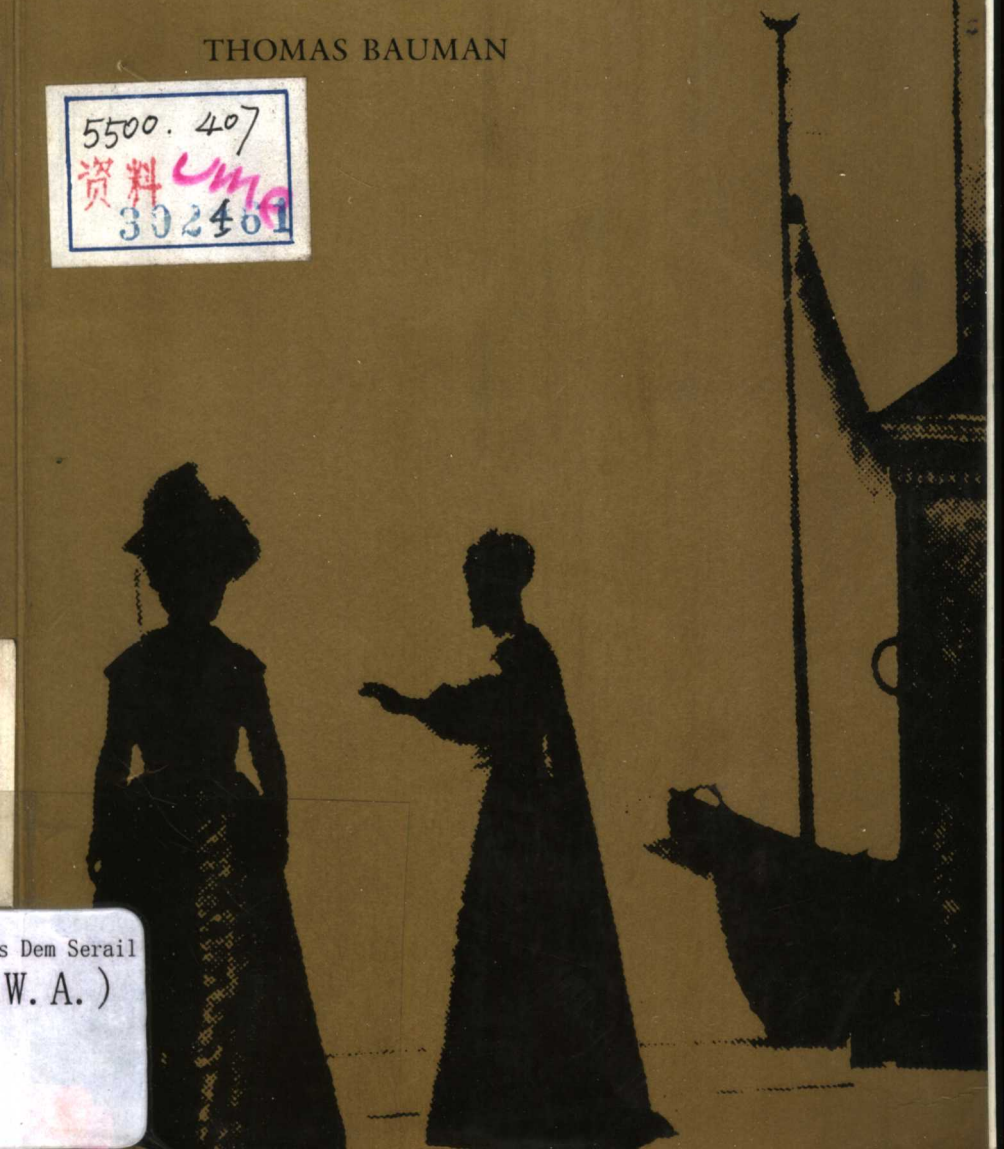
CAMBRIDGE OPERA HANDBOOKS

W. A. Mozart

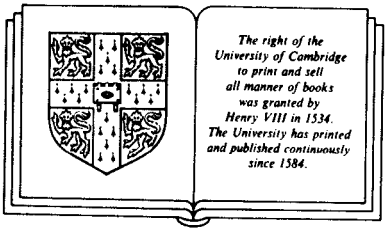
Die Entführung aus dem Serail

THOMAS BAUMAN



W. A. Mozart
Die Entführung aus dem Serail

THOMAS BAUMAN



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge
New York *New Rochelle* *Melbourne* *Sydney*

