

“W.A. Mozart’s: Die Zauberflote”

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There are few names in the history of western culture that encapsulate genius and creativity as much as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Of all his works, it was Mozart's operas that brought him the greatest fame in his own day, and it is the history of Mozart's final opera, “ Die Zauberflote”, that will be the subject of this paper. Of all the operas written, few have as many legends and mysterious origins associated with them as “Die Zauberflote”. It's fanciful subject matter and many allusory images create a wealth of speculation as to the sources of the libretto. Mozart's own intent, with regards to the significance of his Masonic ties, all the more casts a sheen of mystery to the genesis of the work. And no discussion of this amazing piece can be complete without an understanding of the state of the Masonry itself in Vienna at the time of the opera's composition.

The story of “ Die Zauberflote” is based on a number of sources, all contributing to the development of what, at its heart, is but a traditional fairytale about the power of love. All of this is in the context of a highly moral tell of grand drama, showing Mozart's talent for taking something simple and beautiful and enlarging it to epic hights. The basic plot of the story was taken from Liebeskind's ‘ Lulu oder Die Zauberflote’, published in 1786 in Wieland's collection of fairytales called Dschinnistan. To this

were added many elements of religious mysticism taken from Jean Terreasson's novel Sethos, as well as the rituals of Freemasonry of which Mozart and the librettist Emmanuel Schikander were both well associated. Ignaz von Born, a leading Mason in Vienna, also contributed to the libretto with his essay "Ueber die Mysterien der Aegyptier", a work available to Schikander displaying research into early Egyptian religious practices and how they relate to Masonry. Peter Brancombe's book Die Zauberflöte posits similarities of the story to Chretien de Troyes' Yvain, an Arthurian romance in vogue with the 18th century interest in Middle Age legends. There are also ties to countless other romances and Greek myths, which was common for theater of the era. Orpheus, in particular, must have contributed somewhat to the opera's development with his magic voice having a power equitable to Tamino's magic flute.

It was Sethos more than anything, however, which created the atmosphere of the opera. It gave the tenants of Egyptian mysticism associated with the Isis and Osiris cult that is the background of the action in the story. The book also provided the descriptions that were used to create the flamboyant sets so full of Egyptian imagery designed for the fantasy. Why Mozart and Schikander chose this subject matter for their opera at all is a matter of conjecture. We know that the stories from Dschinnistan were popular at the time, and that Mozart had actually attended a performance of another opera based on this theme by Joachim Perinet and Wenzel Müller called, "Der Fagottist Oder Die Zauberflöte". The fact that Mozart was writing many "Masonic" pieces at the time also shows that Mozart was interested in creating art that would honor his secretive fraternity.

Besides the debate over what the basis for the opera was, there is

still an issue over who actually wrote the libretto. This is because thirty years after the opera was first produced, a man named C.L. Giesecke can forward and claimed the authorship. This man was a member of Schikander's theater group, as well as a member of Schikander and Mozart's Masonic lodge. While not claiming to be sole author of the libretto, he did claim responsibility for presenting Dischinnistan to Schikander, as well as for the versification and the basic outline. This claim was somewhat backed up due to Giesecke's having written the librettos for several other magical operas being produced in Vienna at the time, such as "Oberon", an opera done for Wranitzky's theater company. It will now probably never be known for certain whether Giesecke's claim had any merit or not. The fact that this claim wasn't published until after anyone who could prove or disprove it was dead, as well as the lack of mention of it in any of Mozart or Schikander's correspondence leaves plenty of room for doubt.

The story of the opera follows the adventures of Tamino, a knight and prince. At the start he is being hounded by a horrible serpent. The hero swoons from fright near a large temple. From the temple, three veiled ladies appear with spears with which they destroy the serpent by chopping it into three pieces. They muse over the stranger, admiring his beauty, then decide to leave and speak of him with their mistress. Soon Tamino awakes to the sound of pan pipes and we have the entrance of another main character named Papageno. Papageno describes his job as bird catcher to the Queen and claims to have killed the serpent. Papageno's role is a comic one with the purpose of representing nature and simple emotion. The three ladies then return and punish Papageno for his false claim by locking his lips together. They also show Tamino a picture of the Queen's daughter and

