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A Musical Analysis of *Die Zauberflöte*

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ABSTRACT

Upon analysis of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, we are able to discern the compositional techniques throughout which reflect the plot and inner motives of each character. We also analyze Masonic ideas hidden in the subtext of the opera and how they are explored through the use of reinterpretation of past material, *affekt*, and text painting.

Die Zauberflöte, Mozart's final opera, is considered to be one of the most important and influential operas in the Western Classical canon. The opera, which premiered in September of 1731, features a large cast spanning all ranges of the voice, from the bass of Sarastro to the coloratura soprano of the Queen of the Night. The work itself is also considered to be a quintessential example of a Singspiel to come from a Viennese composer. The Singspiel style at the time indicated an alternation of sung arias and spoken dialogue, as opposed to sung recitative. Mozart pushed the boundaries of an audience's expectations for a Singspiel, composing extensive arias and often conjoining multiple sections without interruption.¹ *Die Zauberflöte* made a strong impact on audiences at its premiere, and is still performed with great regularity. In analyzing *Die Zauberflöte*, the compositional techniques utilized by Mozart become clear, as do the deliberate references to Freemasonry.

Overture Mozart dated the completion of the overture to the first act as September 28th, days before the premiere of the opera.² The overture's introductory moments bear a strong resemblance to a French overture. The opening melodic gesture of the overture, after the dramatic and triumphant first three chords, is slow and meditative and immediately brought into contrast with the next passage. What Mozart presents in this Allegro section is a fugal passage centered around near-consistent eighth notes, with the first two voices found in the Violin I and II sections, then gaining a third voice in the bassoon, cello, and double bass. This opening takes the form of the ideal French overture: a slow melodic passage contrasted with a fast, often fugal structure. However, the rest of the overture is composed in Sonata-Allegro form.

¹ Peter Branscombe and Thomas Bauman, "Singspiel," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000025877>.

² Julian Rushton, "Zauberflöte, Die," *Grove Music Online*. 2002, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000907810>.

This overture contains an introduction, the slow and meditative section described above. This introduction, which lasts from mm1-15, is repeated after the end of the exposition. However, this repetition, found in mm97-102, is only a restatement of the first gesture of the opera: the three tutti chords. However, in the recapitulation, all three chords are V chords, instead of the I-vi-I⁶ chord progression found in the beginning. (See Appendix 1.) This gesture sets up the development section in the dominant key area of Bb major, albeit altered to Bb minor shortly after the development begins. Where the development ends at m145, a codetta begins, lasting until measure 155 and further re-establishing Eb major as the tonic before the recapitulation at m156. As the recapitulation ends, a short codetta makes emphasis of the tonic, and ends the overture with a final three chords: all I chords.³

When analyzing *Die Zauberflöte*, one must take into account the outright references to Masonry. For example, in the overture, plenty of nods are made in the way of the number three. The overture is in Eb Major, a key with three flats, and a repeating motif throughout is the infamous three chords mentioned above. Those three chords are even a reference to the masculine knock used by the Freemasons, as opposed to the feminine-associated five knocks.⁴ This outright idea of the number three not only begins and ends the overture, but is found in the middle as well. The number three appears quite often as the opera continues, especially in the characters of the three ladies, the three child spirits, and the three slaves. Not only does the overture give a dramatic start to the opera, it plants the seeds of the masonic influences in the opera and prepares the audience's ears for what will come next.

Der Hölle Rache *Der Hölle Rache*, better known as the Queen of the Night aria, is one of the most well-known rage arias in Classical music history. The aria takes place in the second act of *Die Zauberflöte*

³ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards Music Reprints, 1955): 1-11.

⁴ Jacques Chailley, *The Magic Flute, Masonic Opera: An Interpretation of the Libretto and the Music*, New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1982, 85-91.

after Monostatos sings about wanting to kiss Pamina while she sleeps in the garden. The Queen interrupts Monostatos, shooing him away, and approaches her daughter. In her aria from the first act, *O zitt're nicht...Zum Leiden bin ich auserkoren*, the Queen laments over the loss of her daughter by saying, “With her my happiness was taken”.⁵ However, in *Der Hölle Rache*, the tone has drastically shifted from sadness to rage. In the spoken recitative, the Queen says, “You may thank the power by which you were torn from me, that I still call myself your mother”.⁶ For the first time in the opera, the audience sees the Queen as the villain rather than the victim because of her spiteful text. In the Singspiel style, the spoken text is fully emphasized as the Queen demands, “You will kill him”.⁷ (See Appendix 2.)