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

First published 1987

Printed in Great Britain at
the University Press, Cambridge

British Library cataloguing in publication data

Bauman, Thomas
W. A. Mozart, Die Entführung aus dem
Serail. - (Cambridge opera handbooks).
1. Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus
Entführung aus dem Serail, Die
I. Title
782.1'092'4 ML410.M9

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Bauman, Thomas, 1948-
W. A. Mozart, Die Entführung aus dem Serail.
(Cambridge opera handbooks)
Bibliography.
Discography.
Includes index.
1. Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 1756-1791. Entführung
aus dem Serail. I. Title. II. Title: Entführung aus
dem Serail. III. Series.
ML410.M9B185 1987 782.1'092'4 87-10326

ISBN 0 521 32545 5 hard covers
ISBN 0 521 31060 1 paperback

ME

CAMBRIDGE OPERA HANDBOOKS

General preface

This is a series of studies of individual operas written for the opera-goer or record-collector as well as the student or scholar. Each volume has three main concerns: historical, analytical and interpretative. There is a detailed description of the genesis of each work, the collaboration between librettist and composer, and the first performance and subsequent stage history. A full synopsis considers the opera as a structure of musical and dramatic effects, and there is also a musical analysis of a section of the score. The analysis, like the history, shades naturally into interpretation: by a careful combination of new essays and excerpts from classic statements the editors of the handbooks show how critical writing about the opera, like the production and performance, can direct or distort appreciation of its structural elements. A final section of documents gives a select bibliography, a discography, and guides to other sources. Each book is published in both hard covers and as a paperback.

Books published
Richard Wagner: *Parsifal* by Lucy Beckett
W. A. Mozart: *Don Giovanni* by Julian Rushton
C. W. von Gluck: *Orfeo* by Patricia Howard
Igor Stravinsky: *The Rake's Progress* by Paul Griffiths
Leoš Janáček: *Káťa Kabanová* by John Tyrrell
Giuseppe Verdi: *Falstaff* by James A. Hepokoski
Benjamin Britten: *Peter Grimes* by Philip Brett
Giacomo Puccini: *Tosca* by Mosco Carner
Benjamin Britten: *The Turn of the Screw* by Patricia Howard
Richard Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier* by Alan Jefferson
Claudio Monteverdi: *Orfeo* by John Whenham
Giacomo Puccini: *La bohème* by Arthur Groos and Roger Parker
Giuseppe Verdi: *Otello* by James A. Hepokoski
Benjamin Britten: *Death in Venice* by Donald Mitchell
W. A. Mozart: *Le nozze di Figaro* by Tim Carter

Acknowledgments

I owe a pleasant debt of collegial gratitude to Daniel Heartz and Karol Berger. What follows has benefited considerably from their careful reading and suggestions. Research in Austria for this volume was made possible by a generous Pew Foundation Grant from Stanford University.

The illustrations in this book appear by kind permission of the following: Plate 1, The Library of Congress; Plate 2, Bild-Archiv der österreichischen Nationalbibliothek; Plate 3; Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien; Plate 4, Bild-Archiv der österreichischen Nationalbibliothek; Plate 5*a*, Metropolitan Opera Archives; Plate 5*b*, Glyndebourne Festival Opera 1968; Plate 6*a* and *b*, Pressebüro Salzburger Festspiele; Plate 7*a* and *b*, Teatro alla Scala, Archivio Fotografico; Plate 8, The Library of Congress.

Contents

1 *Introduction*

'Now the day before yesterday Stephanie the Younger gave me a libretto to set', wrote Mozart to his father on 1 August 1781. 'The book is quite good. The subject is Turkish, and it's called *Bellmont* und *konstanze.* or *die verführung aus dem Serail.*'[1] With this amusing slip ('seduction' for 'abduction') Mozart announced his preliminary work on a libretto which grew over the next ten months into *Die Entführung aus dem Serail.* Suffused with youthful confidence in its creator's maturing dramatic powers, this opera more than any other work carried Mozart's name over the next decade to every corner of the German-speaking world.

