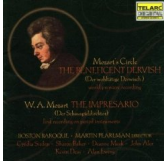


Mozart – Der Schauspieldirektor, Der wohlthätige Derwisch (2002)



Der Schauspieldirektor, opera, K. 486 1. *Ouvertüre* 2. *Da schlägt die Abschiedsstunde* 3. *Bester Jüngling!* 4. *Ich bin die erste Sängerin!* 5. *Jeder Künstler strebt nach Ehre*
Der wohlthätige Derwisch (The Beneficent Dervish), singspiel [Johann Baptist Henneberg]
6. *Sinfonia* 7. *Hier müssen wir uns beide trennen (1. Akt)* 8. *Welche nie empfand'ne Freude*
9. *Liebes Weib* 10. *Der Drache ist den armen Männern gut* 11. *O Abdallah* 12. *Marsch*
13. *Die Männer zu fesseln (2. Akt)* 14. *Bläsermusik* 15. *Sofrano, fühltest du mein Leiden*
16. *Marsch* 17. *Ein Jüngling frisch wie Milch* 18. *Die Seeschlacht* 19. *So bald der Mann ist*
allzu Gut (3. Akt) 20. *Ach, die Teure liebet mich!* 21. *Sofrano! Mein Sohn!* 22. *Vino pani*
23. *Daß Männer unsre Sklaven sind* 24. *Bald wird auch dieser Traum* 25. *Wir sind die zwei*
lustigen Bauern vom Land 26. *Ihr Undankbaren lebet wohl*
Cynthia Sieden (soprano, 1) Sharon Baker (soprano, 1, 2) Deanne Meek (mezzo-soprano, 2)
John Aler (tenor, 1, 2) Kevin Deas (baritone, 1, 2) Alan Ewing (bass, 2)

Boston Baroque Martin Pearlman – conductor

In 1786 Mozart, hard at work on *Le Nozze di Figaro*, took time off, without great enthusiasm, to write the music for a new singspiel, *Der Schauspieldirektor*. The librettist was the same who had provided the text for *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Johann Gottlieb Stephanie the Younger, but this time the play was the thing and Mozart's music amounts to five pieces lasting, on their own, little more than twenty minutes. Lack of enthusiasm for a project does not seem to have acted as a block to Mozart's inspiration – witness the concertos for flute, an instrument he did not like – and these five pieces, beginning with a well-worked out overture, have a good deal more substance than the occasion strictly required.

Attempts have been made in the past to provide a minimum narration to set the numbers in context (well, actually, in the mid-nineteenth century someone tried to work it up as a full-scale opera with Mozart himself among the characters); I daresay most people will be happy to have just the music. The performance is a good one and the first recording on original instruments.

Listeners who are wary of these can be assured that the Boston Baroque are beyond praise as regards tuning, nor do they indulge in the exaggeratedly segmented phrasing some other period groups go in for. In short, the pleasingly natural timbres of the instruments can be enjoyed without any distractions, as can Pearlman's vital but not hard-driven interpretation.

The part for Madame Herz was intended for the same singer as the Queen of the Night and calls for the same extended range. Most of what Cyndia Sieden does is so splendidly confident as to raise surprise – and the same comment applies to Sharon Baker too – when the odd corner is awkwardly turned. Still, these moments are few, the small male parts are well taken and in the last resort it is probably not for this work that the disc will be bought.

In 1998-9 the Boston Baroque hit the world headlines with the first modern performance and recording of *The Philosopher's Stone*, a singspiel emanating from the circle of Emanuel Schikaneder (the librettist of *The Magic Flute*) which was not unknown to scholars, but for which evidence had recently come to light suggesting that its anonymous composers included Mozart himself. No such evidence – "no smoking gun" as Pearlman's readable notes put it – has been found regarding *The Beneficent Dervish*, but evidence has been found that it was performed in March 1791, just before the composition of *The Magic Flute*, rather than a couple of years after Mozart's death as had been previously believed. This obviously increases our curiosity, making us want to check it out for possible influences on Mozart's masterpiece. And of course, one never knows ...

Oh, but surely one does. Immortal, sublime Mozart! How could we be for a moment in doubt? Or could we? All those wonderful pieces that people listen to with tears in their eyes, swooning at their spirituality, are you going to tell me that the same people would yawn their way through the very same pieces if you told them the composer was Salieri or his ilk? Or if you played them Salieri but fobbed it off as Mozart, the waterworks would be turned on again? Or can we not recognise the composer in some more objective way? For example, we are told that cows produce more milk when they listen to Bach, so presumably pieces of questionable authenticity could be put to the milk-yield test (has anyone tried, though?) ...

Well, joking apart, premonitions of *The Magic Flute* mostly centre around a slightly Sarastro-like figure. To my ears, while a lot of the music is in the lingua franca of Mozart's Vienna and does sound as if it could have been by him (but not by late Mozart, surely?) there are also fairly frequent turns of phrase which are distinctly un-Mozartian. All the same, and bearing in mind that there is far less music in this singspiel than in *The Magic Flute*, and also a much less serious subject, the music is usually a good deal more than merely workmanlike and is well worth hearing. I was particularly struck by the use of the piano in the orchestra in the second

act, especially in the Slave Women's chorus. Did Beethoven know this and get some ideas for his Choral Fantasy?

Again, the performance is mostly excellent. Alan Ewing's voice is not quite rich enough in its lower notes for the Dervish (this would have been a part for Gottlob Frick, or even Boris Christoff) but his singing as such is good and everyone else is fine.

The notes are in English and German, as is the libretto; the translator had a lot of fun with the chorus "Vino pani". "First-rate grubbo" for "Prima vesi" and "Muckymuck you" for "Farscha tu" surely leave the originals standing.

The Impresario is well worth knowing and the Dervish is quite interesting enough to strengthen, rather than the reverse, the claims of the present version to be the preferred one. ---Christopher Howell, musicweb-international.com

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