

## Pleasure and Virtue in Early Mozart Reception

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Whether the pleasures of art could also redound to virtue was a pressing topic in aesthetics and criticism during Mozart's day. The matter was especially vexed for music and drama, which were thought to project supra-ordinary sensuous charms that could beguile the unwary. Adding further authority to skepticism about the moral efficacy of those arts was Kant, who, along with arguing that a true man of taste, one possessing a "beautiful soul," would flee the vanities of art for the beauties of nature, also maintained that music offered little more than an agreeable play of sensations.

Although often not cited as a source, that Kantian idea carries considerable weight in modern and modernist Mozart art criticism and historiography. Either Mozart's charms must be resisted because they are false, or set aside as irrelevant because their yield is "mere" pleasure rather than something instructive. Yet to many music critics in the last decades of the eighteenth century, Kant's separation was irksome. Sometimes, the resistance was explicit, as in the counterclaim that the true initiate understands that "the engagement with music is never as with a craft: a mere diversion or empty play of senses." The more fascinating response, however, is also the most paradoxical one. Some followers of Kant would, in the name of Kant, affirm a harmony embracing music's pleasures and its virtues, and the work they found exemplifying it--one that "solved all aesthetic problems of musical composition," as one biographer maintained--was the *Magic Flute*.