Music Review

Continuing the American Revolution in The Operas of Mozart and His Allies

by David M. Shavin

The Beneficent Dervish (Der wolhtätige Derwisch)
by Mozart's Circle, performed by the Boston Baroque, Director Martin Pearlman
Telarc, 2002
Playing time 66:14, CD, $17.98

The Impresario (Der Schauspieldirektor)
by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
On the same recording as *The Beneficent Dervish*

In the decade after the American Revolution, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was probably the most crucial individual in attempting to create a similar transformation in Europe. In the Autumn of 1791, Europe, and in particular, France and Austria, had their last, best chance to wrench historical developments away from what we today know as the rage-driven, oligarchy-controlled French Revolution, a mockery of the American Revolution.[1] Mozart's powerful and beautiful presentation in his opera *The Magic Flute,* of the "republican" proof, that every man or woman whose heart could feel love, also had the capacity to develop the mind, and to self-govern, was capturing and uplifting the general population of Vienna. In this context, one should investigate Mozart's collaborators in this project. Hence, David Buch's researches into Emanuel Schikaneder's theater troupe have some historical importance.

The team of David Buch, the Boston Baroque ensemble, and Director Martin Pearlman has once again done all friends and lovers of Mozart a service. Earlier, in 1999, this team released their CD of the world premiere of *The Philosopher's Stone,* composed in 1790 by the musical leaders of Schikaneder's troupe, which, as Buch was able to prove, included Mozart. At that time, this reviewer posed two major questions: "Why would Mozart work with a team of five composers? And, what changes occurred in the 'sequel' [*The Magic Flute*], when Mozart assumed full control?"[2] That CD provided a unique perspective for a richer appreciation of Mozart's singular leadership.

Now, the Boston Baroque team's new CD has the world premiere recording of *The Beneficent Dervish,* created and first performed (March 1791) by Schikaneder's troupe, but with the exclusion of Mozart. Coming half-way between *The Philosopher's Stone* (September 1790), in which Mozart composed in collaboration with the other four, and *The Magic Flute* (September 1791), in which Mozart composed all the music, *The Beneficent Dervish* prompts a new, third question: "How do Mozart's collaborators do without him?"

Simply put, they do amazingly well. It is a delightful experience to hear this work. However, while the earlier comparison of *The Philosopher's Stone* to *The Magic Flute* put into relief the superior, scientific quality of Mozart's so-called "magic," now the comparison of *The Beneficent Dervish* to *The Philosopher's Stone* allows the listener to hear Schikaneder's group play, as it were, while the teacher is out of the room. Without Mozart, they veer more into the world of magic for the story-line, leaving the important transformations of the text, and of the music, for another time. But they are literate, occasionally a little inspired, and they have fun. This is both a happy group, and a group that fully needed Mozart's intervention. Today's listeners, lovers of Mozart's *Magic Flute,* can now hear two "trial runs" of the Mozart-Schikaneder team, setting into relief Mozart's profound transformation of otherwise similar material.

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[1] Pierre Beaudry, "Why France Did Not Have an American Revolution," *EIR,* Jan. 18, 2002.

[2] See David Shavin's review of *The Philosopher's Stone, or The Enchanted Isle,* in "A Mozartian Warm-Up for 'The Magic Flute,' " *Fidelio,* Spring 2000; see also, " 'The Philosopher's Stone': Mozart's Newly Discovered Opera," *EIR,* Jan. 28, 2000.

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The Importance of Dating the 'Dervish'

My earlier review (*EIR*, Jan. 28, 2000) provided an extensive history of the collaboration of Mozart and Schikaneder in their republican mission, during and just after the American Revolution, of uplifting the cultural level, and the capacity for sustained joy and optimism, of the general population in Austria and Germany. This included the key role of the German translations of Shakespeare by Christoph Martin Wieland. Increasingly, from the mid-1770s, Schikaneder's theater troupes performed plays of Shakespeare, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Wolfgang Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller. And between 1789 and 1791 in Vienna, Schikaneder had four of Wieland's fairy tales worked into opera for his Theater an der Wien—the three discussed above, plus *Oberon.* Later, in 1791, Mozart evidently agreed to set Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to music (though he did not live long enough to begin work on it).

