

Mozart Operas and the *Mozart 22 Series*

Performances of Mozart Operas as Documents of Commemorative Politics

doctoral dissertation theses

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2017

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Introduction

For the 250th anniversary of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's birth, the Salzburg Festival (Salzburger Festspiele) realised an unprecedented, never-before-seen project, the presentation of nearly all the composer's works for the stage in the course of the 2006 summer festival. The series was entitled *Mozart 22* (or *M22* for short) and included productions of Mozart's practically never performed musical pieces, either for the stage or somehow connected to drama and theatre. Thus, in addition to the "masterpieces"¹ seen so often at the Salzburg Festival and in opera houses throughout the world, the program included dramatic oratorios, serenatas, and *azione sacra* pieces from his childhood and youth, as well as works that remained as fragments, not even staged in Mozart's lifetime.

The purpose of my dissertation is to examine the 2006 Mozart festival and reveal how the artists hired by the management in Salzburg approached this vast body of musical-dramatic material, as well as how the series became a commemorative political document. This research led to the realisation of the significant role played by management in initiating processes of cultural identity formation.

In my dissertation, I summarise the history of the Salzburg Festival and how it arrived from its inception to the creation of the *Mozart 22* series. Then, I analyse the *M22* itself from definite standpoints, revealing, through the introduction of important and outstanding productions, how the performances constituted a series. To this end, I reveal the points of correspondence among the directorial visions, verifying the thesis that the *opera buffa* pieces from Mozart's mature period were reinterpreted as dark, often tragic dramas.

¹ Traditionally, in the professional literature on Mozart, the "masterpieces" explicitly refer to his operas written to librettos by Lorenzo Da Ponte, the Singspiele *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *Die Zauberflöte*, and *La Clemenza di Tito*. (cf. Fodor, Géza. *A Mozart-opera világképe*. Budapest: Typotex, 2002, 8)

The Salzburg Festival and Mozart

The Salzburg Festival threw open its doors on 22 August 1920, with director Max Reinhardt and playwright-librettist Hugo von Hofmannstahl credited as its founders. By and large, in its nearly one-hundred-year history – as it grew ever more varied, embracing more venues and longer festival periods – the Salzburg-born Mozart always played an important role. Looking over the opera repertoire for the Festspiele, one may observe that, although Mozart is actually featured year after year, it is generally with one of the same four or five theatre works considered masterpieces. Only to the end of the 1940s did more rarely performed operas appear, and then always just one at a time.

Thus, the festival in 2006 brought about a breakthrough in terms of the Mozart's output for the theatre when Peter Ruzicka, in the course of his administration in Salzburg, instigated the presentation of almost all of the composer's operas.²

***Mozart 22* as a performance series**

Mozart wrote twenty-four works for the stage. The *Mozart 22* event actually incorporated twenty-three productions. Examined from a directorial-dramaturgical point of view, these held together quite strongly – that is, numerous points of correspondence can be found among the directors' interpretations in *Mozart 22*, which could be construed as traces of characteristic cross-references typical of Mozart's music itself. These emphatic correspondences and similarities form powerful bonds, practically melding the *M22* performances into a cohesive series.

Characters in *Mozart 22* productions

² Spielplanarchiv, Salzburger Festspiele.
(<http://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/archiv/>) Last accessed on 20 July 2017.

One striking similarity is the productions' uncommon use of characters, whereby the figures in Mozart's original works are handled freely and creatively. This includes the appearance of multiple actors in one role, the swapping of characters, and the inclusion or omission of other figures when compared to the actual work.

Generally, these new personages play silent roles, speak prose or figure as mirror images, thus contributing to the original opera through their sheer presence or movement. With respect to the traditions of drama and theatre, we could fundamentally refer to them as comic elements; yet, in *Mozart 22*, this use of alter-egos much rather signify uncertainty and tragic identity crises, not least of all alluding to a (self-)ironic critical, interpretive attitude.

For example, Nettuno, almost continuously present as a silent figure in Ursel Herrmann and Karl-Ernst Herrmann's direction of *Idomeneo*, projects a clear sense of being under threat. Unbearable, agonizing love is embodied by the character named Cherubim (also silent), who appears as Cherubino's alter-ego in *The Marriage of Figaro* directed by Claus Guth. In director-conductor Thomas Hengelbrock's interpretation of *Il re pastore* (*The Shephard King*), multiplying the figures visualized and emphasized the search for identity, as well as the constantly recurring question, "Who is who, and who am I?" The multitude of uniform figures in Stefan Herheim's directorial rendering of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*) denotes a feeling of loss and total societal chaos.

The directors' toying with the characters turns up in performance after performance and tend to underline uncertainties and society's problems with identity and self-identification.

Fragments in *Mozart 22*

The fragments comprise a substantial part of the 2006 Salzburg Festival's Mozart series, uniting motifs from multiple productions. They are significant beyond the sheer fact that they were staged without having entered the canon of opera performance. At numerous

points, *M22* did not attempt to cover up their incompleteness with additional material. Instead, it emphasized the quality of being a fragment and gave it meaning.

