

**MISCELLANEOUS STUDIES
IN THE
HISTORY OF MUSIC**

**BY
O. G. SONNECK**

**AMS PRESS
NEW YORK**

PREFATORY NOTE

UNLIKE my book "Suum cuique" this collection is devoted almost exclusively to historical studies. The one essay that is not mainly historical has been included for the purpose of showing why it is still impossible in America to attempt historical research work of the kind that attracted me, in any but exceedingly few of our most famous libraries. This lack of essential study material, whether antiquarian or modern, whether literature or scores, has been keenly felt even by those students of musical history who specialize in subjects of a more general local, biographical or evolutionary interest. It indicates a sad state of affairs and explains why American contributions to musical history of more than "popular" and limited pedagogical value are so scanty; why, in comparison with Europe, those engaged here in scholarly research or codification of research are so few and why these few men and women have such a disheartening outlet for their life-work.

Most of the essays in this volume were prepared from material available at the Library of Congress. Indeed, it is safe to say that whatever their intrinsic historical value may be, they could have been written nowhere in America except in Washington. They owe their origin mostly to minor historical problems that confronted me in my constructive work as Chief of the Music Division of the Library of Congress from 1902 to 1917.

The essays are reprinted here, by permission, practically as they appeared in various magazines at the time of writing. I have not attempted to incorporate the subsequent "finds" of other historians. Happily they were

so few and affected my views so little as to justify publication of these essays in their original form without "re-scoring." The expert will know anyhow where to look for controversial and more or less supplemental literature. For instance, those interested in the history of the *pasticcio* will turn to the writings of Lionel de la Laurencie for certain additional data.

As in the case of my books published by G. Schirmer, Inc., I am indebted to Dr. Theodore Baker for seeing this volume through the press. I am also indebted to him for having relieved me of the necessity of translating the first of the essays into English, and especially am I under obligations to him for his remarkably able translation of the rather difficult early Italian text of Il Lasca's *Descrizione*.

O. G. SONNECK.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE NEW MISE EN SCÈNE OF MOZART'S DON GIOVANNI AT MUNICH	1
EARLY AMERICAN OPERAS	16
LISZT'S HULDIGUNGS-MARSCH AND WEIMARS VOLKSLIED	93
CIAMPI'S "BERTOLDO, BERTOLDINO E CACASENNO" AND FAYART'S "NINETTE À LA COUR." A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF PASTICCIO	111
THE FIRST EDITION OF "HAIL, COLUMBIA!" . . .	180
GUILLAUME LEKEU	190
"CARACTACUS" NOT ARNE'S CARACTACUS	241
A DESCRIPTION OF ALESSANDRO STRIGGIO AND FRAN- CESCO CORTECCIA'S INTERMEDI "PSYCHE AND AMOR," 1565	269
MUSIC IN OUR LIBRARIES	287
A PREFACE	296
THE HISTORY OF MUSIC IN AMERICA. A FEW SUG- GESTIONS	324

MISCELLANEOUS STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF MUSIC

THE NEW MISE EN SCÈNE OF MOZART'S DON GIOVANNI AT MUNICH

(Originally written in German; published in an Italian translation by Luigi Torchi in the *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, 1896.)

WHEN tardy Spring at last arrives in Munich, only to throw herself with unseemly haste into the arms of Summer; when "Sezession" and "Glas-Palast"¹ reopen their doors;—then one may rest assured that Ernst Possart will also do his part to make the summer season interesting both for natives and foreigners. Nor, in truth, is this brought about solely for artistic reasons. The position of Intendant in Munich necessitates an extraordinary heedfulness for the main chance, the more so because, since the death of the genial Ludwig II, conditions less favorable for art have supervened. But so long as a satisfactory compromise between the two contrasting points of view is achieved, there is no need of overexciting oneself. Such achievement has nearly always been the good fortune, the secret, the desert, of Possart. He began with the remarkable Wagner Cycles, followed next year by a production of *The Marriage of Figaro* absolutely finished in style, and this year, as the event of the season, a revival of *Don Giovanni*.