he immediately falls in love with the image. The next scene takes place in the Queen's chamber where she begs for Tamino to rescue her daughter from a terrible villain. She leaves and her ladies reappear, free Papageno's mouth, and present Tamino with a magical flute that will help him in his quest after telling him the name of his enemy is Sarastro. They also leave Papageno a box of magic bells to aid his courage as he must be Tamino's traveling companion. They then tell the couple to expect three boys to show them the way. One can already see the emphasis on the number three which will be repeated throughout the piece. This was part of the Masonic symbolism that fills the opera. The next scene introduces Pamina and Monostatos the Moor, who is making untoward advances to the poor girl. Papageno enters and scares Monostatos and himself half to death. The former runs off-stage and Papageno introduces himself to Pamina and tells her of the prince. As the next scene begins we see Tamino with the three boys set at the crossroads to three temples, one the 'Temple of Wisdom', one the 'Temple of Reason', and one the 'Temple of Nature'. Tamino knocks on the doors to the second two, but is told to stand back. When he knocks on the door to 'Wisdom' a priest greets him and tells him that Sarastro is the chief priest of the Temple. Tamino is then informed that Pamina is safe. We are then switched to Pamina and Papageno who are about to escape when they are confronted by Monostatos. Papageno uses his magic bells to enchant Monostatos and his three slaves into a marching away singing, but just as they think they've gotten away, Sarastro appears in a grand entrance. We discover here that Sarastro is really a benevolent and wise leader and it is really the Queen that is the dangerous character. Monostatos then appears dragging in Tamino. He asks Sarastro for a reward, and is given instead the

apportion of seventy-seven lashes to the feet. (We see later that this sentence is commuted, which stood in line with the political changes of the day led by the Emperor Joseph II, one of which was the abolishment of torture.) A new set is then presented and we see Sarastro speaking to his priests about Tamino's qualities and how he should be admitted to their 'brotherhood of light'. He also tells of the evil qualities of the Queen and how Tamino will help secure them against her, if he survives the trials he must endure to join the brotherhood. The next scene presents the audience with Tamino, Papageno and two priests who ask questions regarding the duo's intentions. Tamino answers that his are friendship and love, while Papageno answers with the desire for a wife, as long as he won't have to risk his life to get one. They are then left alone until the return of the three ladies who warn of the approach of the queen. Two priests appear and send the ladies of the queen howling to hell with three loud shrieks, then praise the courage of Tamino. We are presented then with the scene of Pamina lying asleep as Monostatos soliloquizes of her pull on him. Suddenly the Queen appears and Monostatos hides and watches as she talks to her daughter. She explains how her husband gave to the initiates an emblem of the sevenfold circle of the sun, and that if Pamina wants to show her mother loyalty she must kill Sarastro with her dagger and retrieve the object. After the Queen leaves, Monostatos seizes the dagger and threatens to kill Pamina. Sarastro then appears and dismisses Monostatos who goes to join the Queen. A new scene starts with the three boys in a flying car. Tamino and Papageno are being led again by the two priests who remind them to wait in silence as part of their trial. Papageno talks anyway, mainly about how thirsty he is. An old woman appears and hands him a drink before hobbling off. The three boys fly in and

hand to Tamino and Papageno their magic flute and bells, the objects being returned to the two by Sarastro. Tamino plays his flute and Pamina enters. She is distraught that Tamino doesn't speak to her and fears that he no longer loves her. The next scene starts with priests of the brotherhood holding pyramids and singing to Isis and Osiris with a three part male-chorus. Tamino and Sarastro appear, and Sarastro explains that Tamino is doing well and will be with Pamina if he can endure two more trials. Pamina is brought in and told to by Sarastro to say goodbye to Tamino, interpreting it wrongly as a last goodbye. They all leave and Papageno appears looking for the prince. He bewails his trials and is told by the priest spokesman that he will never be an initiate to the brotherhood. Papageno goes on to say that that doesn't bother him and that he would be happy if he just had a wife. An old woman appears and, taking pity on Papageno, says she will marry him. He says he will be faithful to her and she transforms into the beautiful Papagena. When Papageno tries to embrace her she disappears . The scene changes and we see Pamina about to commit suicide. The three boys appear and restrain her, commenting on what Tamino's grief would be if she were dead and the supreme power of love. Then the scene switches to Tamino who is about to enter the gate of illumination and to begin the difficult path purified through fire, water, earth, and air into the mysteries of Isis. Pamina is permitted to join him and they succeed in walking the path, appearing in the temple where they realize they are now initiates. After that , we are returned to Papageno who is himself about to commit suicide. The three boys appear again and tell him to look behind him where he finds his Papagena. Together they sing joyfully of the new life full of little Papagenos and Papagenas. A scene is then presented with Monostatos and the Queen

preparing to attack the Temple. Suddenly a loud chord is heard and Sarastro, Tamino, and Pamina all appear dressed as priests in blinding sunlight, destroying the power of the evil doers, singing of the triumph of beauty and wisdom.