Now, David Buch has discovered that *The Beneficent Dervish* was performed before *The Magic Flute,* and can be usefully listened to with that in mind. Previously, it had been thought (e.g., according to the Schikaneder expert, Kurt Honolka) that *Dervish* was first performed in September 1793. However, as Pearlman's helpful, accompanying notes summarize, Buch has located evidence for a pre-*Magic Flute* dating. His three most pertinent pieces of evidence are:

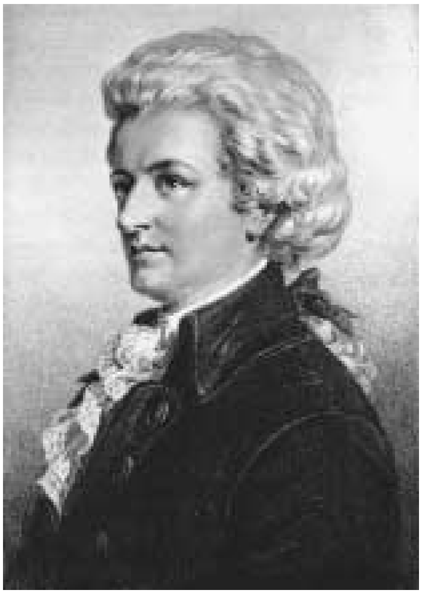
- A March 1791 diary entry, by the prolix Karl Zinzendorf, regarding his visit to Schikaneder's theater to see the opera;
- A 1791 book in the Austrian National Library, including some of the vocal texts; and
- Newspaper ads, offering for sale arrangements from *The Beneficent Dervish,* beginning in April 1791.

So, Buch, having properly resituated this opera, has justified hearing this lighter work, as a special window into the world of the *Magic Flute* troupe, not more than six months removed.

The Beneficent Dervish preserves many of the same character roles as *The Philosopher's Stone* and *The Magic Flute.* The same members of Schikaneder's troupe would be portraying somewhat parallel roles in each of the three operas. The Prince Nadir/Sofrano/Tamino role (given in the chronological order of the operas), originally played by Benedikt Schack, always has a comical sidekick, Lubano/Mandolino/Papageno, played by Emanuel Schikaneder, with the sidekick's sweetheart or wife, Lubanara/Mandolina/Papagena. The Prince, of course, seeks to win his princess, Nadine/Zenomide/Pamina (the part that Mozart most thoroughly transformed). Another of the composers, Franz Xaver Gerl, sang the bass role, Eutifronte/Dervish/Zarastro (another role that underwent serious development).

Paradox of Married Love

Perhaps the most striking connection of *The Beneficent Dervish* with *The Magic Flute* is the aria of the dervish at the opening of Act III, *"So bald der Mann"* ("Whenever a husband is much too kind"). It is, for this reviewer, the most substantial part of this lightweight opera, and it foreshadows *The Magic Flute*'s Zarastro when he sings to Pamina his warm and calming aria, *"In diesen heilgen Hallen"* ("In these holy halls"). In this opera about the cold calculations of women's hearts and the consequent dangers to gullible men, the dervish gives loving, fatherly advice to the Prince: "Therefore before you love her, test her! Both the woman and the workings of her heart." This feature, the investigation of the inner workings of the heart, is seized upon by Mozart in *The Magic Flute,* where it takes on a much fuller life.


Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's collaborators in the Schikaneder theater troupe composed "The Beneficent Dervish," experimenting with thematic elements that would later be profoundly enriched and transformed in their teacher's "The Magic Flute."