Especially in the non-German-speaking world, however, the position of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* as an unequivocal masterpiece has been far more tenuous than that of Mozart's later comic operas. The dramatic weight borne by the spoken dialogue, so much greater here than in *Die Zauberflöte*, has played a significant role in critical misgivings; the story itself has been judged – particularly by later standards – as far too insubstantial and naive, even for an opera. Some have gone so far as to relegate Mozart's music itself to a lower dramatic plane. Most notably, Edward Dent set up a chorus of disappointment among modern writers who lament the opera's lack of stylistic unity – an opinion one can find among the work's earliest critics as well.[2]

The two problems of dialogue and style are part of the same aesthetic issue, for the role played by the spoken word in an opera like the *Entführung* directly affects the musician's ability to shape and articulate the drama. Certainly, by the standards of Mozart's own day, only a perverse listener would have regarded the dialogue of a German opera as so much pedestrian manoeuvring in preparation for sublime moments of music-dramatic expression. In Vienna as in other centres, German operas not only shared many features with spoken dramas, but also alternated with them on the same stage and

often shared many of the same singer-players. A historical appreciation of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* requires us to acknowledge its proximity to the German tradition of spoken plays with musical enhancement.

It also allows us to see more clearly what sets it apart from virtually everything in the German repertory that had preceded it – Mozart's own unwillingness to accept these limitations. The notion of musical enhancement had to yield to transfiguration at moments where operatic demands supersede those of the spoken drama – the quartet closing Act II, for instance, or the lovers' recitative and duet near the end of Act III.

No one had ever written anything like this music before in a German comic opera. Is the *Entführung* as a result fundamentally different from all the lowly specimens of this genre which preceded it, and about which we know so little? Carl Maria von Weber thought so. Despite its mixing of 'the most consummate conception of dramatic truth and characteristic declamation' with 'an incomplete renunciation here and there of the conventional in form and shape', he saw in the *Entführung* not only a unique repository of Mozart's youthful vigour but also the watershed in the composer's artistic coming of age and the basis for everything that followed in his later operatic masterpieces:

> I venture to express the belief that in the *Entführung* Mozart's artistic experience had reached its maturity, and thereafter only life experience created on. The world was justified in expecting more operas like *Figaro* and *Don Juan* from him; but with the best will he could not write another *Entführung*.[3]

The circumstances in which Mozart found German opera in 1781 and under which he composed *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* created an uneasy dialectic between received notions of German comic opera as plays enlivened with interspersed musical numbers and the overpowering, primary role Mozart had come to realise music could play in composing *Idomeneo* for Munich in 1780. The mixed dramatic character of the *Entführung* offered an additional basis for creative unease in the young composer. Just before he began work on the *Entführung*, Mozart had remarked in a letter to his father on 16 June 1781 that he regarded comic and serious opera as divergent styles – and further, that the Viennese view agreed with his own sense of their incompatibility:

> Do you think, then, that I would compose an Opera Comique in the same way as an Opera Seria? – However little playfulness there should be in an

Opera Seria and however much of the learned and reasonable, just so little of the learned must there be in an Opera Buffa and so much more of the playful and comic. I can't help it if in an Opera Seria people wish to have comic music as well; – here, however, one distinguishes very clearly in this matter.

But by the time Mozart completed the *Entführung* the distinction was by no means so clear. As with everything Mozart wrote for the stage, the final shape of the opera sprang as much from external circumstances as from internal impulse. To set forth these circumstances and their significance for the opera as we know it today is no simple task. We begin here with how and why *Belmont und Constanze* – a libretto written for a conservative northern composer and already produced in 1781 at Berlin – should have been put in Mozart's hands for a new Viennese production later that year.

Vienna and the National Singspiel

When Mozart arrived in Vienna on 16 March 1781 the local court-supported company which performed German opera, the National Singspiel, had just concluded its third season. Joseph II had seen to the creation of this enterprise in 1778 as a musical adjunct to the city's National Theatre, which he had instituted two years earlier.

The National Theatre and National Singspiel performed together at the 'Theater nächst der kaiserlichen Burg' or 'Burgtheater'. This stage and the nearby Kärntnerthor Theatre were both owned by the imperial court. The Burgtheater was the smaller of the two buildings, but more prestigious: in Viennese minds it was closely associated with the emperor, both physically and as an extension of imperial patronage and policy. The association became even stronger with the creation of the National Theatre and Singspiel.

