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W. A. Mozart

Die Zauberflöte

PETER BRANSCOMBE



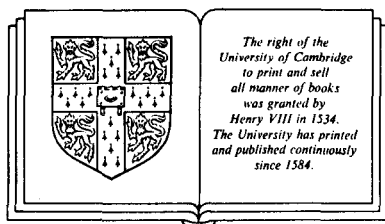
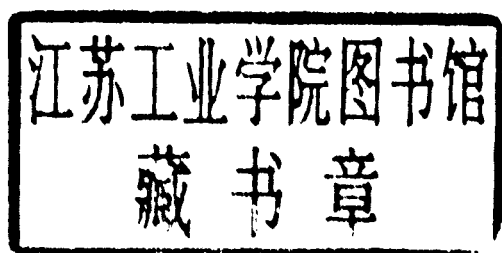
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Die Zauberflöte

PETER BRANSCOMBE

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Few operas have had more written about them than *Die Zauberflöte*, yet few are as often exposed to misguided comment – or to idiosyncratic productions. This book sets out to provide a straightforward account of Mozart's last opera, exposing the half-truths and legends that have proliferated since its first production in 1791. In chapter 1 a hitherto unsuspected source for the opening scenes is presented, and the complex relationship is revealed between the stories, essays and stage-works on which the plot is based. The second chapter studies the intellectual background, with special attention to Freemasonry. A detailed synopsis follows, then the history of the composition, based on documentary evidence and, in the case of the autograph score, the paper-types used. Chapter 5 examines the identity of the librettist and the qualities of his work, and chapter 6 is a detailed study (by Erik Smith) of Mozart's music and more generally of his late style. Chapter 7 covers the first performance, the cast, early reception, and then the rapid growth in the opera's fame; an outline history of productions concludes the chapter. Anthony Besch discusses the nature of the challenge to the director presented by *Die Zauberflöte* and suggests how the problems can be overcome. The volume contains illustrations, a bibliography and a discography.

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General preface

This is a series of studies of individual operas, written for the serious opera-goer or record-collector as well as the student or scholar. Each volume has three main concerns. The first is historical: to describe the genesis of the work, its sources or its relation to literary prototypes, the collaboration between librettist and composer, and the first performance and subsequent stage history. This history is itself a record of changing attitudes towards the work, and an index of general changes of taste. The second is analytical and it is grounded in a very full synopsis which considers the opera as a structure of musical and dramatic effects. In most volumes there is also a musical analysis of a section of the score, showing how the music serves or makes the drama. The analysis, like the history, naturally raises questions of interpretation, and the third concern of each volume is to show how critical writing about an opera, like production and performance, can direct or distort appreciation of its structural elements. Some conflict of interpretation is an inevitable part of this account; editors of the handbooks reflect this — by citing classic statements, by commissioning new essays, by taking up their own critical position. A final section gives a select bibliography, a discography and guides to other sources.

Acknowledgments

It is a pleasure to express my gratitude to many friends and colleagues who have helped and encouraged me during the writing of this book. In particular I thank Anthony Besch, Roy Owen and Erik Smith for their contributions; Erik Smith has also read and commented on the entire manuscript. Peter Adamson, Leigh Bailey, Malcolm Humble, Susan Katzmann and Oswald Ruttner suggested source materials that I should otherwise have overlooked, and Hamish Scott, the late Martin Smith and Frederick Smyth offered valuable comments in areas in which their expertise corrected or confirmed my limited knowledge. Andrew Porter's constant encouragement over many years has been equalled only by the generosity of Alan Tyson, who has allowed me to benefit from his unpublished study of the paper-types and structure of Mozart's autograph score. Finally I thank the editors and advisers of the Cambridge University Press for their confidence and patience during the protracted gestation of this book, and Susan Ramsey for compiling the index.

Notes on the text

The principal source for all references to *Die Zauberflöte* is the full score published in the *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe (NMA)*: II/5/19, Kassel etc., 1970, ed. Gernot Gruber and Alfred Orel. The edition of the libretto used is the facsimile of Schikaneder's original text of 1791, edited by M. M. Rabenlechner (Vienna, 1942).