The character of *The Beneficent Dervish* opera is established early on, in the hilarious duet of the peasant couple, Mandolino and Mandolina. She has caught him with a straying eye, and proceeds to beat him (*"Pritsch! Pratsch!"*). And when he tries to escape ("Watch out! I'll jump in the water and drown myself"), she jumps into the water after him—and uses a rudder to keep hitting him. As he promises to reform, she has him repeat after her, "Dearest, only, best of wives!," though he still needs more of the *"Pritsch! Pratsch!"* Finally, with his repeating, "I'd like to live with you alone!," forgiveness is effected. Amazingly, within a two-minute period, the brawl, with highly believable percussive effects, suddenly melts into the tender conclusion: "Seldom are man and wife as close as we two, we live like children and are one soul and body!" The games men and women play are succinctly and ludicrously portrayed.

The scene was designed for Schikaneder's comic specialty. After hearing Kevin Deas' performances on both CDs, in the roles of Lubano and Mandolino, both originally played by Schikaneder, I've been persuaded that his is actually Schikaneder's voice! He seems both quite comfortable, and convincing, in Schikaneder's role.

The paradoxical plight of male-female relations doesn't get resolved in this opera. The women's chorus sings, "Enslaving men is what we enjoy!" This is followed by a lovely aria by Princess Zenomide, the object of Prince Sofrano's love. She begins: "Sofrano, had you felt my pain since our last bitter parting . . . ," and then she questions his commitment, claiming, "If you feel nothing more for me, so be it. I shall gladly die for you." There is seemingly nothing insincere in the words or the musical setting. Any man in the audience would want to believe the maiden. However, when Zenomide and Sofrano next meet, she is singing to him an entrancing ballad-story, only to distract him and steal his wealth!

One would think the Prince might learn a lesson from this. But not this Prince, and not in this comedy. In the opening of the opera, the Prince was certainly good-hearted enough to take in, and care for, the dervish, who had appeared at the Prince's door as an ill beggar. Sofrano explains that it was simply his duty as a human being. But Sofrano, after his duty is done, is mainly excited by more worldly concerns, singing: "Truly I can't contain myself. Money and love smile upon me." To rescue him, it will take the beneficence of a guardian angel, some liberal doses of magic, and, of course, some peasant cleverness, to deal with the evil hearts of women.

The Beneficent Mozart

Mozart might have made his thoughts known to Schikaneder at the time. In March 1791, when this happy farce was playing on stage, Mozart popularized Schikaneder's troupe by composing a set of eight variations upon "Ein Weib ist das herrlichste Ding!" ("A wife is a wonderful thing!"). The original was from an earlier production of the troupe, created by Benedikt Schack and Franz Xaver Gerl. But, instead of simply spinning out eight variations to ornament the sung theme, Mozart fashions something special. He creates variations, separately, upon both the introductory, instrumental music from the opera, and upon the vocal material. Then, in a coda section, he combines material from both parts together, contrapuntally. This is the sort of mind that addresses the higher forces at work, behind the "magical" moments of our lives.

It is also at this time (March 7, 1791) that Schikaneder asks Mozart to compose *The Magic Flute.* Further, the very next day, Mozart enters into his music catalogue a new work, *"Per questa bella mano"* ("Through this lovely hand"), a concert aria (K. 612) for the bass, Gerl, who also sang the role of the dervish. This aria had a major role for the string bass, written for Friedrich Pischlberger, who played in Schikaneder's theater orchestra.[3] Given Mozart's involvement with the theater troupe, both in *The Philosopher's Stone* in Autumn 1790, and during the March 1791 presentation of *The Beneficent Dervish,* I can't but think that the composers benefitted from Mozart's beneficence throughout.