The Masonic symbolism in the opera is sometimes very obvious in the story such as the three trials of Tamino representing the three degrees and the central theme of equality and the seeking of wisdom. But Mozart's genius was to present these relationships in the music as well. As said before, the number three represents perfection to Masonry, and the key signature is in E flat with three flats and the third interval above C major, the so called Key of Light. Three chords are repeated in a ritualistic way often in the opera showing more Masonic intent and the dotted rhythms spread throughout the opera are said to represent an initiate seeking admission. Mozart's choice of instrumentation also had Masonic overtones as clarinets and basset-horns are favorites of Masonic music, and these instruments play large roles in "Die Zauberflote".

As mentioned before, "Die Zauberflote" was an opera steeped in Masonic symbolism, so much so that it is sometimes called the "Masonic Opera". It is apparent that Mozart's ties were strong to the Brotherhood, even before he was admitted in December of 1784. Masonry was introduced in Vienna as early as 1742, but it took a while before it was accepted as a legitimate practice. It underwent many years of disapproval under Maria Theresia, and never had a long-lived lodge in Vienna until 1770 and the "Zur gekronten Hoffnung" ("The Crowned Hope"). Since that time Masonry was to flourish in Austria under the end of the reign of Joseph II who, though not a member himself, approved of its practices and had several high ranking

advisors who were members. Mozart was initiated in a small lodge called 'Zur Wohltatigkeit' on December 14. Through records of other lodges we see that he must have risen to the degree of Master since he attended the Master Lodge at 'Eintracht' in April. It is interesting to note that Haydn was supposed to have been initiated there in January of 1785 with Mozart in attendance, but to due misnotification, was not initiated until February. Besides 'Zauberflote' Mozart wrote many other pieces for his Brotherhood. His K468, called 'Gesellenreise' ('Fellow Craft's Journey'), was written for his father's initiation to the second degree. He also wrote a piece called 'Maurerische Trauermusik' (Masonic Funeral Music) for two masons at the Lodge of Sorrows. Mozart's K483 and K484 were also written for Masonic occasions and his cantata's K619 and K623 were both written on Masonic themes. Whether Schikander was a practicing Mason has been sometimes doubted but it is obvious that he too had ties to the brotherhood. His familiarity with Born's essay and his presence on lodge meeting records in lodges outside Vienna show he must have been well aquatinted with the ideas and rituals of the Brotherhood.

The opera was a success from its first performances, but its fame grew to the greatest heights after Mozart's death. An example of how well the opera was received in Vienna is given in a letter Mozart wrote to his wife on October 7:

dearest, best little wife!-

*I've just got back from the Opera: - It was as full as always. -
the Duetto Mann und Weib etc.: and the Glocken Spiel in the first*

Act was as usual encored - also in the 2nd Act the boys' Terzett - but what pleases me most, is, the Silent approval! -one can see well how much, and increasingly so, this opera is gaining esteem...

(Brancombe, 152)

The opera was loved by the public and went on to have many performances. Much of the music in the opera was published individually and hundreds of variations were written for everything from the Piano-forte to string ensembles. The Catalogue of Printed Music in the British Library to 1980 has 29 columns devoted solely to works taken from the opera. Though initially a moderate success, and though it took a few years for the opera to spread far outside of Vienna, its fame eventually spread to every corner of Europe.

“Die Zauberflöte” was Mozart’s last opera and perhaps his most fanciful. It was certainly the last work he would see as a success in his own lifetime. In it rested much of Mozart’s passion as well as his philosophical ideas and hopes. The character Papageno, though a fool, is tenderly presented showing Mozart’s spirit of forgiveness in the pursuit of love, and Tamino is a glorious hero, not famous as a destroyer of evil, but as a pursuer of wisdom and friendship. These qualities were close to Mozart’s heart as seen in his loving relationship with his wife and his association with Masonry was probably due to these beliefs that are the central themes of the Freemasons. Many interpretations of the work continue to be written to this very day, and it is perhaps a testament to the creativity of its content that there is still controversy over the intent of its creators. This will hopefully continue to engage the imaginations of the public into creating their own

ideas about the opera and by doing so giving themselves a part of the magic of “The Magic Flute”.

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