¹ Art exhibitions, the latter being the more conservative.

The tribute of admiration and love which the whole world now pays to Mozart's masterwork, was by no means so universal at the outset. During his lifetime Mozart was more highly esteemed, by many, as a virtuoso than as a composer, and precisely his most soulfelt work, *Don Giovanni*, at first met more than once with inappreciative opposition. For example, Salieri's showy operas suited the Viennese far better than works by the German master. But both were outrivaled in favor by Dittersdorf. It is a most remarkable fact that the opera *Figaro's Hochzeit* by this latter popular master drove Mozart's *Don Giovanni* off the boards in Brünn. And again, when Gazzaniga's *Don Giovanni* was presented at the Haymarket Theatre in London in 1794, and the conductor, Federici, interwove numbers of his own and by Sarti and Guglielmi in the action, Da Ponte—at that time the official poet of that theatre—succeeded in having only the "Catalogo" Aria from Mozart's opera inserted. Whereas, in 1857, the Florentines considered his opera to be "worthless, hyperborean music," and hissed it off the stage, Berlinese critical opinion in 1790 was totally at variance with them: "In his *Don Juan* Mozart attempted to write something extraordinary, inimitably grand; this much is certain—it is something extraordinary, but not inimitably grand! Caprice, whimsey, pride, but not the heart, presided over *Don Juan's* creation!" and more nonsense of like sort. This foolish uncomprehension, which *Don Giovanni* met with in still other places, would seem to prove how slight was Mozart's recognition as an opera-composer. And this, in turn, was not the least factor in determining the fate of the work.

We do know what arbitrary treatment theatre-directors accord even to admirable, impeccable operas. They warp and wrest the dramatic construction wherever and however they list. Mozart's masterpiece was not spared this ordeal. On the contrary, it suffered more than any other at the hands of expert bunglers. The master himself was

obliged to inaugurate this evil custom. The rivalries subsisting between the Viennese singers of both sexes influenced him—as is shown in his diary—to insert the so-called “bookbinder” aria, “Ein Band der Freundschaft,” for Don Octavio, for Zerlina and Leporello the duet “Bei diesen kleinen Händchen,” and for Elvira the aria “Mich verlässt der Undankbare.” He did so with a heavy heart; but what did or do the virtuosos care whether the action drags, or the characters are ill drawn, or an art-work is stultified in any way, if only their voices are effectively shown off? And liberties were soon taken with the very name of the opera. The title “Il Dissoluto punito,” or “Il Don Giovanni,” was quickly turned into “Don Juan,” “Don Jean,” “Der Herr Johann.” The first-night playbill at Innsbruck announces (1800) “Don Juan oder das steinerne Gastmahl”; the one at Laibach (Carniola) has even (1815) “Don Juan’s Abenteuer in Spanien oder das steinerne Gastmahl.” And the title in the translation by the Dessau Musikdirektor Neeffe is equally good: “Der bestrafte Wollüstling oder der Krug geht solange zu Wasser bis er bricht.” After the custom then prevailing, Neeffe also Germanized the cast of characters; Don Giovanni becomes “der Herr von Schwänkereich,” Zerlina, “Röschen,” Octavio is transformed into “der Herr von Frischblut,” and Leporello into “Fickfack,” etc. To be sure, these are mere trivialities, but they are characteristic of the manner in which matters of prime importance were treated. When, for instance, on the playbills and librettos the title read, instead of da Ponte’s “dramma giocoso” (i. e., jovial comedy;—Mozart’s diary even calls the work an opera buffa), as years went on, “tragi-comic,” “tragic,” then “romantic,” and finally “grand” opera, this arbitrary generic terminology in itself proves how totally the work was misapprehended. A grand opera requires, first and foremost, imposing choral masses; and so these were actually introduced, like the celebrated Liberty Chorus in the finale of the first act, the unison

stretta, and others. In the original score there is no hint of all this. The stirring "Viva la libertà" is sung by a solo-quintet, led by Don Giovanni. It would certainly be tasteless and out of keeping to allow a rout of peasants, made tipsy in a nobleman's house, to sing a liberty chorus at the reception of noble guests. The unison chorus is also a graft, as remarked above, for the entire passage is conceived simply as an ensemble of the seven principal characters. In the original the chorus plays, withal, a very subordinate part; there are only two places where it participates in the action—in Scene 7 of Act I with the refrain "la la la la," and in the first finale.