The local cultural observer Johann Pezzl defined a 'national stage' as 'one which performs in the language of its nation, and whose pieces depict as much as possible the nation's customs, and tailor themselves to the genius and interest of the people attending them'.[4] The National Theatre at least approximated to Pezzl's ideal, but the National Singspiel inevitably fell far short of it, for Viennese musical taste in opera was anything but 'national'.

Such a state of affairs was by no means surprising. Despite the efforts of Philip Hafner, Joseph Felix Kurz-Bernardon and Franz Josef Haydn during the 1750s and 1760s, German-language opera in Austria continued to favour the improvised farce with music, featur-

ing local variants of the *commedia dell'arte* masks. Such entertainments were not to be tolerated on an enlightened emperor's stage, which ought to be a school for morals and decency, and so they left the imperial stages (where they had been welcome under Emperor Francis Stephan) and migrated to the suburban theatres that began springing to life after Joseph II's Theaterfreiheit Edict of 1776. German opera of a more 'regular' sort was already leading a healthy existence at that date, but remained overwhelmingly a central and north German product. The Viennese admired these works as dramas, but the music left them cold ('too Lutheran' said Mozart's first Belmonte of their vocal style).

The Viennese dramatist Tobias von Gebler explained quite candidly what the emperor demanded in a letter written in early 1778 to the Berlin *lumière* Friedrich Nicolai:

> You honourable people will perhaps have heard that our truly *German* emperor is now founding a German opera, for the serious as well as comic genre. Yet we must have nothing but true musical virtuosos and no street-singers, and the music, too, must be of the sort that we are used to here by Piccinni, Anfossi, Paisiello, and to an extent Grétry.[5]

During its first years the National Singspiel did assemble a cadre of excellent singers as the emperor had wished, as well as a splendid orchestra and chorus. The repertory to be performed by these musicians proved more problematical. Commissions went out to local composers and poets for new works, but production could not keep up with demand in either quantity or quality. Recourse was had almost at once to successful opéras-comiques of Monsigny, Gossec, Dezède, and above all Grétry; soon thereafter the theatre turned to opera buffa as well (Pietro Guglielmi, Gassmann, Sacchini and Anfossi). In other words, the situation reverted to the way things had been before 1778.

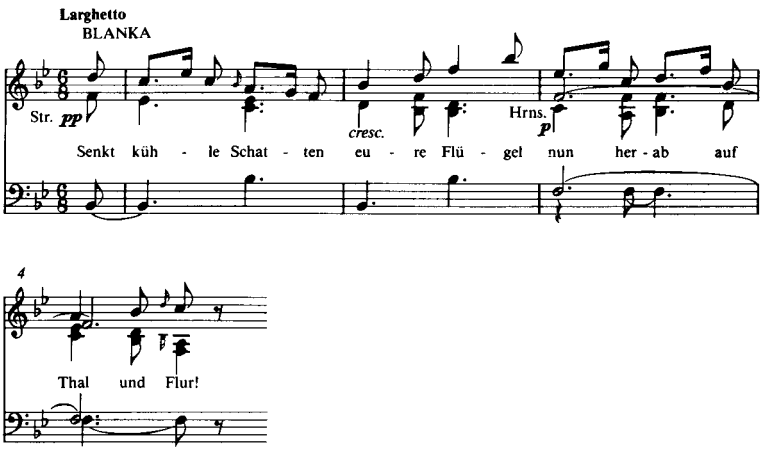
In contrast, the National Singspiel took up very few works originating from other German stages. The enterprise's primary commitment, in theory and in practice alike, lay with local composers. For them the National Singspiel and its superb resources represented an unprecedented opportunity, but prior to Mozart's arrival, only one Austrian had profited from it – Ignaz Umlauf. He was serving as principal violist in the small orchestra which played for the National Theatre, when in late 1777 the court commissioned him to set the one-act opera *Die Bergknappen* for a small operatic wing the emperor was hoping to create at the Burgtheater. On the strength of its success Joseph II decided in early 1778 to make the

National Singspiel a permanent institution. Umlauf was appointed its Kapellmeister. He composed two further operas for the enterprise's first two seasons and was completing a fourth when Mozart came to Vienna in March 1781.

