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The period reception of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

MILADA JONÁŠOVÁ

Following the enthusiastic responses in Prague to the performances of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1785)¹ and *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786), during his visit to the city in January 1787 Mozart was commissioned from the local opera impresario Domenico Guardasoni a new opera for the autumn season, which would become *Don Giovanni*. Its premiere on 29 October 1787 at the Nostitz Theatre was a triumph, and over the centuries the work would become a staple of the Prague opera repertoire. After *Don Giovanni*, in 1790 Prague saw a performance of *Così fan tutte*, a year later the city hosted the world premiere of the coronation opera *La clemenza di Tito*, which was soon followed by the Prague premieres of *Die Zauberflöte* and the singspiel *Der Schauspieldirektor*, and in 1796 the first performance of *Die Gärtnerin aus Liebe*, the German version of the original Italian buffa *La finta giardiniera*.² Accordingly, in the 1790s the Prague opera repertoire encompassed eight Mozart operas and singspiels, with some of them also having been staged in German translation, while *Die Zauberflöte* was performed in Czech and Italian translations too.³ The Mozart-intoxication pervaded to several theatres in Prague.

“While the most frequently staged opera at the Nostitz Theatre was *Don Giovanni*, succeeded by *Tito*, another two Prague companies

¹ Josef-Horst Lederer, „Meine teutsche opera... ist in Prag und Leipzig – sehr gut – und mit allem beifall gegeben worden“ – Fakten und Hypothesen zur Prager Erstaufführung von Mozarts *Entführung aus dem Serail*, in: *Böhmische Aspekte des Lebens und des Werkes von W. A. Mozart*, ed. Milada Jonášová – Tomislav Volek, Prag 2011, pp. 21–57; Milada Jonášová, Eine unbekannte Partiturbeschriftung der *Entführung aus dem Serail* aus dem Jahr 1786 und weitere unbekannt böhmische Quellen, in: *Mozart Studien* 25, ed. Manfred Hermann Schmid – Tomislav Volek – Milada Jonášová Wien: Hollitzer Verlag, 2018, pp. 275–315.

² Milada Jonášová, Mozarts *La finta giardiniera* 1796 in Prag und ein unbekanntes Fragment zur italienischen Version der Oper, in: *Mozart-Jahrbuch* 2005, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2006, pp. 5–55.

³ Tomislav Volek, Die erste Aufführung der *Zauberflöte* in tschechischer Sprache in Prag 1794, in: *Mozart-Jahrbuch* 1967, pp. 387–391; see also Tomislav Volek, *Mozart, die italienische Oper des 18. Jahrhunderts und das musikalische Leben im Königreich Böhmen. Mit der Don-Juan-Studie von Vladimír Helfert*, ed. Milada Jonášová – Matthias J. Pernerstorfer, Wien 2016, vol. 1, pp. 431–438; Milada Jonášová, Die *Zauberflöte*, Il flauto magico, Kouzelná flétna – alles aus Prag, in: *Mozart Studien* 24, ed. Manfred Hermann Schmid, Wien: Hollitzer Verlag, 2016, pp. 49–92.

performed *Die Zauberflöte*, which from 1794 could be heard in three languages: in the original German, in an Italian version (with the recitatives additionally composed by Jan Křtitel Kuchař) and in Czech translation.”⁴

In 1806 *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* was first staged in Czech, and in 1825 *Don Giovanni* was performed in Czech as well. At the time, two translations of the libretto to *Don Giovanni* were published: one in quantitative meter, penned by Simeon Karel Macháček (1799–1846), and the other in a syllabotonic version, created by Jan Nepomuk Štěpánek (1783–1844), which was used for the performance. In the wake of the Italian opera company’s departure from Prague in 1807, the local theatres ceased to stage the challenging-to-perform *Don Giovanni*, before the piece was reincorporated in the repertoire in 1813, during the tenure of Carl Maria von Weber as the opera director, yet only in a considerably modified German Singspiel form. Over the next few decades – with the exception of several extraordinary performances, staged by an Italian voice teacher at the Prague Conservatory Giovanni Gordigiani,⁵ that would be the case of all Mozart operas. Nonetheless, when Johann Bernhard Gugler (1812–1880), a Stuttgart-based mathematician and musicologist, a pioneer in source analysis, was drawing up the first critical edition of the score of *Don Giovanni*, based on exploration of the autograph (1869 [sic!]), he – being aware of the importance of the Prague Mozart and *Don Giovanni* tradition – turned to the Prague opera conductor Bedřich Smetana, asking him for information relating to the period local sources. Gugler was particularly interested in certain details in the Prague copies of the parts, which had survived since the time of the premiere of *Don Giovanni*.⁶

Owing to the primacy Prague enjoys in the history of staging *Don Giovanni*, as well as the local audiences’ response to the piece, Prague became a place from which the knowledge of Mozart’s mature dramatic work spread to the rest of Europe, by means of several copyist workshops. As documented by the earlier and recently discovered copies, a number of copies of the opera were already made during Mozart’s lifetime. Their forms ranged

⁴ Tomislav Volek, Význam pražské operní tradice pro vznik Dona Giovanniho a Tita, in: *Mozartovy opery pro Prahu*, Praha 1991, pp. 43–56, particularly p. 78, see also Tomislav Volek, Die Bedeutung der Prager Operntradition für das Entstehen des *Don Giovanni* und *Titus*, in: Tomislav Volek, *Mozart, die italienische Oper des 18. Jahrhunderts und das musikalische Leben im Königreich Böhmen* (see note 3), vol. 1, pp. 315–386.