One of the most striking examples is the *Irrfahrten* trilogy directed by Joachim Schloemer, a pasticcio of the unfinished operas *L'oca del Cairo* and *Lo Sposo Deluso*, after which the incomplete Mozart *Requiem* round out the cycle. Another outstanding instance is Claus Guth's direction of the production entitled *Zaide – Adama*. This work by Mozart, which also remains in fragments, was supplemented with music by the contemporary composer Chaya Czernowin (Izrael, 1957–) to place emphasis upon the interruptions, the lack of conclusion, and ultimately the unresolved dramatic situation.

Comic operas re-interpreted as tragedies

Among the *M22* productions, the directorial interpretations of the grand, mature comic operas were conspicuously united in a sort of pessimistic and tragic atmosphere. This was most manifest in the bonds between couples which repeatedly become unstable, in accordance with the original music and plots. Instead of love and attraction, suspicion and uncertainty constantly arise. By the end of these performances, the tension was neither relieved nor resolved.

The final tableaux in performances of the *opera buffa* and *Singspiel* masterpieces sharply and visually conveyed the directorial interpretation that traditional human relationships actually cannot come into being. Many times, the original couples were placed far from one other, even turned away from each other (as in Martin Kušej's *Don Giovanni*), separated by a sort of wall (as in Ursel and Karl-Ernst Herrmann's *Così fan tutte*) or simply portrayed in distant, conventional, emotionless human relationships (as in *The Marriage of Figaro*).

Besides the positioning of couples, there were numerous examples of grief and tension. In his direction of *Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute)*, Pierre Audi used a fundamentally cheerful, colourful and fairy-tale formal language. Still, by switching the verses in Papageno's "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen" aria, it concluded with the spectre of death, making the message of the originally upbeat song more hopeless. Director Stefan

Herheim distanced himself completely from the fairy-tale content and happy ending of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*), presenting spectators with an embittered, aggressive, homogenized world where we can no longer follow the character switches, since the figures are perfectly uniform. Both *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* become explicitly stark and tragic productions.

In addition to the pieces that were already part of some sub-series (for example, the pairs of youthful one-acts and the *Irrfahrten* trilogy), these directorial and dramaturgical tools and interpretations forged the *Mozart 22* productions into a cohesive whole.

Summary

The monumental production series in Salzburg, created for the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth, is so encompassing, typified by so many off-beat directorial visions and outstanding musical realisations, that it gives the sense of a complete whole and totality in terms of presenting Mozart's works for the stage.

For the first and last time in the history of Mozart opera interpretation until today, the Salzburger Festspiele presented his entire theatrical oeuvre, so it could be seen and heard live in one series, in the course of a single festival.

Despite the monumentality and virtues of *Mozart 22*, it has not altered the Mozart opera repertoire in the past decade. It seems from the programs of the Salzburg Festival and Europe's prominent opera houses that interest in Mozart's operas remains focused upon the masterpieces, while the *opera seria* and *opera buffa* of his youth appear only sporadically to this day.

Hence, since 2006, there has been no decision similar to that of the management in Salzburg to systematically include in programs the composer's rarely performed and lesser known stage works. What proved exciting on the management level at the time of the 250th anniversary – elevating non-masterpieces into the traditional Mozart repertoire – has not affected the leadership or artists of other institutions in recent years. Certainly, it should not be expected that all Mozart stage pieces are included in repertoires, for they are not all as outstanding as the often played pieces. However, even

because of this, it is a testament to the openness and boldness of Ruzicka's administration that they dared to stage productions of works even now considered less viable and less worthy within the framework of the Salzburg Festival, proving the strength of a festival as an event to excite interest in these pieces which are otherwise kept in the background.

With its *Mozart 22* series, the Salzburg Festival redefined the composer's work for the theatre and its stageability, emphasising the theatricality and dramatic potential of his entire oeuvre. Mozart works which previously fell outside the scope of opera repertoires were categorised as musical theatre pieces – and thus performed. If the Salzburg Festival continued, year after year, to put rarely performed Mozart operas on the program, perhaps it would have a more long-term effect on opera repertoires, and the more important *opera seria* (such as *Mitridate*) and *opera buffa* (like *La finta giardiniera*) may appear elsewhere, too.

Related Publication:

Mátrai, Diána Eszter. “A csavartól a spirálig – Kovalik Balázs operaházi rendezései.” Tanulmánykötet [From Screw to Spiral – Director Balázs Koválík’s Work for the Opera House, volume of essays]. Budapest, Academy of Drama and Film: Balassi Kiadó, 2013.

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Fodor, Géza. *A Mozart-opera vilásképe*. Budapest: Typotex, 2002.

Spielplanarchiv, Salzburger Festspiele. (<http://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/archiv/>) Last accessed on 20 July 2017.