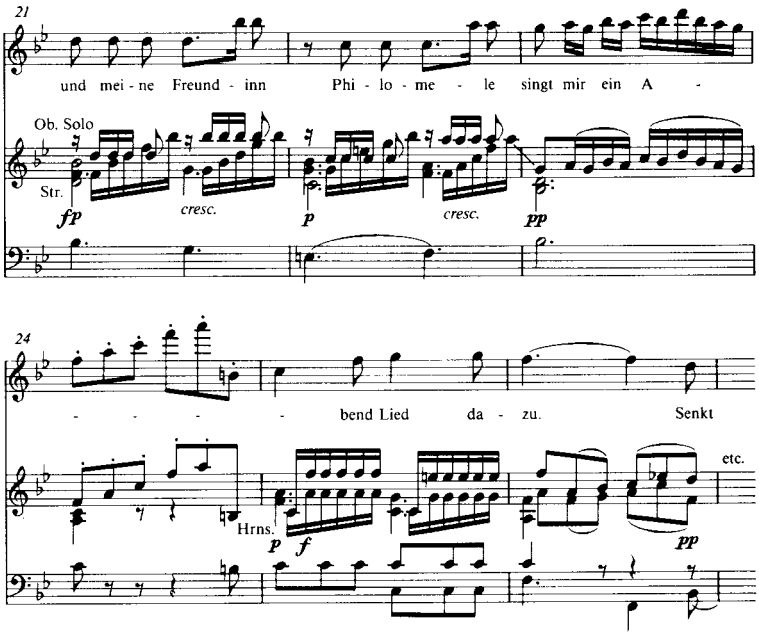
At their best, the German operas Umlauf wrote for the National Singspiel not only reveal a popular tunefulness, they also supply details of ambiance, characterisation and orchestral colour seldom encountered in scores from the North. The first aria of *Das Irrlicht* (1782), for example, acquaints us at once with the arch-innocent heroine Blanka and her simple country surroundings by means of a bucolic, transparent *alla siciliana* melody supported by an opening drone and delightful anticipations in the bass (Ex. 1*a*). Umlauf does not forget for whom he is writing, either – Aloysia Lange, the most celebrated of the early interpreters of the part of Constanze in the *Entführung*. Toward the end he sends her rocketing up to an astonishing high a‴ that would dizzy even Blanka's nightingale friend in the aria text, which presumably inspired this flight (Ex. 1*b*). Umlauf saves the solo oboe for this one passage, and also keeps a solo clarinet silent until it offers its benediction in the closing ritornello.

Gebler described Umlauf's operas as 'solid and pleasing', and they proved to be to the taste of Vienna at large in their congenial blending of tunefulness, buffo style, local folk elements and virtuosic display. From the beginning Mozart was keenly aware of Umlauf as a

Ex. 1*a*



Ex. 1*b*



rival, which may in part account for the uniformly disparaging remarks he made about Umlauf's music in his letters to his father.

Stephanie and Vienna's window to the north

The two operas Umlauf composed around the time of Mozart's appearance at Vienna – *Die schöne Schusterin* and *Das Irrlicht* – were adapted for the National Singspiel by the man who collaborated with Mozart on the revision of *Belmont und Constanze*, Gottlieb Stephanie the Younger. During the Seven Years' War he had come to Austria as a Prussian prisoner of war. He carved out an influential position for himself in Viennese theatrical life as an actor, dramatist, and later director. He was appointed as one of the five inspectors of the National Theatre in 1776, and at the end of Carneval 1781 the direction of the National Singspiel was put in his hands. This in effect made him directly responsible to the emperor's personal overseer of theatrical affairs, the 'General-Spektakel-Direktor' Count Franz Xaver Rosenberg-Orsini.