⁵ Tomislav Volek, Mozartovy italské opery v nastudování Giovanni Gordigianiho, in: *Hudební věda* 38, n. 3–4, 2001, pp. 439–444; Tomislav Volek, Mozarts italienische Opern in den Einstudierungen Giovanni Gordigianis, in: Tomislav Volek, *Mozart, die italienische Oper des 18. Jahrhunderts und das musikalische Leben im Königreich Böhmen* (see note 3), vol. 1, pp. 439–450; Jitřenka Pešková, Provádění Mozartových oper pražskou konzervatoří v první polovině 19. století, in: *Hudební věda* 38, n. 4, 2001, pp. 397–415.

⁶ Milada Jonášová, Guglers Edition der *Don-Giovanni*-Partitur und seine Korrespondenz mit Smetana, in: *Mozart Studien* 17, ed. Manfred Hermann Schmid, Tutzing: Schneider, 2008, pp. 279–329.

from piano reductions of individual arias to meticulous copies of the entire score, including the voice parts. Some of these early copies are valuable not only for the actual “Rezeptionsforschung”, but also – which is especially relevant – for learning of the composer’s intents and revisions during the time when the premiere was being prepared.

In the case of a work so utterly unique, a work whose importance for global culture has over time not decreased in the slightest, each and every ascertained connection and each and every detail pertaining to the form and features of each of the preserved period scores, are of high significance. This very aspect was the focus of the project aimed at research into Prague copyists of Mozart pieces, based on the thesis written by the present author, which she carried out within her engagement at the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Extensive exploration of the matter, which is not limited to a single country, was made possible thanks to the support from the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic, as well as three scholarships received from the German Academic Exchange Service, DAAD. As a result of the support provided, Prague period copies of Mozart works have also been identified in the collections of numerous foreign archives and libraries, where frequently a time the sources were either wrongly dated as ordinary copies from the early 19th century or designated as copies of unclear origin.

When it comes to Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, a discovery of major significance was made back in 2000 at the music archives of the Premonstratensian Monastery in Strahov, Prague.⁷ In this case too it has been confirmed that findings of this type are always beneficial for research, which results from, among other things, the fact that some details may help elucidate certain connections associated with the premiere of the opera, or the first staging and further performances of the work during Mozart’s lifetime.

What is more, a considerable role in the given matter is played by the fact that the original Prague performance parts have not survived, while the performance score – the DONEBAUER SCORE,⁸ which was used at the Estates Theatre after Mozart’s departure from Prague following the opera’s acclaimed premiere during the tenures of Carl Maria von Weber, Josef Triebensee, František Škroup, Jan Nepomuk Maýr, and even that of Bedřich Smetana, is heavily damaged owing to its having been used for approximately 70 years – not only due to the ordinary wear and tear, but also the numerous inscriptions, insertions, notes and modifications. The score no longer contains the majority of the secco recitatives, in which during Škroup’s era the original harpsichord accompaniment was replaced by an additionally composed string quartet accompaniment.

⁷ Milada Jonášová, Neznámý pražský opis partitury Dona Giovanniho ve sbírce hudebnin premonstrátského kláštera na Strahově, in: *Hudební věda* 42, n. 3–4, 2005, pp. 301–350; Milada Jonášová, Eine unbekannte Prager *Don-Giovanni*-Partitur in der Musikaliensammlung des Strahover Prämonstratenser-Klosters, in: *Mozart Studien* 15, ed. Manfred Hermann Schmid, Tutzing: Schneider, 2006, pp. 277–312.

⁸ Archive of the Prague Conservatory, signature: 1 C 276/1–4.



Fig. 1 Titel page of the Donebauer score. Archive of the Prague Conservatory.

The surviving Mozart autograph score also includes various arrangements for the opera's performance in Vienna in 1788.⁹ For centuries, identifying which of the details in the score (as the final changes dating from the time when the work was being rehearsed) pertain to the Prague premiere and which relate to the performance in Vienna, has been a difficult task, for editors in particular. Back in 1860, the task was undertaken by Johann Bernhard Gugler (1812–1880), who, drawing upon the autograph and his knowledge of the Prague performance score, which at the time was lent to Vienna, was preparing the very first edition of the score of *Don Giovanni*. A letter written by Bedřich Smetana, which the present author has found in the Stuttgart University archives, reveals that on several occasions Gugler turned to Smetana with questions of how specific passages were notated in the then still existing parts dating from the time of the opera's world premiere (see the study in this volume, pp. 127–146).¹⁰

These examples alone make it evident that every one of the Prague period copies of the Mozart work may possess a significant information value.

⁹ See Ian Woodfield, *The Vienna Don Giovanni*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010.

¹⁰ See also Milada Jonášová, 'Guglers Edition der *Don-Giovanni*-Partitur und seine Korrespondenz mit Smetana', in: *Mozart Studien 17*, ed. Manfred Hermann Schmid, Tutzing, 2008, pp. 279–329.