The overall form of the aria is two verses that follow an AB|CB' structure ends in a coda. The A section is defined by the syllabic texture in the vocal line through m24 and establishes the aria in D minor. The melismatic section on the word *nimmermehr* (nevermore) is the B section which emphasizes the high vocal range and coloratura. After an instrumental interlude, the C section starts on the words *Verstossen sei auf ewig* (Abandoned be forever). The changes in tonality and increased use of chromatic alterations throughout this section make the section function as a development before returning to D minor in m73. Then, the material from the B section returns but in shorter increments. Finally, the coda begins with the word *Hört* (hear) to end the aria with a dramatic call to action.

Rage is an overarching idea throughout every part of the aria that characterizes the Queen of the Night as the villain. The main motives used in *Der Hölle Rache* establish the form and help express the text. The most prevalent motive is a deconstructed arpeggio, out of the normal order. For example, at the

⁵ Emanuel Schikaneder, *Die Zauberflöte*, Translated by Ruth Martin and Thomas Martin, New York, New York: G. Schirmer, Inc, 1986, 4.

⁶ Emanuel Schikaneder, *Die Zauberflöte*, 17.

⁷ Emanuel Schikaneder, *Die Zauberflöte*, 17.

entrance of the Queen's vocal line, she sings A4-D5-A4-F5 which outlines the D minor triad and the key of the aria, but the vocal line is disjunct and emphasizes large leaps.⁸ The melismatic passage on the word *nimmermehr* (nevermore) is also almost entirely sequences of arpeggios beginning or ending on a large leap which also emphasizes rage.⁹ In the second verse starting with *Verstossen sei auf ewig* (Abandoned be forever), the arpeggio motive is simplified to a repeated F3 and an octave jump down on the last note. Along with the orchestral arpeggios from the interlude measures before this verse, this section clearly begins the development section in the key of F major, although Mozart will change the key through chromatic alterations later in the development.

The Queen of the Night can be thought of as the antithesis to the brotherly love and high morals of the Freemasons.¹⁰ *Der Hölle Rache* directly contrasts the next aria sung by Sarastro, *In diesen heil'gen Hallen*, which speaks about forgiveness and brotherhood. Sarastro's aria has a mostly conjunct melody that directly opposes the Queen of the Night's disjunct one.¹¹ The character foils are reflected in the music so clearly that the Queen is shown to be the villain, and the Freemasonry message "only men can achieve real virtue and enlightenment, assuming they are not led astray by women" is evident.¹²

Ensemble The ensemble piece known as *Der, welcher wandert diese Straße* (Two Men in Armor) is a small but important scene in the beginning of the finale of *Die Zauberflöte*. During this scene, while Tamino is facing the final trials of love, the two armored men are singing a hymn by Martin Luther, which reads:

⁸ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 135.

⁹ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 137.

¹⁰ Renee S. Landzberg, "Perspective from Ancient Greece on Mozart's Queen of the Night," *Classical Inquiries*, (2021), <https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/perspectives-from-ancient-greece-on-mozarts-queen-of-the-night/>.

¹¹ Renee S. Landzberg, "Perspective from Ancient Greece on Mozart's Queen of the Night."

¹² Renee S. Landzberg, "Perspective from Ancient Greece on Mozart's Queen of the Night."

Man, wandering on his road must bear the tribulation, Of fire and water, earth and air's
 probation. If he prevails against the lures of evil's might, He soon will know the joys of
 heaven's light. Enlightened, he will now himself prepare, The holy mysteries of Isis all to
 share.¹³

This text is an Isis and Osiris creed that promises enlightenment to whomever successfully overcomes doubt and fear. The Two Armored Men sing about the trials and tribulations ahead of Tamino just like the trials that the Freemasons face to gain entry into the sacred organization.

