

Introduction

Although Mozart spent only a few weeks altogether in Prague, the city has been generally considered one of the most prominent sites associated with the composer. Czech- and German-language commentators in Bohemia usually take the successful production of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in 1783 as the starting point for the positive reception of Mozart's music in Prague. The enthusiasm aroused by *Die Entführung* intensified with the success of *Le nozze di Figaro* in late 1786 and led to Mozart's first visit to the Bohemian capital in early 1787. The most famous link between Mozart and Prague was created a few months later, when Mozart finished, rehearsed, and premiered his *Don Giovanni* at Prague's Nostitz Theater (a theater initially created mainly for the production of German works, though later also featuring Italian operas and occasional Czech offerings) on October 29, 1787. One more famous premiere followed in September 1791 – that of *La clemenza di Tito*, commissioned for the coronation of Leopold II as the king of the Bohemian crownlands.

This book does not focus directly on Mozart's time in the city and the inception of the works he premiered there.¹ Instead, the following chapters explore how and why these events and works came to be understood as defining for the cultural identity of Bohemia and its inhabitants in the subsequent two centuries. To understand Mozart's reception in Bohemia, I examine Prague performance traditions of Mozart's operas, critical responses to these works in Prague's journals, and commemorative events, such as celebrations of Mozart-related anniversaries. I argue that the strength of the symbolic connection between the composer and Bohemia to a large extent has to do with identity politics and the need for various groups of Bohemians to gain cultural capital and ultimately also political

¹ There are numerous books that explore the subject of Mozart in Prague. The classic study, available in German and in a 1939 Czech translation, is Paul Nettel, *Mozart in Böhmen* (Prague: Neumann, 1938) – Nettel's work is a reworking of Rudolph Procházka, *Mozart in Prag*, 2nd ed. (Prague: Neugebauer, 1899). The main English-language study is Daniel E. Freeman, *Mozart in Prague* (Minneapolis: Bearclaw, 2013).

power. In other words, my examination shows that the canonization of Mozart in Prague was a political affair.

Due to Bohemia's complex history, I will be using historically sensitive ways of referring to the region that is the subject of this study. Although Bohemia is now part of the Czech Republic, I avoid referring to it in ways that stress its links to the dominant ethnicity, such as Czech lands or Czechia. I will also use the adjective Czech only in reference to those who clearly identified with the Czech language. Otherwise, I refer to the region as Bohemia and to its inhabitants as Bohemians. Similarly, prior to the codification and standardization of modern Czech, most Bohemians (including those who could be considered ethnically Czech) wrote in German and used German forms of their names. As a result, I use German names for those Bohemians who are not clearly associated with Czech identity even when modern Czech equivalents exist. For example, Mozart's first biographer Franz Xaver Niemetschek is sometimes referred to in the modern Czech form as František Xaver Němeček, but I will use the German form because that is what Niemetschek used in his German-language publications.

In his analysis of Mozart's myths, William Stafford has shown that the idea of Prague, a provincial city in the eighteenth century, as a special place for Mozart became accepted outside of Bohemia partially because it coincided with nineteenth-century Romantic notions of Mozart as a neglected genius who struggled against the *ancien régime* to produce new, revolutionary, German national art.² At the same time, the original source of the neglected-genius story was Franz Xaver Niemetschek's 1798 biography of the composer.³ Niemetschek's work is imbued with Bohemian patriotism and anti-Viennese sentiments, Stafford adds, which likely provoked the initial impulse behind Niemetschek's promotion of Prague's connections to Mozart. Stafford imagines various Mozart legends as "inverted pyramids, vast superstructures resting on vanishing points."⁴ My book illustrates that national and patriotic ideologies represent an important ingredient of the glue that holds Stafford's metaphorical pyramids together.

The idea that the formation of the musical canon was not an impartial enterprise based on gradual selection of "masterpieces" for posterity according to objective aesthetic criteria has been discussed for several decades, as has been the role Mozart and his works played in this process.⁵ Other studies

² William Stafford, *The Mozart Myths: A Critical Reassessment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 177–85.