Stephanie was not only one of the most powerful men in Viennese theatrical circles, he was also one of the most hated and vilified. Mozart's brother-in-law, the actor Joseph Lange, recalled that Stephanie 'tyrannised over everything, and as a result was universally hated'.[6] Mozart himself learnt of Stephanie's ill fame after only a few months in Vienna. On 16 June 1781 he wrote to Leopold concerning Stephanie:

> This man has the worst reputation throughout Vienna – for which I am very sorry – as a rude, deceitful, slanderous man, who inflicts the greatest injustices on people. But I'm not getting mixed up in any of that. It may be true, since everyone carps about it. Nevertheless, he carries the greatest weight with the emperor, and he was very friendly toward me from the first, and said 'We're already old friends [he had first met Mozart in 1773] and I am glad if I can be in a position to help you.'

Mozart stressed something else about Stephanie in this letter: he was a man who understood the theatre, a virtue Mozart held in the highest esteem. By 1781 Stephanie's theatrical competence extended to German opera as well. More than anyone else, Stephanie had been the National Singspiel's literary work-horse, serving from its inception as its principal translator and adapter. By the time of the première of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* he had translated nine French operas and four Italian ones (for use with the original music) and had adapted three other texts for new settings by local composers.

In the National Theatre's repertory many of the most successful original German dramas came from outside Austria despite the activities of many local dramatists, Stephanie among them. It was only natural, under these circumstances, for the National Singspiel to look northward as well for readily accessible German librettos that could serve as vehicles for local composers. Viennese adapters of these northern texts were not indiscriminate, however. The earliest phase of the German libretto's cultivation in the north found little resonance at Vienna. Theatrical taste was, like fashion, a mercurial and fickle thing there. One seized the moment and strove studiously to remain *au courant*, as many of Mozart's own remarks in his letters tell us.

In all of Germany, the most popular librettist around 1780 was the Leipzig businessman Christoph Friedrich Bretzner. In 1779 he had published a set of four comic opera texts, each a departure from earlier paths and each set many times by composers all across Germany during the next few years. As far as the musical structure of these texts is concerned, they offered nothing new to German opera.

Characterisation, the conduct of the plot and scenic construction are almost entirely the creation of the dialogue, making these works little different from spoken comedies and farces. The musical items consist mostly of solo songs, strewn about here and there with little regard for how they fit into a scene. Many are short and aphoristic, and often a single character will be given three, four or even five numbers in a row to sing. Dramatic ensembles and finales are nowhere to be found. All of this reflected accurately Bretzner's northern legacy.

Yet such conservative features did not deter German composers from embracing Bretzner's librettos for their cleverness, charm, and above all their colourful and novel plots. No one in the north had thought of bringing Molière to German operatic stages before (as in *Adrast und Isidore*), or of exploiting the grisly and supernatural side of medieval German legends (*Das wütende Heer*), or of turning the spirit of Gozzi's fables to operatic account (*Der Irrwisch*).

Vienna was intrigued as well. All four of Bretzner's librettos were adapted there for local composers during the 1780s. The most important of these adaptations was the revision of *Der Irrwisch* which Stephanie undertook for Umlauf in late 1780, retitled *Das Irrlicht*. We shall have occasion to mention this project several times later on, for it ran a course remarkably parallel to that run by *Belmont und Constanze* on its way to becoming *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.

Mozart and the search for a German libretto

In 1781 Bretzner published his fifth libretto, a markedly different work from his earlier efforts – *Belmont und Constanze, oder Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. He had written it in 1780 for Johann André, the popular Kapellmeister of the Döbbelin company, resident at Berlin. The opera capitalised on the burgeoning vogue of Turkish operas (a subject we shall deal with in Chapter 3), and also presented several important technical advances in the musical construction of a German libretto. But no doubt the name of its author was the decisive factor in Stephanie's mind when he presented it to Mozart on 30 July 1781 after months of casting about for a text suitable for the young composer and for the National Singspiel.

That March Mozart had already shown Stephanie another Turkish opera he had brought with him to Vienna, the one we now know as *Zaïde*. We do not have the dialogue for Mozart's opera, but one thing

is clear from the music: it was unusually serious in tone and high-minded in sentiment for a German opera (some elements appear to be derived from Voltaire's verse tragedy *Zaïre*). The opera's serious complexion sealed its fate as far as the National Singspiel was concerned: Stephanie rejected the work at once, but offered to give Mozart a new piece,

> and, as he says, a good one. . .I could not really disagree with Stephanie. I only said that the work (except for the long dialogues – which are nevertheless easy to change) is very good, but isn't for Vienna, where one prefers to see comic pieces (18 April 1781).

