



COMMUNICATION: CONFERENCE REPORT

W. A. Mozart's Opera Fragments: Then and Now

Uppsala universitet, 5–7 September 2024

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The historic Swedish town of Uppsala was buzzing with traditional festivities marking the start of the academic year, further spurred on by an unseasonal heatwave. Against this backdrop, the University hosted a cross-disciplinary event, bringing together academics and performers dedicated to exploring Mozart's unfinished operatic works *L'oca del Cairo* and *Lo sposo deluso* and the contexts of their creation. The main organizer of this practice-based workshop and discussion forum was Karina Zybina (Uppsala universitet). Her research project COIN (Complete Incompleteness: The Posthumous Histories of Mozart's Opera Fragments) has been hosted at the Department of Musicology since July 2023.

In the introductory session at Carolina Rediviva, Uppsala University's library, Zybina provided an overview of the conference programme and a history of the fragmented operas that had brought attendees together, discussing how they had been revived on earlier occasions, and how each reconstruction in various ways merged past and present. The conference description had already set the stage enticingly by revisiting how, in 1782, Mozart was commissioned to compose an opera for an Italian troupe in Vienna. Although he began two projects with enthusiasm, he soon lost interest, remarking to his father in 1784 that his music 'liegt und schläft gut' (is sleeping well) (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, letter of 10 February 1784, in *Digitale Mozart-Edition Briefe und Dokumente*, <https://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/> (26 September 2024)).

Next was a tour of the library, showcasing select parts of the impressive collection of historical materials that were relevant to the workshop theme and complemented the exploration of Mozart's opera fragments. Many of these resources have been digitized and are available on Alvin (www.alvin-portal.org), an online platform providing global access to collections from libraries, archives and museums in Sweden and Norway.

Alongside the conference, a music-theatre workshop directed by tenor Ziad Nehme featured four students from the Royal College of Music in Stockholm – Eveliina Ainsalo, Svante Gustafsson, Liv Nyberg and Maja Peining – accompanied by pianist Emily Liu. Together they created a new pasticcio from Mozart's unfinished operatic works. This practice-based approach also characterized much of the conference, which included numerous workshop exercises and projects grounded in similar types of research.

A few presentations focused specifically on Mozart's fragments and the context of their composition. Bertil van Boer (Western Washington University) provided the historical backdrop, exploring the gap between Mozart's early successes and later Viennese triumphs, and examining why several operatic projects from this period remained incomplete. Van Boer suggested that these works may not have aligned with popular taste or may have been victims of circumstance, yet they still played a role in Mozart's musical development.

Nathan Martin (University of Michigan) focused on the relationship between Italian prosody and musical phrasing in Mozart's operas, analysing examples from *Lo sposo* and *L'oca*. He stressed

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that the setting of Italian verse requires alignment between speech accents and musical metre. Martin revealed a pattern of metrical regularity in Mozart's operas whereby singers cut across the strong beats provided by the accompaniment, creating interlocking rhythmic groupings. Focusing on the archetype of the libertine, Mateusz Kawa (Universität Mozarteum Salzburg) analysed Mozart's aria 'Dove mai trovar quel ciglio' from *Lo sposo*, comparing it to 'Madamina' from *Don Giovanni*. He ventured a distinction between what might be considered a sketch – essentially a few nearly complete bars suggesting the full texture of a piece – and a fragment – a (more or less) complete melody lacking (almost) all accompaniment.

Also focusing on Mozartean opera but not specifically the two fragments, Simon P. Keefe (University of Sheffield) reassessed the nineteenth-century reception of *Così fan tutte*, challenging the notion that it was uniformly negative. He unearthed a rich and varied reception, including positive and creative responses in literature and music. Keefe argued that understanding these diverse reactions provides new insights into Mozart's cultural impact and emphasizes his enduring significance. Metoda Kokole (Znanstvenoraziskovalni center Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti (ZRC SAZU)) illustrated how Mozart's opera arias were adapted in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for various settings, including salons, churches and theatres. Focusing on the regions that are now part of Slovenia, Kokole discussed instrumental arrangements, sacred contrafacta with Latin texts and new compositions inspired by Mozart's works. Notably, she showed how the 'Madamina' text had been replaced with 'O quam suavis est Domine, spiritus tuus'.

Shifting focus beyond Mozart, Thomas Betzwieser (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main) explored the genre of the pasticcio. Despite being somewhat neglected in opera scholarship on account of its complex relationship with the concept of the original artwork, the pasticcio has recently gained renewed interest with the growing emphasis on hybridity and intertextuality. Using Gérard Genette's concept of transtextuality (Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982)) as theoretical framework, Betzwieser analysed examples from across Europe, including Da Ponte's *L'ape musicale* (1789).

Surveying the golden age of Italian opera buffa in Vienna before the premiere of *Le nozze di Figaro*, Ingrid Schraffl (Alban Berg Gesamtausgabe) offered new insights into the repertoire and its reception. Building on her work systematizing performance data (see 'Italian Opera in Vienna in the 1770s: Repertoire and Reception – Data and Facts', *Musicologica austriaca: Journal for Austrian Music Studies* (26 June 2020) <https://phaidra.univie.ac.at/detail/o:1617176>), Schraffl discussed how operas imported from Venice and Rome were adapted for Vienna, often with significant modifications to suit local tastes. This contextualization illuminated the challenges Mozart faced in composing Italian opera in Vienna and could explain why some works remained unfinished. In a related paper, Livio Marcaletti (Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien) examined libretto translations in Mozart's Vienna, focusing on versions for reading as well as versions for singing. Using the case studies of *Giulio Sabino* (1781) by Giuseppe Sarti and *I filosofi immaginari* (1779) by Giovanni Paisiello, he outlined the linguistic and cultural characteristics of translations at the time. He emphasized the importance of understanding librettos as multimodal texts, integrating staging and music, for a full appreciation of their adaptation and performance.