³ Stafford, *The Mozart Myths*, 249–50. ⁴ Stafford, *The Mozart Myths*, 141.

⁵ For a review of the study of the musical canon, see esp. William Weber, "The History of Musical Canon," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, 336–55 (New York: Oxford

have shown that modern understanding of Mozart and his works have been conditioned by earlier generations of interpreters and by a series of “meta-narratives,” such as the views of Mozart and works such as *Don Giovanni* either as demonic and romantic or classical.⁶ This book shows that some aspects of this process were initiated in Prague earlier than in other places, that this initiation had to do with specifically Bohemian ideologies, and that Prague commentators developed their own metanarratives that either resonated, countered, and sometimes even fostered those in other places. The canonization of Mozart continued in the following two centuries and to a large extent still holds sway today. As the individual chapters show, the specifics of the reception of Mozart’s operas in Prague have been influenced by social and political transformations within the Bohemian population: Prague’s critics, musicians, and audience members projected onto these works changing views of the Habsburg dynasty and the gradually emerging sentiments of (Czech and German) ethnic nationalism. Historians of Habsburg Central Europe have shown that national ideology often influenced the “facts” about histories, including cultural histories, of various regions and their populations.⁷ Similarly, my study of Mozart reception in Prague demonstrates that various patriotic and national agendas shaped notions about Mozart’s links to the Bohemian capital and questions of Mozart biography in general.

The influence of politics on musical developments in Habsburg Central Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been the subject of many recent studies. For instance, David Brodbeck discussed the reception of Czech music in late nineteenth-century Vienna in connection to the struggle between cultural and ethnic concepts of Germanness.⁸ Kelly St. Pierre has explored how Czech scholars and politicians mythologized Bedřich Smetana, and how this mythologizing discourse both kept to a few basic tenets but also shifted according to the political context.⁹ This book’s focus on Mozart allows for a much broader chronological scope because

University Press, 1999); and Cormac Newark and William Weber, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Operatic Canon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁶ Mark Everist, *Mozart’s Ghosts: Haunting the Halls of Musical Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12 and 18.

⁷ For a brief overview of these trends, see Pieter M. Judson, “Introduction,” in *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, ed. Pieter M. Judson and Marsha L. Rozenblitt (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), esp. 4–5.

⁸ David Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum: Political Ideology, German Identity, and Music-Critical Discourse in Liberal Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), see esp. chapters 1, 5, and 7 for discussions of Czech music.

⁹ Kelly St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana: Myth, Music, and Propaganda* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2017).

the composer has been discussed and venerated from the late eighteenth century to the present. An exploration of the political aspects of Mozart's legacy in Bohemia shows that although the views and interpretations of the composer's music have reflected evolving social and political paradigms, they also remained surprisingly consistent, with recurring narrative tropes.

Mozart Reception Studies

The study of the reception of Mozart's operas has a long history. Since the nineteenth century, researchers have explored the transformations and local variants of these works on stage and in criticism.¹⁰ Many of these studies turn to largely positivist listings of various productions in chronological order, thus avoiding a more extensive analysis of what they show about these productions' cultural and social contexts. Recently, Magnus Tessing Schneider has taken a more interpretive approach to Mozart reception and shown how early nineteenth-century adaptations have determined present-day understandings of *Don Giovanni*.¹¹ Somewhat opposite to Schneider's attempt to present *Don Giovanni*'s reception as a response to a singular set of interpretive views, Mark Everist has drawn from a wide-ranging number of sources to point out that reception is a largely complex and often confused and contradictory process.¹² Everist also pays attention to various myths and legends that became associated with Mozart in the nineteenth century. Unlike earlier scholars, however, Everist does not primarily focus on disentangling the myths from the truth but analyzes and explores the social and cultural underpinnings of the hagiography.¹³ Similar to Everist's work, this monograph shows how Bohemian discourse about Mozart has been and sometimes still is dominated by complex ideological biases.