'The Impresario'

During these same Winter months of early 1791, Mozart, the third Court Composer, was being underutilized by the Austrian court. He was being paid to write dance music—minuets. On one receipt for payment for some of these minuets, Mozart wrote: "Too much for what I did, not enough for what I could do." (Emperor Leopold II had not yet decided to give Mozart the major commission to compose the opera, *La Clemenza de Tito.*) Which brings us to the second offering that Pearlman directed on this CD, *The Impresario.*

Mozart's collaboration on *The Impresario* in 1786, hearkened back to an earlier project. He had done revolutionary work for Joseph II's Austria, back in 1781-82, when the composer had first come to Vienna. His *Abduction From the Seraglio* was the singularly successful operatic work for Emperor Joseph II's project for a national theater, using the German language. Joseph II had discussed and planned with the dramatist Gottfried Lessing, to launch such a project, as being vital to uplift his population—uplifting both the language they spoke, and the thoughts capable of being expressed in the language. Outside of this project, the German-language entertainment in Vienna was fairly banal (though surely not quite as insipid as what we've achieved in our own time). In the wake of the victory at Yorktown, where America had turned the world upside-down on the British oligarchy, brawls and controversies in Europe swirled around Mozart's revolutionary transformation of the libretto. Mozart replaced the importance of blood-line descent with the grace of agapic charity, in which the most "Christian" action in the opera was portrayed by the feared Turkish pasha![4] But, by 1783, threats, palace intrigues, and arrests put an end to the German-language national theater project of Joseph II.

So, for Joseph II to arrange an elaborate, costly party on Feb. 7, 1786, with a German operetta, *The Impresario,* by Mozart, to be performed directly against an Italian operetta, one might assume that there was, very likely, something on the Emperor's mind. Evidently, Joseph II himself had proposed to the *Abduction*'s librettist, Johann Gottlieb Stephanie, that he also compose the story-line for *The Impresario,* taking as his subject, the problem of the egos of soprani in a German-language opera company. Meanwhile, Joseph II also proposed to Mozart's rival, Antonio Salieri, that he compose something in Italian, dealing with the difficulties between the demands of a librettist and of a composer.[5] Joseph II arranged for the two troupes to present their offerings to his dinner party, using two different stages, set at

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[3] H.C. Robbins Landon, *1791: Mozart's Last Year* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988), p. 36.

[4] David Shavin, "Mozart and the American Revolutionary Upsurge," *Fidelio,* Winter 1992.

[5] Robert W. Gutman, *Mozart* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999), p. 652.

A Wolf Trap Opera Company production of Mozart's "The Magic Flute" (1994) shows Papageno (right) and Pamina. During Mozart's time, Emmanuel Schikaneder specialized in the comic role of Papageno, and of his counterparts, Lubano and Mandolino, in the earlier productions of "The Philosopher's Stone" and "The Beneficent Dervish."

different ends of the hall.

The elaborate party was in honor of his sister, the Archduchess Marie Christine, and her consort, Duke Albert, who was Joseph's Governor-General for the Austrian Netherlands. Stephanie brought back his two lead singers from *The Abduction,* Valentin Adamberger and Caterina Cavalieri, and engaged Mozart's sister-in-law, Aloysia Weber, to be the other soprano who duels with Cavalieri. Stephanie set the farce in Salzburg, Austria, probably reflecting Mozart's satiric attitude about his hometown's backwardness and the ruler there, Archbishop Colloredo. In Stephanie's libretto, a non-singing comic actor named Buff tells an impresario, Herr Frank, to hire cheap actors and singers, so he can conserve his money to spend on bribing the critics: "Leave your good taste at home? The world wants to be deceived."

Much fun is had with the dueling soprani, as they have trouble conforming their egos to the larger purpose of a theatrical presentation. Stephanie has the voice of reason trying to calm the soprani, arguing that "Harmony's the greatest virtue I can recommend to us." He brings back Buff, to deliver his joke at the expense of all the singers, upon which joke (not revealed here) Stephanie seems to have hung his whole story.