From these disfigurements one may easily imagine how the whole book gradually became transformed. I do not so especially refer to the translations themselves; they were, from the start, inexact and lacking in taste, like almost all translations of opera-books.—Mozart appears to have had a premonition of this, for, according to trustworthy tradition, Mozart's son possessed a free, but felicitous, translation written by his father's own hand. But, unfortunately, it is preserved only in fragmentary form.—Not the translations are meant, but something different. The moment that the (sung) secco recitatives were changed, in the German representations, into spoken dialogue, the "revisers" and "adapters" had every opportunity to compress or expand these passages. Rochlitz, for instance, whose "arrangement" is still adopted in many quarters, found it necessary to enliven da Ponte's flow of ideas. He inserted grandiloquent phrases, gave the characters a different complexion, and even treated portions of the dialogue in the style of Schiller's "Räuber." This produces a very comical effect in the rococo environment. But the most wildly willful deeds were done by an adapter—probably Spiess—when he cold-bloodedly injected three personages into the action—a constable, a hermit, and a tradesman. All three—according to Freisauff—had

scenes together with Don Giovanni. "These scenes, following the taste of the times, remind one forcibly of the puppet-show and the harlequinades which were in high favor with the Vienna populace, and whose only aim was evidently to amuse said populace with coarse and stupid jokes." The scene with the tradesman, placed before the last finale, maintained itself on most stages until about 1830; Don Giovanni, instead of paying his due notes, burns them up and has the tradesman thrown out by his lackeys. The scene with the hermit—before the scene in the churchyard—was performed seldom; its dull point consisted in the twisting of the hermit's words by Leporello. Don Giovanni asks the hermit, "What do you live on?"—*Hermit*: "On roots (*Wurzeln*) and herbs (*Kräutern*)."—*Leporello*: "What? The fellow eats infantry (*Fussvolk*) and cavalry (*Reiter*)?"—The above-mentioned writer rightly follows this with the observation, "These three scenes could have been fathered only by the grotesquely perverted Viennese taste of that period. They sufficiently demonstrate how little appreciation was then to be found of the wonderful beauties contained in Mozart's masterwork."

Foreign countries had less to suffer from such mutilations, for the simple reason that performances in Italian were commoner there than in Germany. And one may readily imagine that now, in Germany, earnest protests against this outrage made themselves heard. The first step was the rehabilitation of the original score. This was done here and there already in the first half of the nineteenth century. For similar reasons a number of more conscientious and exact translations were made later, like those by Viol, Bitter, Gugler, Grandaur, Wolzogen, Kalbeck, Vaupel, and others. In 1883 there was even a meeting of a committee of German theatre-directors, under the chairmanship of Intendant-General von Perfall, whose aim was to reach an agreement concerning the text of

Don Giovanni. Their efforts were fruitless, "for to-day nearly every considerable theatre has its own arrangement of *Don Giovanni*."

Professional experts, more especially Gugler, gradually turned their attention to an examination of the musical side. They compared the modern growths with the parent stock—the altered scores with the original score in the possession of Mme. Viardot-Garcia and with almost equally reliable copies from the eighteenth century. Theatre directors, in so far as they were still possessed of an artistic conscience, utilized all the results thus arrived at and organized adequate representations of the mutilated work. In a word, the last decades finally aroused themselves to do justice to Mozart and da Ponte.