At the same time, Everist's work is filled with the spirit of cultural supremacy and academic neocolonialism. In his need to articulate a theoretically sound, generalized understanding of the complexities of Mozart reception, Everist claims to strive for "a geographical balance between the main linguistic

¹⁰ For *Don Giovanni*, for example, the standard studies are Rudolf von Freisauff, *Mozart's Don Juan 1787–1887* (Salzburg: Kerber, 1887) and Christof Bitter, *Wandlungen in den Inszenierungsformen des "Don Giovanni" von 1787 bis 1928* (Regensburg: Bosse, 1961). For *La clemenza di Tito*, see Emanuele Senici, *La clemenza di Tito di Mozart: I primi trent'anni (1791–1821)* (Amsterdam: Brepols, 1997).

¹¹ Magnus Tessing Schneider, *The Original Portrayal of Mozart's Don Giovanni* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

¹² Everist, *Mozart's Ghosts*.

¹³ One of the most comprehensive myth-busting studies is Stafford, *The Mozart Myths*.

areas that ‘received’ the composer.”¹⁴ By “the main linguistic areas,” however, Everist means German-speaking regions, France, and Anglophone countries – Western European and North American regions that Germanocentric music historians and their followers from the nineteenth century to the present have appointed to represent the cultural mainstream. Practices in the regions on the margins or outside this “main” area, Everist implies, are somehow dependent on and mostly identical to the German, French, and Anglophone reception. Similar neocolonialist tendencies have marked Ian Woodfield’s pathbreaking study of Mozart reception in Central Europe in the late eighteenth century.¹⁵ Although the book deals largely with operatic culture in Prague, Woodfield treats Czech-language scholarship on this topic as entirely peripheral, and his book often overlooks important Bohemian contexts.¹⁶ My book, by contrast, brings to the fore previously overlooked work by generations of Czech critics and scholars. In presenting a geographically limited alternative to Everist’s analysis, I hope to engage both the allegedly mainstream and peripheral aspects of Mozart reception in connection to Prague’s status as a center of both Austro-German and Czech musical culture. My study also shows that some of the ideas about Mozart that originated in Prague, often under the influence of specific local circumstances, affected how the broader Western community has perceived the composer.

Bohemian versus Czech versus German(-Bohemian)

The distinction between Czech and German cultures became a prominent paradigm in Bohemian musical thought and practices precisely at the time of Mozart’s visit. This paradigm grew in importance throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, as the following chapters show,

¹⁴ Everist, *Mozart’s Ghosts*, 21.

¹⁵ Ian Woodfield, *Performing Operas for Mozart: Impresarios, Singers and Troupes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁶ This ignorance of Czech scholarship and the cultural context in Prague leads to curious misrepresentations. For example, in his chapter on *Die Entführung*, Woodfield suggests, quite reasonably, that Pasquale Bondini played a major role in promoting Mozart’s opera outside of Vienna by producing it in Leipzig in early fall 1783. This was at a time, Woodfield writes, when “as yet there was nothing inevitable about [the opera’s] selection” for the repertoire of a company outside Vienna. In writing that, however, Woodfield does not at all reflect on the fact that in spring or summer 1783, *Die Entführung* was produced in Prague by the Bohemian company of Karl Wahr – a production that Mozart later mentioned, together with that in Leipzig, in his letter of December 6, 1783 as being excellent and receiving great applause. Bondini must have been aware of this production too since both his Italian and German troupes performed in Prague’s Thun Theater at that time.