Mozart's remark about Viennese taste invites us to look for a moment at what the National Singspiel was in fact up to at that time. Table 1 summarises the most popular offerings during the 1780/81 season and the first half of the next one, with items ranked by number of performances during that time. A total of thirty different works were put on, twelve of them French, nine Austrian, six Italian and three German. French operas (eight of them by Grétry) dominated during the season preceding Mozart's arrival, but diminished significantly during 1781 in favour of Italian works.

The most successful of the operas listed in Table 1 share several common traits. The two most popular of all – Gluck's *La Rencontre imprévue* (1763) and Grétry's *Zémire et Azor* (1771) – represent revivals of older works with both exotic settings and a mixture of serious and comic characters. Below them are four operas of frankly comic stamp seasoned with a strong dose of ridicule. In particular, *Der Rauchfangkehrer* (about an Italian chimney-sweep who outwits a group of pretentious German lovers) and *I filosofi immaginari* (mocking the mania for intellectual attainments which possesses a father and daughter) dominated the repertory of the National Singspiel during Mozart's first months at Vienna. They also represent the early stirrings of a popular preference which two years later brought about the demise of the German enterprise and the reinstatement of opera buffa at the Burgtheater.

Mozart spent the rest of April engaged in Viennese concert life, waiting for Stephanie to write him a libretto, and growing increasingly disgusted with his employer, the Archbishop Colloredo. In early May the strain culminated in his rude ejection from His Grace's service. From then on Mozart devoted himself to reassuring his disgruntled father that he had acted honourably, that everyone in Vienna despised Colloredo anyway, that he was working hard and making money there, and that his prospects for recognition and

Table 1 *The most popular operas given by the National Singspiel, March 1780–September 1781*

Title [acts] (Librettist–composer)	1st Nat'l Singspiel performance	performances 3/80–2/81	4/81–9/81	Total
La Rencontre imprévue [3] (Dancourt–Gluck)	26 Jul 1780	11	4	15
Zémire et Azor [4] (Marmontel–Grétry)	13 Oct 1779	10	3	13
I filosofi immaginari [2] (Bertati–Paisiello)	22 May 1781	–	11	11
L'incognita perseguitata [3] (Petrosellini–Anfossi)	21 Aug 1780	7	4	11
Le Tonnelier [1] (Poinsinet–Audinot & Gossec)	29 Jun 1780	9	1	10
Der Rauchfangkehrer [3] (Auenbrugger–Salieri)	30 Apr 1781	–	9	9
Was erhält die Männer treu [2] (Zehnmark–Ruprecht)	30 Mar 1780	7	1	8
Die schöne Schusterinn [2] (Stephanie–Umlauf)	22 Jun 1779	4	3	7
L'Ami de la maison [3] (Marmontel–Grétry)	25 May 1778	3	3	6
La Fausse Magie [1] (Marmontel–Grétry)	27 Oct 1778	4	2	6
L'Amant jaloux [2] (d'Hèle–Grétry)	12 Oct 1780	4	1	5
L'isola d'amore [2] (Gori–Sacchini)	7 May 1780	5	0	5
La Rosière de Salencie [3] (Favart–Philidor, Duni *et al.*)	29 Sep 1779	5	0	5

advancement were bright. By the end of May he had made several important friends among Vienna's nobility, including Count Rosenberg. In early June, before leaving for the summer, the count entrusted the responsibility for finding a suitable libretto for Mozart to Friedrich Ludwig Schröder, one of Germany's greatest actors, engaged that April by the National Theatre.

By mid-June Schröder had hunted up a four-act libretto. He gave it to Stephanie, who found the first act strong but the later ones less satisfactory. He also feared it would not be accepted by Rosenberg.

In consequence, Mozart refused to look at it, much less begin work on it. The unknown libretto[7] was never mentioned again.

Mozart returned to his hopes of a new opera from Stephanie himself. But Stephanie, as we shall learn later on, was a busy man who hoped to satisfy Mozart with a minimum of creative energy expended on his own part. The next news we hear of the project is that at the end of July Stephanie handed Bretzner's *Belmont und Constanze* over to Mozart.