

Mozart's Operas and National Politics

As both an in-depth study of Mozart criticism and performance practice in Prague and a history of how eighteenth-century opera was appropriated by later political movements and social groups, this book explores the reception of Mozart's operas in Prague between 1791 and the present and reveals the profound influence of politics on the construction of the Western musical canon. Tracing the links between performances of Mozart's operas and strategies that Bohemian musicians, critics, directors, musicologists, and politicians used to construct modern Czech and German identities, Nedbal explores the history of the canonization process from the perspective of a city that has often been regarded as peripheral to mainstream Western music history. Individual chapters focus on Czech and German adaptations of Mozart's operas for Prague's theaters, operatic criticism published in Prague's Czech and German journals, the work of Bohemian historians interpreting Mozart, and endeavors of cultural activists to construct monuments in recognition of the composer.

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Mozart's Operas and National Politics

Canon Formation in Prague from 1791
to the Present

MARTIN NEDBAL

University of Kansas



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*To the most important Czech women in my life: Ludmila,
Zdeňka, Růženka*

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Preface

This book is divided into three larger parts, each of which consists of two chapters. Part I focuses on the concepts of authenticity and ethnicity. These concepts defined Mozart's reception in Prague for numerous decades and thus shed new light on the links between Mozart and the social, political, and cultural history of Bohemia. Chapter 1 ("Werktreue, Patriotism, and Nationalism in Prague Productions of Mozart's Operas") explores the relationship between political developments in Bohemia from the 1790s to the 1880s and the concept of truthfulness and fidelity to "authentic" texts and music (*Werktreue*) in Mozart's operas. I show that the idea of *Werktreue* appeared in Prague in the 1790s and that it was connected to a sense of Bohemian patriotism and negative attitudes to central government in Vienna. In the 1820s, the emerging Czech national movement embraced similar attitudes, and the first Czech production of *Don Giovanni* showcased the opera with musical numbers, such as the *scena ultima*, that were cut in most contemporaneous German productions. *Werktreue* was seen as a specifically Czech quality that was antithetical to how the Czechs perceived German culture. German-Bohemians appropriated *Werktreue* as well, specifically in connection to German performances of *Don Giovanni* in Prague in the middle of the nineteenth century. Chapter 2 ("Mozart and Ethnic Identity") focuses on ethnic nationalism in Bohemian Mozart discourse. With the rise of ethnic viewpoints in the nineteenth century, Prague's critics and musicologists mined operatic works of Mozart for inherent, unique qualities associated with Czech and German-Bohemian cultures, especially folk music. In the twentieth century, Czech and German-Bohemian music researchers, critics, and novelists used racial criteria to appropriate Mozart's legacy for the national cause, and the nationalistic approaches to Mozart were also incorporated into post-World War II Marxist musicology.

The second and third parts of the book focus on three specific operas (*La clemenza di Tito*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Die Zauberflöte*) and one landmark (Bertramka). These chapters explore some of the issues outlined in Part I. Part II ("Monuments and Politics") focuses on the political history of two specific monuments (one physical and one musical) associated with

Mozart's legacy in Prague. Chapter 3 ("Bertramka and the Politics of Prague's Mozart Monuments") explores the history of the suburban estate of Bertramka, where Mozart supposedly lived during his Bohemian visits, as a guest of Franz Xaver Duscek and Josepha Duscek, and where he allegedly finished *Don Giovanni*, *La clemenza di Tito*, and portions of *Die Zauberflöte*. The chapter examines how the estate gradually became a site of national myth and conflict. Chapter 4 ("*La clemenza di Tito* and the Habsburg Dynasty in Bohemia, 1791–1891") focuses on Mozart's final *opera seria* and shows that, although *Tito* is often viewed as conservative and lacking appeal for nineteenth-century audiences, in Prague it retained relevance as a music-political monument. Bohemians, Czechs, and German-Bohemians projected their views of Bohemia's relationship to the Habsburg dynasty onto *Tito*.

Part III ("Translations and Adaptations") focuses on reception histories of individual Mozart operas in and around Prague. Chapter 5 ("Wenzel Mihule and *Don Giovanni*") explores how post–World War II nationalism affected the understanding of the transnational dissemination of one German adaptation of *Don Giovanni* from Prague throughout late eighteenth-century Central Europe. Chapter 6 ("*Die Zauberflöte* and Czech National Theater") explores how Czech translations of *Die Zauberflöte* intertwined with the development of Czech national culture between the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries.

Acknowledgments

Several chapters of this book are based on articles that have been published elsewhere. Most prominently, Chapter 5 is a slightly reworked version of my 2022 article in the *Journal of Musicology*.¹ Portions of Chapters 1 and 6 are based on my 2018 article in *19th-Century Music*.² Some sections of Chapter 1 are also related to my 2016 article in *Divadelní revue* (Czech Theater Review),³ and portions of Chapter 2 are connected to my 2019 article in *Hudební věda*.⁴ I want to sincerely thank the editors and anonymous peer reviewers of these journals for their insights and suggestions. Many sections of this book are also related to various articles published by the Mozart Society of America – either as short contributions to the Society's *Newsletter* or as a special publication devoted to the history of the Estates Theater.⁵ I am grateful to the editors of the *Newsletter* in recent years and to those who have reviewed, commented on, and proofread these publications. I also want to thank Bruce Alan Brown, Kathryn Libin, and John Rice for their support with these and other Mozart-related projects.

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¹ Martin Nedbal, "Wenzel Mihule and the Reception of Don Giovanni in Central Europe," *Journal of Musicology* 39 (2022): 66–108.

² Nedbal, "Mozart's *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, Operatic Canon, and National Politics in Nineteenth-Century Prague," *19th-Century Music* 41 (2018): 183–205.

³ Nedbal, "František Šír's First Czech Translation of Mozart's Final Opera *Buffa* and the Reception of *Così fan tutte* in Prague 1791–1831," *Divadelní revue* 27 (2016): 53–70.

⁴ Nedbal, "Music History and Ethnicity from Prague to Indiana: Paul Nettl, Eighteenth-Century Bohemia, and Germanness," *Hudební věda* 56 (2019): 386–508.

⁵ These publications are, in chronological order: "Jan Nepomuk Štěpánek: Preface to Don Juan (1825)," *Newsletter of the Mozart Society of America* (NMSA) 16, no. 1 (January 2012): 14–16; *Prague's Estates Theater, Mozart, and Bohemian Patriotism* (Mozart Society of America, 2017); "Domenico Guardasoni's Prague Conducting Score for Mozart's *Così fan tutte*," *NMSA* 21, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 5–10; "A Previously Overlooked Manuscript of *La clemenza di Tito* in Strakonice and the Opera's Early Reception in Bohemia," *NMSA* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 5–10; "Franz Xaver Niemetschek and the Mozart Circle in Early 1794: Previously Overlooked Documents," *NMSA* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 3–12.

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