The 'Impresario' and the 'Figaro' Project

Now, in a polemical work, ridiculing the egos of singers, it is certainly not good form to have the singers simply display their voices in performance! Perhaps, only in such a semi-illiterate age as our own could such a mistake occur, but occur they often do. Fortunately, this is not the case in this performance, as Pearlman's troupe seems happy to get into the spirit of the work.

Further, this CD is said to be the first one on period instruments, and, for what it is worth, it is quite clean. The performance's authenticity, fortunately, seems to come not from the period instruments nor from the unvibrated fingering, but rather from the top, from a conceptual level, which then carries through in the voices and instruments. The singers' voices convey the text and the interplay of the roles, leaving one almost hearing the visual images of actors on a stage. The whole affair is quite good fun. Finally, Mozart seems to have composed the music to be its own character in the operetta, which, more than once, has to bring the egos back to reason. Pearlman's orchestra properly re-creates this role, also.

Nonetheless, the work is unavoidably a curious matter, which somehow seems quite a distance from the issues that Mozart was fighting out with Joseph II at the time. Mozart's music for *The Impresario* is marvelously better than the story deserves, and seems to reflect, more than anything else, the transcendent work he was then engaged in, *The Marriage of Figaro.*

If Joseph II was simply attempting to revive the debate over German vs. Italian opera, then some of the results are known. At the private dinner party, Count Zinzendorf (who was nothing if not snobbish) judged *The Impresario* as very mediocre. When the Stephanie/Mozart *Impresario* and the Salieri work were performed a few days later for the public, two different Vienna papers praised the former. One singled out Mozart's music as "containing some special beauties," while another thought his German work "infinitely superior" to Salieri's Italian one, adding that the superiority "is surely not the result of national pride." However, and most critically, what Emperor Joseph II intended by the affair, and what he thought of the result, is not known. What is known, is that he was in the middle of the most intense brawl of his life.

The 'Figaro' Project

As of February 1786, Joseph II had been the sole ruler of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for just over five years. His reforms, in brief, had attempted to break the Empire from its feudalism, and to develop its manpower. He freed the serfs; extended religious toleration to Protestants and to Jews; encouraged science, mining, metallurgy, and agriculture; allowed freedom for public debate and for publishing; and established public hospitals, public works, and a broader public education. The entrenched Austro-Hungarian nobility resisted the development of their newly freed population, no less than did the embittered Confederate landowners after Lincoln's victories. They would ridicule Joseph II's attempts to enrich the public mind by such means as his German National Theater. After Mozart and Joseph II's close 1781-82 collaboration in producing *The Abduction,* the immensity of the political counterattack kept Joseph II away from his best collaborators during 1783 and 1784. So, in 1785, when Joseph

II agreed to have Mozart compose *Figaro,* it was a major breakthrough, and Mozart focussed his creativity, and his recent musical-scientific discoveries,[6] upon making operatic and political history.

The conditions under which the Emperor proceeded, were that Beaumarchais' original French play *Les Noces de Figaro,* would only be allowed on Vienna's operatic stage in Italian. (The head of the Secret Police, Count Anton Pergen, had banned the play in German, in February 1785, when Schikaneder had proposed to perform it. Pergen's defenders claim that he did this at the behest of the Emperor; however, the extent of the behind-the-scenes brawl within the court can only be surmised.) Minimally, it is indisputable that the Emperor very much wanted *Figaro,* as an Italian opera, to be aimed against his reactionary nobility.

In the story, Count Almaviva in *Figaro* had agreed on paper to renounce his feudal right to spend the first night with any bride wed within his lands (a practice called the *droit du seigneur*). Despite this, he continues, throughout the opera, trying de facto to re-assert that right. Thus, also, the ridiculousness of the Austrian nobility was put in the limelight, as they had agreed to the Emperor's reforms on paper, while doing everything to de facto re-impose feudal slavery. Their hearts were not reconciled to loving and developing their fellow man.