Ernst Possart, for his part, expressed the views which guided him in this affair both in a speech and a pamphlet of similar content. This little essay is well worth reading, even though not wholly free from errors, and though the historical material placed at his disposal by professionals may not always have been rightly understood. It was his purpose, "to explain how important and desirable it appears to base the project for a revival of the opera on the original text and the original score." Furthermore, he wished "to convince his readers, that with regard to the dimensions of the auditorium, the strength of the orchestra, and the musical and poetical elements in their entirety, the first representations in Prague, which took place in October, 1787, under the master's personal direction, ought to serve as a model; and that the advanced modern technique of the stage should be employed only in connection with the external equipment, i. e., the scenic decorations and the costumes."

This idea is not novel, but it is correct. When *Don Giovanni*, by Mozart, is set before us, what we want is Mozart's own, and not an arbitrary substitute concocted by some stage-manager or conductor. But between theory and practice there is a long step to be taken.

As *Don Giovanni* was, from the outset, intended for Prague; as da Ponte wrote the poem in Italian and the German Mozart composed it for Italian performers, taking into consideration the constitution of the orchestra and the size of the theatre, with which he was familiar; moreover, as the intellectual horizon of present-day audiences, the taste and the whole trend of our time, in brief, the entire *milieu* is fundamentally different from that of the late eighteenth century, etc., we are confronted by irreconcilable antagonisms.

Whoever should succeed in suitably combining the greatest number of the elements originally given in a stylistically finished representation, would, to be sure, come nearest to a solution of the problem.

The actors themselves are irrevocably lost to us; what is left is only the original Italian libretto, the original score, and—the theatre in Prague. An artistic, conscientious production based on these three would assuredly afford the acme of artistic enjoyment. In fact, this has already been attempted. By the Prague Conservatory on May the 12th, 1842, in the *Landständisches Theater* and in the Italian language, the opera *Don Giovanni* was “presented precisely as Mozart had composed it, in Prague, for the Italian opera of his time.” However, the representation seems to have been not “precisely” so. For the play-bill announces “Don Juan,” and “grand opera,” besides other caprices.

After all, Prague is far away; so what shall other cities do? They can have recourse only to the libretto and the score.

Even so, it would be a sheer impossibility to let a German company sing in Italian. Our throats and ears would energetically protest against it. Such, indeed, was the experience of Possart the consistent, when he made the attempt on beginning rehearsals for the new production. So nothing remained but the score and the stage-directions.

Now, it is understood that parts of the original score are missing. Furthermore, there are cuts in it, made by Mozart from necessity rather than choice. Besides, it is by no means proved that the employment of trombones in the Churchyard Duet and the Descent into Hell is owing to their introduction by an alien hand. It may be assumed with equal probability that Mozart was induced to make changes because the trombone players in Prague found the passages beyond their powers.

So in this particular we also encounter difficulties.

And then, if Mozart had to hear how (with few exceptions) our contemporary singers mishandle the Italian style of the eighteenth century, he would stop his ears.

Contrary opinions are likewise held concerning the numerical strength of the orchestra. It varies with the size of the hall in which it plays. A large auditorium requires a large orchestra, diminishing with the size of the hall. That Possart chose the cozy Residenztheater for the Don Giovanni evenings this season, is a point deserving the heartiest praise. The modern circus-halls with their swollen orchestras spell ruin for all delicate effects. To squeeze some eighty players into the orchestra of the Residenztheater would, of course, be a crude and perverse procedure. Mozart's orchestra, much more than that of our time, played the part of an accompaniment, and only seldom outrivals the voices in importance. But it does appear overdone and pedantic that Possart should have copied the strength of the Prague orchestra in 1787—twenty-six pieces. Mozart appreciated the good will and efficient work of these men to the full; he even left a testimonial to the orchestra in his translation, where he renders Don Giovanni's query, "Che ti par del bel concerto?" and the response, "È conforme al vostro merto," as follows:

"Don Giovanni: Herrlich spielen diese Leute!

Leporello: Es sind Prager Musikanten."

"These men play finely."—"They are musicians from Prague."

This was certainly an amiable compliment. But it is evident from his letters that he longed for Vienna and its more opulent resources; for the Prague opera orchestra was, even in contemporary estimation, a very small one. The characteristic color of Mozart's instrumentation would not be vitiated in the least if the Munich Intendant chose to augment his orchestra by eight or ten string-players. Even then the strings would number only twenty-two, against twelve wind-instruments and a drummer. The Introduction, and the Descent into Hell, would gain decidedly thereby, and the rest would lose nothing.