was a driving force in the reception of Mozart's operas in Prague. The multiethnic and multicultural conditions in Bohemia were due to the region's geographical location and historical development. Slavic tribes that spoke what eventually became modern Czech settled in the Bohemian lands in the sixth century CE and gradually assimilated with remnants of earlier Celtic and Germanic populations.¹⁷ It was not from the Slavs but from one of the Celtic tribes, the Boii, that Bohemia received its common name. The Czech tribes were eventually unified by the Přemyslid dynasty in the tenth century – and this new state also incorporated regions inhabited predominantly by Slavic people outside of Bohemia, the largest among them being Moravia. When the Přemyslids eventually received the status of hereditary kings, the regions they ruled came to be referred to as the Bohemian crownlands. Referring to these regions as the Bohemian crownlands emphasizes their multiethnic heritage, although many people use the term “Czech lands,” which stresses the idea that the region is mainly linked to the Czechs. To make matters even more complicated, in the Middle Ages the Bohemian lands were incorporated into the Holy Roman Empire despite their predominantly non-Germanic population. Starting in the thirteenth century, Bohemian kings also brought predominantly German settlers to establish cities and introduce new mining practices, and the Bohemian regions thus became largely bilingual. The proportions of the Czech and German speakers fluctuated throughout the centuries, but in general the German speakers were concentrated in larger cities and in the mountainous borderlands. The social, cultural, and political relationships between the Czech and German populations in Bohemia were also determined by the region's incorporation into the Habsburg monarchy, the western part of which relied on German as the principal language of official communication with increasing intensity. The Habsburg emperors also tended to diminish the autonomy of Bohemian authorities and delegate their powers and responsibilities to Vienna, which called forth patriotic anti-Austrian resistance from many different groups within Bohemian society.

In the late eighteenth century, Emperor Joseph II and his mother Maria Theresa attempted to unify and centralize the Habsburg lands by enforcing the use of German as the official language and supporting the development of vernacular German culture. As Pieter Judson has pointed out, this Germanization “was more product of systematic centralization efforts

¹⁷ A good overview of these developments is found in Hugh Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004).

than an ambitious scheme to Germanize local populations,” although in the nineteenth century, various nationalists within the Habsburg Empire viewed it as nationalizing in spirit.¹⁸ Already in the 1700s, some Bohemian intellectuals and artists responded to both the German cultural movement and the Germanization enforced by the Habsburg government by striving for the preservation, codification, and further development of a specifically Czech culture. Bohemian cultural institutions started to split along the Czech–German divide. At the same time, many Bohemians continued to understand their region as basically bilingual. This bilingualism, however, operated within the framework of German cultural and linguistic superiority, according to which the Czech language and culture was backward and unable to achieve the same universal validity as the Germans.¹⁹ Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, various artists and intellectuals in Prague to greater or lesser degree identified with one of three cultural and political movements: Bohemian patriotism that perceived Bohemia as an autonomous and bilingual unit within the Habsburg empire, a unit with rich history and traditions that had been threatened by the Habsburgs’ centralizing efforts; Czech nationalism that understood Bohemia as a land that historically belonged to the Czechs and to which those linked to German language and culture were somehow alien; and German (or German-Bohemian) views that considered Bohemia a part of the German realm, which could be represented by the Holy German Empire, the predominantly German-speaking parts of the Habsburg Empire, or both, and into which the Czechs could be easily assimilated. The three movements were by no means clearly defined and their goals were often complex and contradictory, but they did determine basic cultural developments of Bohemia for two centuries.

Nostitz Theater and the Imperial/Patriotic/National Politics of the Late 1700s

One example of the complex interaction between the three cultural and political viewpoints in late eighteenth-century Bohemia can be found in the establishment and operations of what is now called the Estates

¹⁸ Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 224–25.

¹⁹ On German cultural superiority in view of Central European Slavic nations, see Pieter M. Judson, “Rethinking the Liberal Legacy,” in *Rethinking Vienna 1900*, ed. Steven Beller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 57–79.