References to the Mozart family correspondence are based on *Mozart. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen. Gesamtausgabe*, 7 vols., Kassel etc., 1962–75, ed. Wilhelm A. Bauer, Otto Erich Deutsch and Joseph Heinz Eibl. Letters are identified by date, and the passages quoted have been newly translated for this book.

Identification of scenes has been abbreviated; thus II, 17 = Act II, scene 17. The individual items in the score are numbered from 1 (*Introduction*) to 21 (finale), as in the *NMA* and most other editions; Mozart exceptionally numbered his autograph from 1 (overture) to 22.

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The illustrations appear by kind permission of the following: Plate 1, from an English private collection; Plates 2, 3, 4 and 5, VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, Leipzig; Plate 6, Torre Abbey Collection, the property of Torbay Borough Council; Plates 7 and 8, Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien; Plate 9, the artist, Peter Rice; Plate 10, the photographer, Andrew March.

Introduction

'Dined at Prince Schwarzenberg's ... after dinner charming music by Mozart. *Die Zauberflöte*.' Thus wrote Karl, Count Zinzendorf, in his diary on 19 February 1793;¹ there is a similar entry just over a year later. This music-loving aristocrat and prominent state official, whose comments after attending an early performance of the opera we shall find in chapter 7, is here unconsciously pointing to the extraordinary popularity that the music of Mozart's last opera achieved within a year or two of its première.

Of this success Mozart of course knew nothing, though his recognition of the opera's increasing hold on the public of the Freihaustheater auf der Wieden during the final weeks of his life gave him much pleasure. Perhaps the clearest indication of an opera's popularity at that time was to be measured by its appearance in the form of arrangements and adaptations. Apart from the piano scores and transcriptions that began to appear within weeks of the first night, there are in the case of *Die Zauberflöte* sets of variations and pot-pourris by Beethoven and Gelinek (several sets), Spohr and Sor; numbers from the opera make a saucy appearance in Lanner's waltz opus 196, *Die Mozartisten*, of 1842. The benign shadow of the opera lies heavily upon much of German-language literature and music in the next two centuries. Music from it appeared in arrangements for wind octet, flute quintet and quartet, string quartets, trios, duos (even for two cellos), guitar, and as German dances. In Victorian England, imagined to be unreceptive to *The Magic Flute*, there is evidence that many of the airs and duets ('The manly heart', for instance, as 'Bei Männern' was known) were familiar and well-loved items in the family circle and concert room. In Vienna, where the opera remained almost permanently in the repertory, a further sign of its hold on the public is to be found in the vocal quodlibets or pot-pourris prominent in innumerable plays with music in the popular theatres: no opera is as often quoted, from the early years of the nineteenth century on to

the death of that tradition that coincided with the passing in 1862 of its greatest master, Johann Nestroy (himself a Court Opera débutant as a very young Sarastro forty years before).

Die Zauberflöte has always been a controversial work: greatly loved and very frequently performed, yet also the object of heated scholarly debate and critical comment. The ordinary opera-goer does not find it difficult to come to terms with, though this has not prevented a large number of persons from feeling the need to interpret and explain what is at root a simple fairy-tale opera with a strong admixture of comic and more profound elements.

Two nineteenth-century comments suggested the nature of the problems it was held to present:

Here that which is eternal, valid for all times and all humanity (it is enough that I point to the dialogue of the *Spokesman* with *Tamino*!), is so irretrievably bound to the veritably trivial tendency of the play, intended by the poet simply to please a suburban Viennese public, that we need the intervention of an explanatory historical critique in order to be able to understand and endorse the whole work in its accidentally shaped uniqueness.

The second:

And yonder musician [i.e. Mozart], who used the greatest power which (in the art he knew) the Father of spirits ever yet breathed into the clay of this world; – who used it, I say, to follow and fit with perfect sound the words of the ‘Zauberflöte’ and of ‘Don Giovanni’ – foolishlest and most monstrous of conceivable human words and subjects of thought – for the future ‘amusement’ of his race! – No such spectacle of unconscious (and in that unconsciousness all the more fearful) moral degradation of the highest faculty to the lowest purpose can be found in history.

