punktierten Figuren sind an die Triolen rhythmisch anzugleichen.

Fig. 5: 2nd movement. NSA

Are we sure that this *Adagio* is supposed to be played slowly? It seems to me that Schubert really wanted those repeated 16th notes to be played very fast (Presto in our modern way of saying things).

The issues described here are so deep that even the 1st movement, marked *Allegro*, seems problematic.

43

146

149

152

155

158

ppp

cresc.

f

*) Takt 151, unteres System: Schubert notierte im Autograph D statt D_2 , da der Tonumfang der zu seiner Zeit üblichen Klaviere meist nur bis zum F reichte.

Fig. 6: 1st movement. Notice the right-hand chromaticism. NSA

It seems to me that this whole chromaticism in the 1st movement is supposed to be played as an effect, like the storm. Currently pianists play that chromaticism so slowly that we can hear the difference between the 16th notes and the triplets.

I believe that Schubert wanted his chromaticism to be played very fast, in order to not hear the difference between the 16th notes and the triplets.

The reason why Schubert used triplets in his scores, was simply to mathematically make all these chromatic notes fit the measures.

If the thesis here is correct, then it means that we pianists currently play F. Schubert like... first-year music theory class. Is Schubert rolling in his grave?

This chromaticism page indicates two things:

- Allegro are currently played too slowly
- Sonatas need tempo fluctuation

This 2nd point here is probably even more problematic than the Adagio issue, because many pianists will disagree to add that much tempo fluctuation in Schubert sonatas. The themes and the melodies in Schubert piano sonatas are the same as the melodies in the lyrical work. If singers sing with lots of tempo fluctuations, it is possible that the sonatas should be played in the same way, with lots of tempo fluctuations. I ask the musicologists to provide some answers on whether or not it is possible to add lots of tempo fluctuations in the instrumental work of F. Schubert.

3rd movement

Unfortunately, this 3rd movement also seems wrong to me. This movement is currently played by the quarter note. It seems that it should be played three times faster, by the dotted half.

That issue also appears in Mozart Symphony no. 40, 3rd movement. In my opinion, this movement is currently played too slowly (by the quarter note), and it should also be played 3 times faster (by the dotted half).

W. A. Mozart – Piano Sonata no. 14 in C minor, K.457

The end of this Mozart sonata, in my personal opinion, needs as much ornament as one can achieve. It seems evident that the dotted half notes on the left hand, and then the right hand, does not correlate to the spirit of the opera. It seems harsh and lifeless. In my opinion, the score that the composer wrote is just the skeleton of what is intended, and the pianist needs to add as much trill and ornaments as needed, even going as far as full improvisation.

One needs to understand the difficulty of music engraving. Putting all these notes and engraving them by hand is difficult. Any mistake on the plate means throwing the metal plate away and starting all over again. The composer, and the engravers expect the pianist to do all the improvisation work themselves.

97

Erstdruck:
290

290

297

297

304

304

simile

simile

Fig. 7: NMA

W. A. Mozart – Violin Concerto No. 3 in G major, K. 216

Violinists will be very sorry to hear that their beautiful and sentimental adagios in the violin concertos of Mozart may just actually be... simple classical era music, with tempi in the good spirit of Jean-Philippe Rameau.

It should be stated here that at the risk of giving the impression of being insensitive, the current way of playing these adagios just doesn't fit the era of Mozart. I again encourage violinists to immerse themselves in the world of opera to understand these issues about the tempi.

The same issue for pianists for the Adagio in the Piano Concerto no. 23 arises, for instance. Romantic composers liked to romanticize Mozart music to the point of completely slowing it down. I understand that playing it like a normal piece feels almost disappointing. But who knows, maybe Mozart himself would have been a fan of playing some of these Adagios as slow as we are playing them?