Theater, the building in which Mozart's two Prague operas had their premieres. The main model for Franz Anton, Count Nostitz-Rieneck, the theater's founder, was Joseph II's National Theater, operating in the Vienna Burgtheater since 1776. The creation of the Vienna National Theater resulted from a lengthy process in which some members of the Viennese intellectual elite embraced the concept of a theater that was no longer simply a site of courtly representation or popular entertainment but an institution that presented edifying works in the vernacular and thus projected the state's ideologies to large segments of the population.²⁰ Joseph II also helped jump-start Nostitz's project in the spring of 1781, when he and his Viennese officials issued three different proclamations (on March 24, May 11, and June 22) countering opposition to the new building by Prague's city council and the university. Various social and cultural conditions specific to Bohemia, however, distinguished the Prague theater from its Viennese model. The main issue was the conflicted nature of national and regional ideologies that the theater was supposed to reflect. Most educated consumers of literate culture in Prague in the 1780s considered German as their primary language, an attitude that corresponded with Joseph II's Germanization policies. Nostitz certainly viewed German as the primary language of the enlightened Bohemian theater, and in a 1782 proclamation to his fellow Bohemians, he expressed the hope that the new theater would allow its audiences to demonstrate that they did not "feel any less German blood in our veins" ("weniger deutsches Blut in unseren Adern fühlen") than other inhabitants of the "German hereditary lands" ("deutsche Erbländer").²¹ At the same time, Nostitz must have known that the majority of Bohemian population spoke Czech, and Czech was also the language associated with traditional institutions of the Bohemian kingdom. Many members of the Bohemian nobility acknowledged the significance of the Czech language when they tried to speak it during various state rituals to emphasize their patriotic leanings.²² Nostitz himself spoke Czech well and chose prominent scholars who specialized in Czech language and

²⁰ This transformation is discussed in Martin Nedbal, *Morality and Viennese Opera in the Age of Mozart and Beethoven* (New York: Routledge, 2017), chapter 1.

²¹ Cited by Oscar Teuber, *Geschichte des Prager Theaters*, vol. 2 (Prague: Haase, 1885), 97. For a discussion of how the proclamation relates to Nostitz's relationship to Pasquale Bondini and his Italian opera troupe, see Marc Niubo, *Italská opera v mozartovské Praze* (Prague: Karolinum, 2022), 33.

²² On the importance of Czech in state ceremonies in late eighteenth-century Bohemia, see Hugh LeCaine Agnew, "Ambiguities of Ritual: Dynastic Loyalty, Territorial Patriotism and Nationalism in Three Royal Coronations in Bohemia, 1791–1836," *Bohemia* 41 (2000): 3–22 (9).

history, such as Franz Martin Pelzel (1743–1801), as his children's educators and family librarians.²³ The clash between the linguistic variety of the Bohemian population and the emerging concept of Germanocentric patriotism is reflected in the inscription on the main façade of the new building: "Patriae et musis" ("To the Fatherland and the Muses"). Nostitz chose a motto in Latin, the language many educated Bohemians viewed as the chief literary language prior to the Habsburg Germanization efforts.²⁴ This motivation comes more clearly into focus when one considers how easy it would have been for the count to ask for the German inscription "Dem Vaterlande," an option that was in fact called for in some Prague circles.²⁵ In the 1782 proclamation, moreover, Nostitz allowed the theater to perform in any language that fit the desires of the nobility and the public (thus not excluding the possibility of Czech performances, which indeed took place, starting in 1785).

The 1782 proclamation also suggests a complicated relationship between the new Prague theater and Vienna. On the one hand, Nostitz views the new institution as emulating the court-supported National Theater in Vienna, yet he emphasizes the Bohemians' right to their own culture. After its festive opening with Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* on April 21, 1783, the theater both relied on inspiration and stimuli from Vienna and rejected them in more or less explicit ways. The theater's 1783 production of Mozart's *Die Entführung* is a good example of the cultural tensions between Prague and Vienna.²⁶ *Die Entführung* was one of several *Singspiele* that the theater's first artistic director Karl Wahr imported from Vienna.²⁷ Furthermore, several of the singers who performed in the Prague *Entführung* possibly also participated in the original Vienna production

²³ See Pavel Bělina, Jiří Kaše, and Jan. P. Kučera, *Velké dějiny země Koruny české*, vol. 10 (Prague: Paseka, 2001), 144 and 445.

²⁴ For a discussion of Nostitz's patriotism as Bohemian as opposed to German-Bohemian, see Markéta Bartoš Tautmanová, *Eine Arena deutsch-tschechischer Kultur: Das Prager Ständetheater 1846–1862* (Berlin: Lit, 2021), 24.