Some presentations, while not focused on Mozart or Vienna, provided methodological and contextual insights relevant to the overall discussion of the Mozart fragments. Magnus Tessing Schneider (Göteborgs universitet) gave a preview of his forthcoming project on Ranieri Calzabigi, concentrating on the opera *Cook o sia Gl'inglesi in Othaiti* (1785). The libretto, based on James Cook's voyages to Tahiti and probably written by Calzabigi, features contemporary historical figures and examines the encounter between Europeans and Pacific Islanders. Tessing Schneider highlighted the opera's layers of parody and intertextuality, noting how it encourages critical reflection on colonial themes by subverting traditional portrayals of heroism and villainy.

Emma Sohlgren (Uppsala universitet) discussed *Syrinx* (1747), often regarded as the first Swedish opera. However, *Thetis och Pelée* (1773), by Francesco Uttini and Johan Wellander, later

took this title, as it was through-composed, unlike *Syrinx*, which was assembled from music by composers such as Telemann and Graun. Sohlgren stressed the challenges in defining *Syrinx* within the world of eighteenth-century opera, suggesting that its classification as a pasticcio – though not a term used at the time – would more accurately reflect its nature and historical importance.

Similarly, I (Peter Koch Gehlshøj, Københavns Universitet) presented research on Scandinavian music theatre, focusing on how political conflicts and gender roles were negotiated in eighteenth-century Copenhagen. Building on a workshop collaboration between the Royal Danish Academy of Music and the University of Copenhagen, I analysed an aria from the singspiel *Chinafarerne* (1792) by Claus Schall and Peter Andreas Heiberg. I explained how we tested whether soprano Catharine Bertelsen, who originally performed the aria, could have exerted a fundamentally different onstage presence through her virtuoso vocal performance, compared to the portrayal of her character as weak in Heiberg's libretto.

These presentations sparked broader discussions on music-theatre genres that incorporate spoken dialogue. Terms such as singspiel, opéra-comique and ballad opera not only travelled and were translated but also acquired different meanings across various contexts and periods, not least in Scandinavia. This has led to significant ambiguity and a need for context-specific definitions. Interestingly, Betzwieser, along with Carl Dahlhaus and Norbert Miller, has proposed the term *Dialog-Oper* to encompass all genres that blend spoken dialogue with operatic musical theatre. (See Thomas Betzwieser, *Sprechen und Singen: Ästhetik und Erscheinungsformen der Dialogoper* (Stuttgart: Springer, 2002) and Carl Dahlhaus and Norbert Miller, *Europäische Romantik in der Musik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999).) While not widely adopted, this term offers a comprehensive concept that can even accommodate hybridization of comic, sentimental and serious themes.

Several sessions adopted a practical approach. For instance, Anders Muskens (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen) and João Luís Veloso Paixão (Universiteit van Amsterdam) presented a musical pantomime based on Georg Vogler's *Hamlet* (1778), demonstrating how music can be aligned with theatrical gestures. Their lecture showcased music as a 'language of the passions' and included experiments in creating a pantomimic score. Mark Tatlow (Göteborgs universitet) discussed his role in creating *Georgiana* (2019), an eighteenth-century pasticcio opera, explaining the process of assembling music from different composers and the relevance of pasticcio in renewing the vitality of music theatre.

In another collaborative session, Martin guided us through completing an aria from *L'oca*, while Zybina interviewed tenor Gustafsson about the workshop experience. Caryl Clark (University of Toronto), in her session, proposed a classroom exercise to imagine a mash-up of Mozart's *Lo sposo* and Haydn's *La fedeltà premiata* (1781). We collaborated in groups to reinterpret characters and music fragments, agreeing that such experiments could be both educational and enjoyable.

Altogether, this conference-workshop reflected a growing trend towards practice-based research in music theatre, perhaps particularly evident in Scandinavia. This trend is exemplified by the recently concluded Swedish project 'Performing Premodernity', which focused on late eighteenth-century theatre and opera, with contributions from, among others, Paixão, Tatlow and Tessing Schneider (Magnus Tessing Schneider and Meike Wagner, eds, *Performing the Eighteenth Century: Theatrical Discourses, Practices, and Artefacts* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2023)). Integrating historiographical research with contemporary performance practices offers exciting opportunities, deepening our understanding of historical artworks and contexts. The combination of practical experimentation with scholarly enquiry can enrich our appreciation of ephemeral artforms and their relevance to both past and present.

Peter Koch Gehlshøj is a doctoral student at Københavns Universitet. He has a background in musicology, urban studies and alternative theatre practices. Currently he is part of the research project 'Voices, Places and Quarrels', which is focused on music theatre in eighteenth-century Copenhagen and combines conventional historiographical methodologies with practice-based and experimental approaches to the performing arts.