I would also like to say here that the Romantic era of music (middle of the 19th century) happened at the same time as the great scientific discoveries regarding sound waves theories (Helmholtz, etc.). But the Classical era is more influenced by the ancient theories (ratios in mathematics, divine proportions, think more in the spirit of Leonardo da Vinci, or the Pythagoreans with the ancient Greeks etc.). This way of playing these Adagios so slowly can only exist with the way of thinking of the music notes that get lost in the reverberation of the room. This way of thinking the music was not prevalent in the classical era. Again, my history knowledge is limited, experts will have a much better explanation on the relation between the science and the arts of these eras.

L. V. Beethoven

L. V. Beethoven music is also problematic. I will just put below an excerpt from the Appassionata Sonata for piano (the 2nd movement, marked Andante con moto).

16 (180)

The image shows a musical score for Chopin's Étude Op. 10, No. 16, 'Breitkopf'. The score is written for piano and consists of five systems of two staves each. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The first system features a melody in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The second system includes a *cresc.* marking. The third system starts with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic and includes a *dolce* marking. The fourth system continues with a *cresc.* marking. The fifth system concludes with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic, a *dimin.* marking, and a *p dolce* marking. The score is characterized by its rapid tempo and intricate piano accompaniment.

Fig. 8: Breitkopf

Chopin Études

Many musicians have wondered why the metronome indications in Chopin Études are so fast. I believe that Chopin simply wanted his études to be played... very fast.

Singer breathing

There are many issues of singers breathing in the middle of phrases, because of how slow classical music has become.

Musicology

Speaking about musicology feels like a risky game for me, as the musicology people are going to crush me with their knowledge. Don't hesitate to send me a mail if there are any errors in what I will say.

I have found three books on the matter of Mozart tempos:

- Helmut Breidenstein: Mozart's Tempo-System (2019)
- Eva and Paul Badura-Skoda: Interpreting Mozart on the Keyboard (1962)
- Jean-Pierre Marty: Tempo Indications of Mozart (1989) (he doesn't define himself as a musicologist)

Even though I disagree with the conclusions of the three authors, I would like to talk about some of the things I learned:

I encourage musicians to use the appendix part of the book by Breidenstein. This appendix compiles everything related to tempo in the historical writing: letters by Mozart, essay by his father etc.

One interesting thing that Breidenstein says is that a good part of the tempo markings is from the editor, and not from Mozart himself.

Gottfried Weber's pendulum indication for Pamina's aria

I would like to talk here about the small part of Breidenstein appendix called "Gottfried Weber's pendulum indication for Pamina's aria", p.352.

In this section, Breidenstein explains that some guy from around Mozart time (J. G. Weber) made measurements with a pendulum, in order to define the tempo of the Aria in the Magic Flute. Converted into modern metronome, the value J. G. Weber got was 138-151 (for eighth note).

His work was published in a journal at the time, and apparently, an anonymous reader of the journal in which the result of J. G. Weber was published, confirmed that the tempo was correct, and that musicians confirmed it was correct. (I do not understand German and could not translate the journal in question.)

Breidenstein disagrees with the result of J. G. Weber, and claims that the man was not a professional musician.

I have to say here that I believe that the measurement of J. G. Weber to be pretty accurate. Breidenstein calls it a “grotesque tempo” (he says it is way too fast) and dismisses it, but I don’t believe that to be the case.

As was said before, musicology seems contradictory to me, and can be used to say anything and its contrary. I encourage musicians to find the answer and the secrets to Mozart music, in the spirit and the orchestration of the opera instead.

Mozart Letter

In a letter (No. 405, 17.1.1778), Mozart complains that his music is played too rapidly by a man named Vogler. This is what Mozart says:

“Before eating he scampered through my concerto at sight [...]. He played the bass mainly other than it's written, and sometimes with another harmony and also melody; at that speed it cannot possibly be otherwise, one's eyes cannot see, nor hands grasp it. Yes, what is that then? – to play at sight like that and to shit is to me one and the same”.

Musicologists use that letter as a way of saying that Mozart music should not be played too fast.

