

OPERA SUPERS OF IOWA CITY NEWSLETTER

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

There have been a number of unavoidable delays in getting the Newsletter out before the last two meetings of the Supers. We are working on the problems responsible for the situation. The present issue is the last one that will deal with the Spring opera, Così fan tutte and contains information that should increase your understanding of Mozart and the fate of the original performances of the opera. The Supers who have attended the last two meetings were given copies of some material I had prepared on unique aspects of the background of Così as well as a synopsis of the opera. Those of you who would like a copy of the five-page background section may get one by attending the next meeting or by sending the editor a stamped, self-addressed long envelope. The next issue of the Newsletter will be directed toward the summer opera offering: Donizetti's Elixir of Love.

I am pleased to report that several Supers have sent me material for general use in future issues of the the Newsletter. Does anyone want to prepare a regular column on some topic of interest, or a particular point of view? The column would bear your name or a pseudonym (if that is your preference) in the by-line. Last year I suggested that the Newsletter could serve as a conduit for an exchange of tapes (audio or video) or recordings of operatic material that Supers are willing to be used in this way. Will someone want to take charge of that service? Some of you miss the quiz questions and contests that I provided for the first two volumes of the Newsletter. I was dismayed by the scarcity of contestants but the quiz-questions and answers seemed to have made good copy. Will someone take on this feature? Your editor cannot do it all-- although he started off thinking he could. One of the things that I have learned in doing a newsletter is that I have limitations in time and energy although my curiosity may be boundless.

Come to the next meeting where we can discuss ways of improving the Newsletter as well as getting assistance in preparing copy for printing and mailing.

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF FEBRUARY 22

Eighteen members attended the meeting. The group was given news about Michele Crider's recent success at the Pavarotti competition in Modena, Italy. The details for the April ~~One~~ reception for community leaders in commerce and in arts were discussed. Linda Behrendt and Marlene Stanford volunteered to assume responsibility for making arrangements for the event. The reception for the first performance of Così will be sponsored by the University of Iowa Foundation to honor the patron ticket holders, Supers and members of the President's Club. It will take place before the Friday evening performance, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. The group went over the details for the reception to be given after the Evangeline Glass recital on February 28. It was decided to hold the Supers post opera pot-luck at Mary Wall's home on Thursday, May 5 beginning at 6:00 p.m. The group learned that Professor Glass will stage Lucia di Lammermoor in Salt Lake City sometime in October, 1989. He will also be "staging" the concert performance of Fidelio for the Cedar Rapids Symphony to be given on March 18 and 20, 1989. A packet of materials containing a synopsis of Così fan tutte and background material of the opera prepared by the editor of the Newsletter

was distributed to the members in attendance . The next scheduled meeting will be the evening of March 28. The meeting was adjourned.

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF MARCH 28

It was announced that the Così poster designed by Tom Besgrove was completed and would be available for distribution at the April first reception . The details for the reception were reviewed with the group. A letter from Michele Crider was read bringing the members up-to-date on her activities in Europe and her singing in the Modena competition. The Supers also received a letter from Evangeline Glass expressing her thanks and appreciation for the reception following her recent recital. Joanna Beers will focus her article for the April 27th Press Citizen on Neapolitan dishes for the post Così potluck . The recipes will be supplied by Hope Solomons. Discussion was held on the matter of establishing relations with the Cedar Rapids Symphony Guild . The Supers may be able to host a reception for the Peking Opera after its Hancher performance next season. The question of how the Supers may be of aid to voice students wishing to attend competitions was discussed. This led to consideration of how to develop a fund to be administered under the auspices of the University Foundation for such purposes. The group next discussed details for the strike party following the last performance of Così and the pot-luck supper for May 5th. The next meeting will be by June 20th unless there is some special reason for an earlier meeting.

THE NEAR DEMISE OF COSI FAN TUTTE or A BORN AGAIN OPERA

Although Così appeared to have been well received by the audience hearing it during the opening performances in 1790, the opera shortly thereafter went into a sharp decline. It was not simply a matter of fickle audiences that plagued Mozart in Vienna but the resultant effect of a number of forces occurring at the time that led the opera to practically disappear from the stage. The opera had been commissioned by the emperor Joseph II, who it may be said was a protector of Mozart, Salieri notwithstanding. However by the time Così opened, Joseph became seriously ill and died shortly thereafter, causing curtailment of performances at the court theater. The opera may have yet been revived but Leopold II, Joseph's successor, was disinterested in Mozart's music, abetted in his attitudes by Salieri. Da Ponte also had his enemies at this time who were pressing to get rid of him. One might say that Mozart's decline coincided with the fate of his opera. It was also at this time that German romanticism was beginning to flourish along with the post-French Revolution changes in attitude toward womanhood and the romanticization of love relationships. The story of Così was deemed to be immoral or stupid, or both. There was too much flippancy revealed. The reaction against pre-revolutionary manners and elegance was growing. First Beethoven and later Wagner went on record decrying Così . Wagner could not understand how Mozart could compose such beautiful music for Figaro and not for Così . He blamed the libretto, implying that even a Mozart was incapable of writing good music to such a frivolous, uninspiring and immoral libretto. Thus it was that for

most of the nineteenth century, Così was not presented in its original form but rather in altered stories, different titles (see the November 1987 Newsletter) and even revisions of the music. It was not until 1896, that Così fan tutte was presented close to its original form. Herman Levi, a prominent conductor, presented the opera in a new German translation based on the original da Ponte libretto and Mozart score. The performance took place in a small Munich theater. The success of the revival led to one conducted by Mahler in Vienna (1900) and another by Beecham, in London (1910-11). Thus it was that Così fan tutte was born again to become a great attraction in Germany and Austria, often conducted by Richard Strauss who played the harpsichord continuo himself for the recitatives. In 1934, the opera became the cornerstone of England's new Glyndebourne Opera and has since remained in the repertory of all the major opera houses. It is now recognized as a great ensemble opera, one of Mozart's finest achievements.