The Curious 'Impresario'

Mozart composed *The Impresario* between Jan. 18, 1786 and Feb. 3, 1786, in the midst of his work on *Figaro* (begun seriously in the Fall of 1785 and debuted on May 1, 1786). Mozart had an agenda for the Emperor that was greater than the compositional themes which the Emperor had suggested to Stephanie and Salieri for the February contest. Hence, Mozart's *The Impresario* may well be a curious work, as it is clearly the product of a curious situation. While Joseph II, in proposing the themes, had in his mind the republican versus oligarchic themes that were wrapped up in the controversy over German versus Italian music, it yet remains unclear what he intended for this elaborate dinner. It would appear, from Stephanie's libretto, that he did not plan anything so revolutionary as the intervention that Mozart, with his *Figaro,* was planning for that Spring. Finally, it seems that Mozart was content to shower his *Figaro*-like music upon the lesser vehicle, and wait another ten weeks, to make his full operatic intervention on the court.

However, the events of that Winter and Spring indicate that the feudal oligarchy was getting the upper hand over Joseph II. By the beginning of 1786, the financial situation in Austria was turning ugly, as the court was in over its head to usurers. (Joseph II's brother-in-law, King Louis XVI of France, was in a similar situation. Neither country succeeded in following the lead of their friends in America—Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and Alexander Hamilton—who would deal with the 1785-86 crises, by organizing the Federal powers of the Constitutional Convention of 1787.) In Austria, the "Bruderschaften," or the equivalent of the savings and loan associations for the burgeoning middle class, were largely wiped out. Ignaz Born, the Benjamin Franklin of Vienna who was later the model for Zarastro in *The Magic Flute,* was pushed out of control of the masonic lodges in Vienna, which wielded significant political influence, leaving them to lesser minds. Also the Venetian agent Casanova was involved in an attempt to compromise Joseph II in a sexual entrapment, an entrapment that Mozart may well have known about as early as that Spring. And, finally, Count Pergen, who had ordered the ban on *Figaro* as a German drama, was given increased police powers, undermining the republican law efforts of Mozart's friend, Joseph von Sonnenfels.

Between the time that the Emperor heard *The Impresario* in February, and *Figaro* that Spring, one gory event situates the unravelling of the situation: On March 10, 1786, one month after the *Impresario* party, 30,000 spectators turned out in Vienna to witness the execution of a nobleman, Franz Zaglauer von Zahlheim, who had robbed and murdered an older woman whom he had courted. Joseph II had either acceded to, or agreed to, the re-imposition of the death penalty, which he himself had ended back in 1776. The order, with the Emperor's signature, was that "in accordance with the regulations of the 'Nemesis Therresiana,' the death penalty described therein shall be administered without mercy to the delinquent. . . . Glowing hot pincers shall be applied to the left and right sides of his chest. . . . His body shall be broken on the wheel from the feet upward [maximizing the pain] and then displayed on a gibbet."[7] Vienna was transfixed by the spectacle, and it would appear that nothing was so hotly debated that Spring, as that execution. Joseph II seemed to be increasingly unable to control the "Pergen faction," as they would succeed in getting their colonial war (against the Turks in 1787), and greatly increased police powers.

Joseph II had benefitted immensely from his cooperation with Mozart on *The Abduction* back in 1782, winning several years to push ahead on his reforms. He seems not to have reaped the marvelous benefits of Mozart's ever-so-more-powerful *Figaro* in 1786. Looking back upon that curious February party where Mozart's *Impresario* debuted, one hears a fascinating mix: beautiful, dramatic music for a modestly funny libretto, drawn from a theme chosen by an Emperor, that seems most poignantly, too little, too late. Mozart's 1791 comment—that the court payments for his minuets were "too much for what I did, not enough for what I could do"—has its 1786 corollary: He did more than anyone had ever done, but was paid too little attention, too late.

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[6] Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., "Mozart's 1782-1786 Revolution in Music," *Fidelio,* Winter 1992.

[7] Volkmar Braunbehrens, *Mozart in Vienna, 1781-1791* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), p. 273.