I want to explain here that I believe that in Mozart time, people probably butchered Mozart music, and the only goal of the people of the time was to just take the music as a game of who could play the fastest. Playing the Klavier was this new game, and everyone wanted to be the virtuoso. When Mozart complained about his music being played too fast, one needs to understand that people of the time probably only cared about being the fastest player, without even playing the notes correctly.

Imagine playing the Adagio of the 23rd piano concerto, the fastest possible. Mozart is then not happy, and says that it should be in a much slower tempo. But the slower tempo in question is still way, way faster than what we are doing today.

Badura-Skoda – Stein Letter

In p.38 of the Badura-Skoda book (chapter “Playing in time”), Badura-Skoda says that Mozart shouldn’t have tempo fluctuations (I think Breidenstein also says it’s bad). Badura-Skoda cites a letter of Mozart (No. 355, 23.-25.10.1777), where Mozart complains that music should be played in exact timing.

I want to state here that the letter in question was simply Mozart correcting an 8-year-old girl who could not play in time. Badura-Skoda implies that Mozart means that there should be no tempo fluctuation. In my opinion, it was just Mozart saying that the child was not playing correctly.

I will just give my personal opinion that I believe that the piano sonatas have to be played in a way that gives the same feeling as the drama of the opera, and that it should be the only thing that matters to the musician. And therefore, that the tempo should definitely fluctuate (in good taste).

That letter is quoted in the back cover of the book by Jean-Pierre Marty, as the first sentence. I don't think Mozart would be too happy to know that we took some random thing he said about an 8-year-old child, and transformed it into some grandiose statement about the way his music should be played.

In his book, Marty speaks about the 5th variation of the 11th sonata, and says it is the "traditional slow variations of the 6/8 themes". It may have been the tradition of the Romantics for sure, but was it actually the tradition of Wolfgang?

Beat unit

At this point, I cannot give any conclusive information for the beat unit problem. If Adagio means 60 on the metronome, then what is the reference rhythm? Is it the quarter note, the half?

I will give here my interpretation. If the piece is in:

- binary time signature, then the reference is the quarter note.
- ternary, then it is the dotted quarter.
- 2/2, then it is the half note.

The exception to that rule is the Trio in 3/4, which is in dotted half.

It seems that some pieces of Mozart are edge cases and don't follow the rule listed above, a problem that will need studying.

J. S. Bach

I am too lazy to write about Bach. I will leave the thesis here.

Conclusion

How to conclude such a paper, with such grandiose claims about classical music?

I want to relate a story that happened to me. I was beta testing some music notation software, and I sent the beta software to many professional musicians: violinists, pianists, drummers, etc.

There was a very obvious mistake in the software. The silence rectangle is supposed to be below the 2nd line, and not below the 3rd.



I have worked for 3 years on that software without noticing anything. No one noticed this mistake, even after sending the beta software to dozens of professional musicians. The mistake in question is year 1 music theory level. A professional composer had to intervene and send me a mail to correct the mistake.

Even the most competent people can overlook some of the most obvious mistakes.

Humans make mistakes, and this is part of what we do. Maybe the thesis that I exposed here is another mistake of mine, and that Mozart Adagio are really supposed to be played slowly.

I will say though that the arguments of the musicologists have not convinced me enough.

If time allows me, I will upload some piano playing of mine on the internet.

I will conclude by putting below an excerpt of Mozart piano Sonata no. 14 in C minor, K.457, the Adagio 2nd movement. Notice the writing of the music. The written ornamented notes, being like the flowers that blossom in the trees.

Valence France, March 13, 2026

Adagio

sotto voce

f p cresc. f p

4

p f p

6

f p cresc. f p p

9

f p f p

11

f simile f

13

p p cresc. p f p cresc. f

*) T. 12f., rechte Hand: Widmungskopie ohne Ornamente; vgl. Krit. Bericht.