The first writer is Richard Wagner; the essay is ‘Das Publikum in Zeit und Raum’ of 1878.² And the second writer is John Ruskin, in the Fifth Letter, ‘Entertainment’, of *Time and Tide* (25 February 1867).³

Belittlement of Schikaneder’s libretto, like the numerous posthumous attempts to rob him of its authorship, have continued in the twentieth century, if on the whole to a less marked extent. This disparagement has done nothing to inhibit the enthusiasm for the opera of the general public, for whom the niceties of authenticity are of small concern.

In writing this book I have tried to maintain a balance between the needs of the ordinary opera-lover and the reader with a more specialized interest in Mozart’s last work for the stage. I have also striven to thread my way through the thickets of the unusually prolific

and luxuriant secondary literature, but above all to concentrate on the essentials, which must surely be to set out as directly as possible the ingredients, questioning traditional assumptions whilst as far as possible avoiding new speculation. This means that I have not attempted a detailed interpretation of the opera in Masonic terms, since the surviving evidence is incomplete, and to some extent contradictory.

The nine chapters (readers are advised against looking for any significance in the number of chapters or their sub-divisions) cover the most important sources for the opera, the intellectual background against which it was written, a synopsis, the genesis of the opera, essays on the libretto and the music, an outline history of the work in performance and reception, the interpretative and practical problems that face the director of a production, and brief consideration of some of the problems that recur in criticisms of the work.

1 *The sources*

The popular theatre and Mozart's links with it

More important than any one source of *Die Zauberflöte* is the whole tradition of the Viennese Popular Theatre, of which this opera is the supreme product – thanks to Mozart's musical and dramatic genius, prompted and aided by Emanuel Schikaneder. The tradition was already around eighty years old when *Die Zauberflöte* was written. The previous pattern of travelling companies of actors presenting a varied repertory of dramas, Singspiels and comedies was to continue until well after the establishment of a resident company at Vienna's Kärntnertor-Theater in 1710 or 1711. A notable ensemble was created under Joseph Anton Stranitzky, whose role of Hanswurst was descended from older comic types, native and foreign. His surviving repertory of *Haupt- und Staats-Aktionen* (plays about kings and queens, their advisers, and generals, with sudden changes of fortune, and liberally larded with the extemporized antics of comic servants) indicates that music, dance and spectacular scenic effects were within the capabilities of Stranitzky's company. Most of the plays were either parodies of, or satirical popular commentaries on, works performed at court or in the Jesuit theatre.

Stranitzky's successor in the mid-1720s, Gottfried Prehauser, built up the ensemble and repertory to a yet higher standard. His Hanswurst was admired for four decades, and he was supported by a strong team. During the 1750s, by when the rôle of music was extensive, Haydn wrote songs, and at least one complete Singspiel, for this company.

Well before the end of her reign, Maria Theresia had turned against this popular comic tradition; good taste and 'regular' (i.e. non-extemporized, Enlightenment) drama by the early 1760s were already excluding Hanswurst, or permitting him at most an anodyne rôle. But the tradition refused to die, and following the abandonment in 1776 of the restrictions limiting Vienna's theatres to two, both under court

control, troupes began to put on comedies on temporary stages and in adapted buildings. At the beginning of the 1780s, specially built suburban theatres began to open: in 1781 Karl Marinelli opened his Theater in der Leopoldstadt (a suburb to the north-east of the city); in 1787 Christian Rossbach opened his theatre in the Wieden suburb, to the south of the city, (the so-called 'Freihaus-Theater auf der Wieden'); and in 1788 Franz Scherzer built the Theater in der Josefstadt, to the north-west of the city centre; less permanent theatres existed in other suburbs. The Theater in der Josefstadt, and the Theater an der Wien, which in 1801 replaced the Theater auf der Wieden, still exist, much rebuilt.