²⁵ According to Teuber, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, 76, on August 19, 1781, the journal *Prager Oberpostamtszeitung* claimed that the inscription in the frontispiece of the theater would be "Dem Vaterlande," not "Patriae et musis," as had supposedly and "incorrectly" been reported in the *Erlangenische Zeitung*.

²⁶ The production is discussed in Josef-Horst Lederer, "Meine teutsche opera . . . ist in Prag und Leipzig – sehr gut – und mit allem beyfall gegeben worden" – Fakten und Hypothesen zur Prager Erstaufführung von Mozart's *Entführung aus dem Serail*," in *Böhmische Aspekte des Lebens und des Werkes W. A. Mozarts*, eds. Milada Jonášová and Tomislav Volek (Prague: CAS, 2011), 21–28.

²⁷ Although the exact date of the opera's Prague premiere is unclear, Lederer points out that *Die Entführung* must have been produced between the opening of the Nostitz Theater in April 1783 and August 1783. Lederer, "Meine teutsche opera," 24–25. See also Niubo, *Italská opera*, 100.

under Mozart.²⁸ The Prague German company, however, distanced itself from Vienna in the 1783 Prague print of *Die Entführung's* libretto.²⁹ The title page bears a curious note from Christoph Friedrich Bretzner, the Leipzig author of the original text, adapted for Mozart by Gottlieb Stephanie the Younger in Vienna. Bretzner writes that he cannot claim responsibility for the numerous arias that were incorporated into his text in Vienna (because of their supposedly poor quality) and as a result marks the inserted arias throughout the Prague publication with the note “v.W.U.” (vom Wiener Umarbeiter).³⁰ Thus, although Wahr's company produced Mozart's Viennese *Die Entführung*, it also pointed out a distinct approach to the Viennese original and linked the Prague production to north German theater.

Complex political issues continued to influence the operations of Nostitz's theater. Although Joseph II initially supported the count's theatrical project, he soon turned against it, possibly in response to Nostitz's opposition to Joseph's centralistic efforts that threatened Bohemian autonomy within the Habsburg monarchy.³¹ The emperor visited the completed theater only once (he had also previously visited the construction site), in September 1783. During that visit, he stayed only for part of the performance and later persuaded Nostitz to replace Karl Wahr's company with that of Pasquale Bondini, whose Italian opera troupe had until then performed in the Thun Theater in Prague's Lesser Town, a city across the river Vltava/Moldau from the Old Town where the Nostitz Theater was built. Afterward, the emperor never again visited the Nostitz Theater, although he attended full performances in other theaters during his stays in Prague throughout the 1780s.³² The emperor, furthermore, supported the establishment of other theatrical troupes and institutions, as if to sabotage Nostitz's project and his financial interests in it.³³ In the spring of 1786,

²⁸ Lederer, “Meine teutsche opera,” 27.

²⁹ *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Prague: Diesbach, 1783).

³⁰ A few months before the Prague production, in 1782, Bretzner published a note in the *Leipziger Zeitung* complaining about “a certain man, named Mozart,” who dared to “abuse” his libretto for an opera.

³¹ For a basic introduction to the Bohemian patriotic nobility's reactions to Joseph II's policies, see Bělina, Kaše, and Kučera, *Velké dějiny země Koruny české*, vol. 10, 123–25, and Jitka Ludvová, “Hudba v rodu Nosticů,” *Hudební věda* 23 (1986): 144–65.

³² These visits are discussed in Teuber, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, 77 (on the emperor's visit to the Kotzen Theater in 1781), 120–21 (on his frequent visits to the Thun Theater in September of 1783), and 171 (on his visit to the Patriotic Theater in 1786).

³³ The large sums that Nostitz lost in the operations of his theater are reflected in the financial records preserved in the Nostitz family archive. Jaroslav Čeleda used these records to explore the amount Nostitz spent on supporting the company of Karl Wahr in the early 1780s. Jaroslav