Contact info:

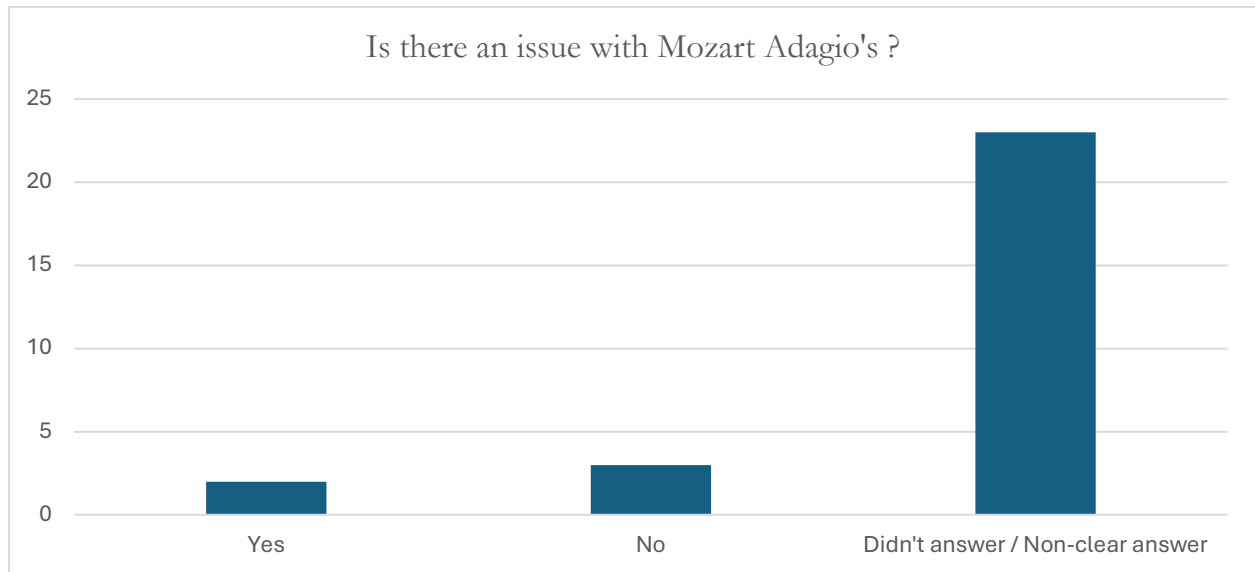
youtube.com/xavierfavier

Mail: support@avenciamusica.com

Mozart Adagio issue: poll results and additional notes

Xavier Favier

March 21, 2026



After a few days of asking (28 professional musicians), here are some poll results:

Yes: 2

No: 3

Didn't answer / Non-clear answer: 23

Additional notes

I have some additional thoughts about this whole Adagio issue:

- I don't know anything about singing and opera, but it seems to me that there are issues with singers getting the style of the classical era wrong. The Magic Flute is an easy-going and popular opera, like a Hollywood movie. It seems to me that singers are singing these classical-era Arias in singing class like they are some late Romantic Adagios with super slow speed and tons of vibrato. Not good. Same with the Requiem of Michael Haydn or W. A. Mozart, for instance, the solo passages in the Requiem are sung with **way too much vibrato** (in my opinion). This is the classical era and it should be treated with lightness and purity (think in the spirit of Leonardo da Vinci), nothing like the late Romantics. Also on the Requiems, currently, the solo singers are in front and separated

from the choir. But it seems to me that they are supposed **to be part of the choir**... am I right? (need to ask the musicologists about that).

- The chords in the piano sonatas should sometimes be **arpeggiated**, for instance in Schubert 2nd movement of the D.958 sonata (the example in my paper). This movement may also need ornamentation in the beginning theme and left hand, and maybe even improvisation everywhere else.
- R. Schumann in his Symphony no.2, composed in 1845, has a 3rd movement marked Adagio espressivo, with a metronome marking of 76 for eighth note. The time signature is 2/4. Of course, this is incompatible with classical era Adagio meaning, because for them, Adagio would mean that it should be double that metronome marking (something like 120 for eighth note). This implies that Schumann probably did not play Mozart music correctly. But he's not the only composer that did that, everywhere else in Europe, it's the same issue (Berlioz in France, etc.). In classical-era Vienna, these Italian tempo markings were primarily metronomic.