

Mozart's New Approach to Opera

Jenna N. Beremand
Cedarville University, jberemand@cedarville.edu

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Mozart's New Approach to Opera

Presented by Jenna Beremand
Undergraduate Student at Cedarville University



Opera

- Invented in Western Europe around the end of the 16th century.
- “A drama in music: a dramatic action, performed on a stage with scenery by actors in costume, the words conveyed entirely or for the most part by singing, and the whole sustained or amplified by orchestral music.”
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was one of the many composers of opera in the 18th century.
- Opera has come a long way since the 16th century, and Mozart is one of the reasons for this.



Main Ideas

- Influence from his father.
- Ability to depict characters' emotions through music alone.
- Ability to add comic relief to serious situations.
- Portrayal of women as heroines.

Examples of these will be further explored in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.



Background on Mozart

- Born in Salzburg, Austria in 1756.
- His father is Leopold Mozart.
- Showed much musical ability from a young age.



Mozart's Father's Influence

- His father poured into him and pushed him towards excellence.
- Strict training, traveling the world, expanding musical knowledge, and getting the best musical training.
- Traveled to Munich, Vienna, Heidelberg, Frankfort, Paris, and London.
- Musical instruction on the violin and organ.
- Musical instruction from an Italian singer.
- Some see Mozart's father's efforts as overbearing and unhelpful.
- Even so, one cannot deny the influence his father had on his ability to create music.



Operatic Works and a New Idea

- First opera, *La Finta Semplice* (1769), written at 12 years old.
- *Idomeneo* (1781)
 - Representation of what he studied in Paris.
 - Depiction of characters' conflicting emotions.

This new idea of depicting many characters' emotions at once is used in his other operas, including *Don Giovanni*.



Don Giovanni

- One of Mozart's most famous works.
- First performed in Prague on October 29, 1787.
- Italian text by Lorenzo da Ponte.
- Based on the libretto by Bertrati of an opera, *The Stone Guest*, by Giuseppe Gazzaniga.
- Takes place in 17th century Seville.
- Characters: Don Giovanni, Leporello, the Commendatore, Donna Anna, Don Ottavio, Donna Elvira, Zerlina, and Masetto.
- 2 acts, 5 scenes.



Opera seria v. Opera buffa

- Opera seria is a mixture of recitatives and arias.
 - Recitatives typically take place during the action of the opera, while an aria takes place when the action is at a standstill.
 - Depicts a single mood or emotion, expressed through the character's singing.
 - Composers could only do so much to depict emotion with just one voice.
- Opera buffa, or comic opera, came to redefine and replace opera seria.
 - Contained musical theory and characteristics that were much different from opera seria.
 - Contemporary settings with emphasis on realism.
 - Castrati replaced by bass voices.
 - Depicted more than one emotion at a time.
 - Emotional depiction went beyond the singer, including an ensemble/more voices - using these voices, composers had the ability to express multiple emotions at once.



Use of Opera buffa/Conveying Emotions

- Surrounds the character Leporello. He is overall a very comedic character.
- Leporello's arias.
- "Ensemble finale" in Act II.
- Use of three trombone.
 - Not typical. They were normally just used in religious music.
 - Symbolize Don Giovanni's horrible fate.
 - Conveys the fear and dread associated with Commendatore's statue.
 - Present during the dialogue between Don Giovanni and the statue.



The Importance of Women Characters

- Donna Anna does not play the typical soft, submissive role of a female. She is angry and determined to get back at Don Giovanni for killing her father.
- She is more than just the main character's enemies; she is a heroine.
- Her character further shows Mozart's ability to express one's emotions.
 - The key of D minor.
 - Sing an aria and recitative that depicts both fury and despair
- Donna Elvira is given a whole scene to herself to express her anger with Don Giovanni.
- Zerlina: After finding out that Don Giovanni wronged her, she shows her true, unfeminine side.
- All women in this opera are portrayed as powerful and strong-willed.



Conclusion

- He had a way of connecting people to his operas by making them feel they could relate to it.
- He portrayed powerful images and messages in his operas.
- Opera buffa, conveying emotions, and depicting women as powerful.
- He presented opera in a new light: comical, emotional, and relatable.
- He made an impact on music history.

