



REVIEW: BOOK

Das Wiener Kärntnertortheater 1728–1748: Vom Städtischen Schauspielhaus zum Höfischen Opernbetrieb

Andrea Sommer-Mathis and Reinhard Strohm, eds
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Books unravelling the legacy of an eighteenth-century opera house offer numerous points of interest. If carefully researched and balanced, such (hyper-)contextual studies have the potential to reveal hidden networks between the artistic, political and economic agents – patrons, impresarios, vocalists, instrumentalists, ballet dancers, librettists, composers, stage and costume designers, printers, critics and so on – that engendered and moulded the operatic ‘work’ at a time when the composer was not (yet) an opera’s focal point or chief instigator. In limiting themselves to one particular locale, furthermore, such books can evoke forgotten rituals, horizons of expectations, local identities and other attributes of historical audiences.

Vienna has been a long-time favourite subject for such an approach. At the turn of the twentieth century, literary historian Alexander von Weilen devoted a trilogy to Viennese theatrical life between the early seventeenth century and the author’s own time, when Mahler held sway over the Hofoper – *Geschichte des Wieners Theaterwesens* (Vienna: Gesellschaft für Vervielfältigende Kunst, 1899), *Zur Wiener Theatergeschichte: Die vom Jahre 1629 bis zum Jahre 1740 am Wiener Hofe zur Aufführung gelangten Werke theatralischen Charakters und Oratorien* (Vienna: Hölder, 1901) and *Das K. K. Hofburgtheater seit seiner Begründung* (Vienna: Gesellschaft für Vervielfältigende Kunst, 1903–1906). The courtly venues and the old Burgtheater on the Michaelerplatz dominated the multiple endeavours following Weilen’s example, but lesser-known, peripheral or short-lived venues – such as the Freihaustheater or Theater auf der Wieden (where Mozart’s *Magic Flute* was premiered) – have also been unearthed in the process.

The present volume by Andrea Sommer-Mathis, Reinhard Strohm and a team of seasoned opera scholars, supported by the Don Juan Archiv Wien, places the spotlight on the Theater am Kärntnertor. Officially named the Kaiserliches und Königliches Hoftheater zu Wien, this venue was erected in 1709 and functioned until the Staatsoper, just opposite on the same street, opened its doors in 1869. The Kärntnertor’s eighteenth-century history has thus far been covered sparingly, in essays which focus on the improvisational *Stegreifkomödie* (improvised comedy) staged by Joseph Anton ‘Hanswurst’ Stranitzky (most recently, Franz Hadamowsky, *Wien: Theatergeschichte von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Vienna: Jugend und Volk, 1988)). Confining themselves to the years 1728–1748, by contrast, the authors of the volume reviewed here have chosen to scrutinize the operatic legacy of the Kärntnertor, as well as to treat its (counterintuitive) evolution from a municipal theatre, run by commercially minded impresarios, to an opera house controlled by the emperor’s court.

In their brief Introduction, the editors acknowledge the stumbling-blocks hampering such an undertaking: the roughly 150 works that are alleged to have been staged in the period at hand are represented by a mere eleven full scores and a handful of arias. To complicate matters further, few names of performers and other individuals are known, owing to their absence from printed librettos. Substantial contextual ‘extrapolation’ – and scholarly experience, which all contributors abundantly possess – is therefore necessary in order to complete the picture.

Fortunately, the construction and workings of the Kärntnertor can be adequately described, as Sommer-Mathis shows in her opening chapter. Making profitable use of fresh sources from Viennese archives, the author delineates fascinating links between stakeholders such as the theatre’s architect, Antonio Beduzzi, court chaplain Marc’Antonio Ziani (Beduzzi’s father-in-law) and his predecessor at court, Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini. The chapter also addresses the shared impresarial activities of the Handelian tenor Francesco Borosini and the dancer Joseph Carl Selliers, who, in 1728, were restricted by imperial privilege, preventing them from mounting full-scale *opere serie*. The duo devised a most amusing solution, offering abbreviated pasticcio arrangements that were misleadingly advertised as ‘intermezzi musicali’ (138–145).

Claudia Michels’s chapter transcribes and translates recommendations made by Francesco Borosini, in his *Memoria, sù l’impresa delle Opere in Vienna* of 1749, for future operations at the Viennese opera houses. The document suggests, among other things, providing each subscriber with a metal token (‘tichetto di metallo’) that bears their name and a design of choice in order to be granted access to the gallery. It furthermore advises that managers should rent costumes from the Venetian workshop of Natale Canziani, as, apparently, did multiple venues on the Italian peninsula and in German-speaking countries. In offering numerous additional insights, Borosini’s *Memoria* provides a valuable supplement to similar documents of the time, such as the personal papers of the Florentine impresario Luca Casimiro degli Albizzi and Carlo ‘Farinelli’ Broschi’s correspondence with the Bolognese Count Sicinio Pepoli.