MOZART ON FRENCH, GERMAN AND ITALIAN OPERA

Mozart's involvement in opera can be gleaned from his letters to his father. We can sense his fervor and commitment to the composition of opera from these letters as well as learn *something* about the way he worked with his librettists before da Ponte. What also comes across are his rather chauvinistic attitudes and his conviction that, given the chance, there was nothing he could not accomplish in the way of opera. As you will see from the excerpts, Mozart was every inch a German. The following are taken from Volume II, Letters of Mozart and His Family that were translated and arranged by the late Emily Anderson .

Paris, 5 April, 1778 ... I am not simply going to compose an act for an opera, but a whole opera en deux acts. The poet has already written the first actI think it is to be called 'Alexandre et Roxane' (Ed. this plan was never carried out).

Paris, 3 July, 1778It is very difficult to find a good libretto. The old ones, which are the best, are not adapted to the modern style and the new ones are all quite useless. For poetry, the only thing of which the French have had reason to be proud, becomes worse every day. ... and yet the poetry is the one thing which must be good here, for they do not understand music.

Paris, 31 July, 1778(This excerpt is from a very long letter and continues the theme of the one of July 3).. I told you in my last letter about the opera. I cannot help it-I must write a grand opera or none at all; if I write a small one, I shall get very little for it...should it have the misfortune not to please these stupid Frenchmen, all would be over---If ...I write a grand opera-the remuneration will be better-I shall be doing the work in which I delight- and I shall have better hopes of success if I am commissioned to write an opera, I shall have no fears(whatever. True, the devil himself must have invented the language of these people.....I tremble from head to foot with eagerness to teach the French more thoroughly to know, appreciate and fear the Germans. For why is a grand opera never entrusted to a Frenchman ? Why must it always be a foreigner ?

Munich, 8 November, 1780 (Mozart here is referring to an opera seria for which he had asked the Court Chaplain in Salzburg to prepare an Italian text.).....I think he ought to finish writing the text, and not forget the little notes (Ed. presumably

stage directions) and send it to us with the synopsis as soon as possible. As for the names of the singers, that is of no importance whatever... now comes what has always seemed unnatural to me- I mean, in an aria--and that is a spoken aside . In a dialogue all these things are quite natural, for a few words can be spoken aside hurriedly; but in an aria where words have to be repeated, it has a bad effect..... I should prefer an uninterrupted aria. (Ed. Mozart, in this letter, as in a number of subsequent ones, was using his father to pass instructions to the librettist, Abbate Varesco. The opera was to be Idomeneo.)

Vienna, 5 February, 1783 I do not believe that the Italian opera will keep going for long, and besides, I hold with the Germans. I prefer German opera, even though it means more trouble for me. Every nation has its own opera and why not Germany? Is not German as singable as French and English? Is it not more so than Russian? ... I am now writing a German opera for myself. I have chosen Goldoni's comedy 'Il servitore di due padroni', and the whole first act has now been translated.

Vienna, 7 May, 1783 Well, the Italian opera buffa has started again here and is very popular . . . I have looked through at least one hundred libretti and more, but have hardly found a single one with which I am satisfied . . . so many alterations would have to be made here and there that even if a poet were to undertake to make them, it would be easier for him to write a completely new text. . . .Our poet here is now a certain Abbate da Ponte. . . . He has promised to write a new libretto for me. But who knows whether he will be able to keep his word -or will want to? For as you are aware, these Italian gentlemen are very civil to your face. Enough, we know them! If he is in league with Salieri, I shall never get anything out of him. But indeed I should dearly love to show what I can do with an Italian opera! (Ed. Mozart first decided to stick with Varesco but not long afterwards did ask da Ponte for a libretto. This was for Le Nozze di Figaro and thus began an association which produced the three great operas: Figaro, Giovanni and Così.)

If we know so very little about the decisions regarding Così fan tutte, how it got started and how Mozart and da Ponte collaborated for the opera, whether together or through go-betweens, it is probably because Mozart's father died on May 28, 1787. His father was the one person with whom he shared so much of his ideas on opera and got to act as a go-between. His death took place two years before Mozart began work on Così.

A NAME FOR THE NEWSLETTER ?

Should we give the Newsletter a distinctive name? After all, the Supers is a distinctive group and should be able to refer to the newsletter accordingly. I propose a contest for a new name. Send in your suggestions for a suitable title. It should be simple, apropos, and not already used by some other newsletter. A group of three judges: myself, Mona Shaw and Miriam Canter will make the decision if there is prize-winning entry. We have to leave open the possibility that none of the suggestions would be acceptable. A prize to the winning entry will be decided upon- perhaps a recording or a pair of tickets, etc. None of the judges is eligible for the prize even if a choice title comes from one of them.