It follows from the above, that we in Germany have nothing else to cling to for the institution of stylistically correct performances but the original musical score and the stage-directions. Everything beside is subject to limitations. To begin with, in making a German version of the libretto we encounter the old difficulty—a literal translation, if we would have it prosodic, is an absolute impossibility. In such cases, liberties are permitted, but these, in any event, must conform exactly to the sense of the original. It cannot be denied that this desideratum has been attained, on the whole, by the new translation (founded on Grandaur's) made with solicitous devotion by Hermann Levi. Yet even in this one, as in all the rest, we miss the requisite consistency. The so-called "popular" passages have not been thoroughly revised. We refer to those passages whose wording, however perverted or inexact, is held to be sanctioned by tradition. As long as the "champagne" nonsense is done away with, why not the following:

Reich mir die Hand, mein Leben, etc.—The *Là ci darem la mano*, etc., of the original bears a different meaning in connection with the context. And the wording of the lines at the very beginning, *Keine Ruh' bei Tag und Nacht*, etc. (*Notte e giorno faticar*, etc.), might be suppressed, although the poetic motif is, at bottom, better than da Ponte's own.

It was to be expected that Possart would elaborate the scenic side of the production with great refinement. In such matters he is regarded as a master. To be sure, it did not go off without certain daring details of performance. Although he, after Don Giovanni's descent into hell, let the palace crash into peals of thunder (as in *Le Prophète*), and thereupon brought on the original second finale (dragged to light by Possart for the occasion, and so dreadfully conventional and insipid that one would rather not see it)—although Possart let this finale take its course on the ruins of the palace, it shall not be reckoned among the "daring details." For this specimen of bad taste was happily discarded after three performances. The propitiatory and, as observed above, artistically depressing close now proceeds according to the directions in the libretto—without change of scene, without theatrical humbug. What I mean will be found in the answers to the questions, When and where does the action take place? They are exceedingly important, for on them the choice of costumes and decorations depends.

Both poem and music are conceived in the rococo style. But where the librettist's work is merely skillful routine, that of the composer discovers infinite depth. It goes so deep that the contrasts between the characters and the situations often seem too abruptly depicted, giving rise at times to a sense of uneasiness. Contrasted with the smooth verses, Mozart's music is far too soulfelt, far too dæmonic, to insure an harmonious reaction for his *Don Giovanni*. In truth, between poem and music there yawns an unbridgeable chasm. While Mozart, too, is of the rococo period as regards his means of expression, his inspiration spurns the environment of a predetermined epoch. His *Don Giovanni* fits as admirably into the fifteenth century as the eighteenth, or any succeeding time. This aloofness from time and space is the distinguishing mark of a genial, immortal work.

Otherwise the poem. In contrast with Mozart's music,

it may not be transplanted from the rococo soil. Da Ponte neither intended an excursion into history, nor sought to create the illusion of some imaginary time. In his poem lives the spirit of the waning eighteenth century—of the years before the French Revolution. Loose living prevailed, not because it afforded real pleasure, but only to deaden the dread of a frightful convulsion. The cry, "Après nous le déluge!" rose ever louder and more importunately, the nearer it was felt to approach. There was a revel in refined sensuality for the same reason that a murderer feels himself irresistibly drawn to the scene of his deed. In stage-performances a partiality was shown for reflecting the spirit of the times, whose weaknesses were parodied or scourged with ironic and sarcastic scorn, dallied and toyed with. And this same period was on an equally familiar footing with the most heedless materialism and with the mysteries of the spirit-world. A subject-matter like that of *Don Giovanni* was capable of producing a tremendous effect. This was rightly sensed by more than one librettist.