The use of the orchestration of the woodwinds, trombones, strings, and basso continuo provide the piece with the support it needs to convey the longing emotions of the characters. It also allows the audience to understand the meaning of the text by hearing the pain and suffering throughout the music. This section is a baroque-style chorale prelude, a chorale setting of a short liturgical hymn that is taken to be sung as the cantus firmus. This style also tends to have contrast between loud and soft and solo and ensemble sections.¹⁴ In a sequencing motion from the beginning to end of this prelude, the music reflects this idea of emotions through the trials to gain love.

The Doctrine of Affections is the theory that music has a theoretical aesthetic assigned to a specific key area based on the emotion being aroused by the listener.¹⁵ This ensemble piece is able to express emotions beyond the context given in the libretto because of its key area. Mozart uses the key of C minor to convey the idea of love-sick longing that Tamino is expressing to the priests, which is further supported by the use Martin Luther hymn and the use of *affekt*. The key of C minor continues through the

¹³ Emanuel Schikaneder, *Die Zauberflöte*, 23.

¹⁴ Palisca, Claude V. "Baroque," *Grove Music Online*, Jan. 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.02097>.

¹⁵ Steblin, Rita. "Chapter 6: Marpurg versus Kirnberger." Essay. In *A History of Key Characteristics in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008.

entire piece up to the last measure of the hymn, where a Picardy-third modulates to C major, which is an innocent joy, according to the Doctrine of Affections' designation.

Mozart orchestrates two opposing groups in m183 of the finale: the trombones, strings, basso continuo, and the flutes, oboes, along with the bassoons. The two groupings imitate each other up to the point of the stretto within the strings starting at the Adagio at m190. Mozart uses this Adagio section to convey the longing and suffering that Tamino feels during this trial. This musical action continues through to the last measure before Tamino begins the next duet with Pamina.¹⁶ This longing section, in C minor, would bring the listener's attention to the Armored Men's warning of the trial because of the understanding of the musicality used for this musical section. Because of the Doctrine of Affections and the key areas being designated to certain meanings, a typical practice that listeners at the time would be aware of the longing ideas that Mozart evokes.

Die Zauberflöte is an example of Mozart's expert compositional skills in opera. Upon analysis, the extent to which Mozart created meaning in his music through orchestration, tonality, *Affekt*, and extra-musical features is massive. Many scholars connect compositions from the last seven years of Mozart's life with Freemason ideas such as *Maurerische Trauermusik* (The Masonic Funeral Music), K. 477 or *Kleine Freimaurer-Kantate* (The Little Masonic Cantata), K. 623. However, these works do not compare in size or grandeur to *Die Zauberflöte*. From beginning to end, Mozart expertly weaves Freemasonry ideals into the music and characters of the opera to share the rituals and message of brotherhood with the audience.

¹⁶ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 174-176.

Appendix 1

Overture

mm1-3

Adagio.

mm97-102

Adagio.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, Arranged for SATB chorus and piano, Glendale, New York:

Edition Peters, 2001.

Appendix 2

Der Hölle Rache

KÖNIGIN	QUEEN
Verdank es der Gewalt, mit der man dich mir entriss, dass ich noch deine Mutter mich nenne. -Siehst du hier Diesen Stahl?-Er ist für Sarastro Geschliffen. -Du wirst ihn töten.	You may thank the power by which you Were torn from me, that I still call Myself your mother. Do you see this Dagger? It has been sharpened for Sarastro. You will kill him--
PAMINA	PAMINA
Aber, liebste Mutter!-	But dearest Mother-
KÖNIGIN	QUEEN
Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen, Tod und Verzweiflung flammet um mich her! Fühlt nicht durch dich Sarastro Todesschmerzen, So bist du meine Tochter nimmermehr. Verstossen sey auf ewig und verlassen, Zertrümmert alle Bande der Natur, Wenn nicht durch dich Sarastro wird erblassen! Hört Rache, —Götter!— Hört der Mutter Schwur.	Not a word! The wrath of hell within my breast I cherish; Death, desperation prompt the oath I swore. If by your hand Sarastro does not perish. Then as my child I shall know you nevermore. Abandoned be forever, Forsaken be forever, And shattered be forever All the force of nature's tie If not through you Sarastro's life be taken! Hark! Gods of vengeance, hear a mother's cry!

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