The theatre in the Leopoldstadt was for some seventy-five years the principal home of popular comedy, with comic types like Kasperl and Staberl keeping alive the old Hanswurst tradition. From the late 1780s, after Joseph II abandoned his 'National-Singspiel' venture at the Court Theatre, Marinelli, seizing on the lack of light vernacular musical theatre, developed the musical side of his company, increasing the size and proficiency of the orchestra, and instituting a school for talented youngsters. Though the emphasis remained on dialect comedy, the musical repertory was adventurous (it included works by Schenk, Gassmann, Salieri, Dittersdorf, Paisiello, and had special success with German adaptations of two of Martín y Soler's operas); the farces often included music, with extensive ensembles.

When Schikaneder took over the direction of the Freihaus-Theater auf der Wieden in summer 1789 he brought with him from southern Germany the strengthening the company needed, especially in music. The most important new members, apart from himself, were Benedikt Schack and Franz Xaver Gerl, both composers as well as singers and actors. The three newcomers were responsible for the first production, the Singspiel ('comic opera') *Der dumme Gärtner aus dem Gebirge, oder Die zween Anton* ('The stupid gardener from the mountains, or the two Antons'), given on 12 July. Over the next six years it was followed by six sequels. The musical ambitions of Schikaneder, and the new direction he was taking with the magic opera, are both apparent in Paul Wranitzky's *Oberon, König der Elfen*, presumably commissioned, and certainly first staged, by Schikaneder (7 November 1789). *Der Stein der Weisen oder Die Zauberinsel* ('The philosophers' stone, or the magic island'), by Schikaneder, Schack and Gerl followed on 11 September 1790; it was clearly a forerunner of *Die Zauberflöte*, with its story from *Dschinnistan*, its magic element, and its pairs of lovers, one serious, one comic. The emphasis that

Schikaneder was placing on music is apparent in the appointment of Johann Baptist Henneberg as kapellmeister, in the vocal and orchestral concerts that began to be given in the theatre, and in the appearance of Dittersdorf in 1789 as composer of two new Singspiels, one of which he conducted. Schikaneder's principal achievement was to secure the services of Mozart as composer of *Die Zauberflöte*.

Mozart's links with the popular theatres of Vienna tend to go unremarked. At an unknown date, perhaps early in 1786, he sketched the scenario for the first four scenes of a comedy, *Der Salzburger Lump in Wien* ('The Salzburg dolt [rogue?] in Vienna'). And – perhaps early in 1787 – he wrote out some five pages of another comedy, intended to be in three acts, *Die Liebesprobe* ('The love-test'). The list of characters includes types familiar to any student of eighteenth-century Viennese comedy – Herr von Dumkopf ('Thick-head'), Leander, Wurstl (the familiar abbreviation of Hanswurst) and Kasperl. There is no suggestion in either fragment, however, that these were to be anything other than spoken comedies. In his own sphere, music, Mozart wrote the strophic 'Ein deutsches Kriegslied', 'Ich möchte wohl der Kaiser sein' ('A German war-song', 'I should like to be the Emperor'; K 539) for the benefit concert of the Leopoldstadt-Theater actor-singer Friedrich Baumann; the entry in Mozart's *Catalogue of all my works* ... carries the date 5 March 1788; it was performed two days later. The scoring – intended to have a patriotic ring at a time when hostilities had again broken out against Turkey – includes the 'Turkish' instruments of piccolo, cymbals and bass drum. On 17 September 1789 Mozart entered in his *Catalogue* the aria 'Schon lacht der holde Frühling' ('Sweet Spring is already laughing'; K 580) for his sister-in-law Josepha Hofer to sing in an intended but cancelled production in the Freihaus-Theater of Paisiello's *Der balbier von Seviglien* (as Mozart called it); and it seems likely that the lost German aria, 'Ohne Zwang, aus eignem Triebe' ('Without coercion, on my own impulse'; K 569), of January 1789, was also written for Josepha. On 8 March 1791 Mozart entered in his *Catalogue* the aria 'Per questo bello mano' ('For this lovely hand'; K 612) for two members of Schikaneder's company, 'Hr Görl und Pischelberger' – Franz Xaver Gerl, the first Sarastro, and Friedrich Pischelberger, the principal double-bass player of the theatre orchestra, and, given the difficulty of the piece, a talented performer. These works, like *Die Zauberflöte*, suggest that Mozart was confident of the competence and artistic skills of the performers, singers and orchestral players.