The year 1787 alone beheld the birth of four operas founded on that fable. (1) The one-act *Don Giovanni* by Gazzaniga (Venice); (2) the two-act *Il Nuovo Convitato di Pietra* (The New Guest of Stone) by F. Gardi (Venice); (3) the one-act farce *Il Convitato di Pietra*, by Fabrizj (Rome); and (4) Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. In all four lives the spirit of the eighteenth century.

Possart very clearly recognized this spirit, and had designs for all the characters made in rococo style for the rehearsals. But then he immediately changed his mind. "The monstrous, barrel-like hoopskirts of the ladies and the towering powdered perruques made a grotesque impression even in the sketches, while on the stage they would materially interfere with grace and plasticity of motion, and would impose most irksome restraints on outbursts of passion." He finally decided, like the organizers of the production at Prague in 1842, on laying

the scene in seventeenth-century Spain, which had been left unscathed by the reactionary counter-reformation. True, this was a liberty, but it afforded an acceptable means of escape from the difficulty. That century offers, in some details, an analogy to the eighteenth: "Here, too, the nobleman is no longer the standard-bearer of the nation, but only the member of a caste devoted to unbridled self-indulgence." And so Possart chose the costumes of the seventeenth century.—"And the magnificent tableaux furnished by seventeenth-century Seville, provide an harmonious background for these costumes."

However, Possart had a certain right to lay the scene in Seville. The libretto itself designates the scene of the action only as "a city in Spain." Furthermore, Gardi's *Convitato di Pietra* likewise plays in Seville. But then, the specific selection of this city, or the selection of any specific city, is somewhat hazardous.

By Chrysander's investigations ("Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft," Vol. IV) it has been definitely established that da Ponte and Mozart were acquainted with the *Don Giovanni* of the poet Bertati and the composer Gazzaniga, and made use of it. Mozart's borrowings are negligible, whereas da Ponte's utilization of Bertati must be branded as a barefaced plagiarism. Of course, such poetic motives are to be excepted as are part and parcel of the subject-matter of *Don Giovanni*, foremostly the detail of the Guest of Stone. These are self-evidently the common property of all versions. But most of the others, and even the smallest and apparently most insignificant incidents, were similarly employed by da Ponte, and by them we most clearly perceive the extent of his borrowings. The fact that certain characters, like that of Donna Anna, are not delineated like those in the model, does not redeem da Ponte from the charge of plagiarism. Much must necessarily be different in the construction of a one-act play from that of a drama in two acts. Besides, the happy conceits in this revised version would seem to

have come from Mozart. Da Ponte himself was manifestly troubled by a bad conscience. In his Memoirs he evades the issue of plagiarism—which a moment's comparison with Bertati convincingly proves—with the slippery facility of an eel;—he makes no mention of it whatever.

Ernst Possart is thoroughly familiar with these matters; he discusses them pertinently in his essay. He also appears to have familiarized himself with Bertati's book. For the detail of letting Donna Elvira (a lady of Burgos, deserted by Don Giovanni, as da Ponte, following the text of his model, remarks) enter "in a litter, with traveling impedimenta, followed by servants," though not found in da Ponte's version, is clearly set down in Scenes 4 and 5 of Bertati's. This renders it the more remarkable that Possart did not adopt the latter poet's stage-direction, first brought into general notice by da Ponte;—the scene is laid in a small town in *Aragon*. Observe the difference; Burgos is situated in Old Castile, that is, in northerly Spain, and Seville and Andalusia in the south, while Aragon lies next to France. The character of the scenery would assuredly have been altered, more particularly because the assertion that the Don-Giovanni legend is indissolubly bound up with Seville cannot be regarded as wholly well founded.

After all, these strictures are of slight moment; indeed, they are quite overborne by the praise extorted by the masterstroke of this season's production—the utilization of Lautenschläger's revolving stage. This invention consists—to employ Possart's own very skillful description—in superimposing on the bare stage floor a gigantic turntable. Upon the front half (or on a third or a quarter, or less, according to scenic requirements) is placed the first "set" of the piece to be played. The second "set," for the time being invisible from the auditorium, is put in position back to back with the first, on the rear side of the turntable. When the first scene is over, a motor revolves the