Sommer-Mathis’s second and third contributions further the momentum with a thorough analysis of the theatre’s surviving librettos. One offers a very useful catalogue – the equivalent of Claudio Sartori’s *I libretti italiani a stampa dalle origini al 1800: catalogo analitico con 16 indici* (Cueno: Bertola e Locatelli, 1991) – of all of these 150 Italian and German operas, comedies and parodies, each of which is listed together with a transcription of the original title-page, date of premiere, synopsis, cast, list of stage sets and ballets, and information about provenance, printing format, authorship and sources. Sommer-Mathis’s other contribution considers the opera texts in more detail, providing an additional wealth of primary source material, with expert commentary, and so readying the topic for future research.

The next three chapters deal with more microscopic – though not unimportant – aspects of the Kärntnertor. Livio Marcaletti analyses the German libretto translations made by the lawyer, actor and playwright Heinrich Rademin (1674–1731). He concludes that Rademin’s renderings present a reader-oriented (as opposed to singer-oriented) version of each drama in achieving a flexible compromise between the metrical and semantic features of the Italian (mostly Metastasian) source text. Jana Perutková, who has already published excellent articles on the librettos and scores for the Kärntnertor located in the Moravian castle library of Count Johann Adam von Questenberg, contributes a chapter on four German-language operas that were premiered in 1741: *Die glückliche Vorbedeutung* by Ignazio Conti and Johann Leold von Ghelen after Pietro Metastasio’s *Demetrio*; the anonymous *Aristheus*; *Hypermmestra* by Ignaz Holzbauer and Ghelen after Antonio Salvi’s *Ipermestra*; and *Hypsipile*, possibly by Conti and Ghelen after Metastasio’s *Issipile*. The four works represent an intriguing case of early serious German opera. A rather lean chapter by Herbert Seifert compares the repertoire and personnel of the Kärntnertor as of 1737–1744 with that of the itinerant troupe of Angelo and Pietro Mingotti and speculates on possible visiting performances by the latter ensemble.

More convincing is Strohm's chapter on the repertory of the Kärntnertor's Italian opera between 1728 and 1748, which advances a wealth of fresh information on obscure resident composers Johann Ignaz Beyer (died 1758), Anton Phuniak (1682–1771), Franz Joseph Carl Pirker (1700–1786) and Francesco Rinaldi (flourished 1730–1732), who Strohm suspects to be Pirker. Strohm likewise provides helpful information on local masters Antonio Bioni and Ignazio Conti, on the debuts of Sammartini, Bernasconi, Holzbauer, Carcani and Wagenseil, as well as on the better-known masters Handel, Vinci, Hasse and Vivaldi, who died in the Kärntnertor neighbourhood in 1741. Painstakingly correlating single arias to hypothetical sources, the author argues that roughly three quarters of all performed works were pasticcios, compiled out of older arias already present in the theatre's library or 'suitcase arias' that belonged not to singers, but rather to composer-arrangers. Additional sections in Strohm's cornucopian chapter deal with operatic parodies (*musica bernesca*), ballets and singers.

The book is rounded out by two essays by Herbert Seifert and Judit Zsovár, the first of which seeks to explain the fate of Giovanni Battista Sammartini's *Memette* – one of eleven full scores associated with the Kärntnertor, though it was extended for a later staging in Milan. Judit Zsovár's essay sketches a vocal-biographical portrait of the soprano Maria Camati, who, at the Kärntnertor, revived several arias from Farinelli's portfolio.

Of course, additional essays would have been welcomed, for example on patrons and printers of librettos, or on the relationship of the Kärntnertor to any equivalent international venue. It seems, however, that the present, voluminous book has already more than adequately exhausted the surviving (and limited) primary source material. In keeping with earlier volumes in Hollitzer's prestigious 'Specula Spectacula' series, *Das Wiener Kärntnertortheater 1728–1748* is beautifully designed and richly illustrated in colour, with appendices listing the sources of all illustrations, a bibliography and indices for historical figures, places and titles of works. This particularly solid volume will doubtlessly provide a lasting contribution to the secondary literature on Viennese opera in the first half of the eighteenth century.

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