The Jubilee of the 'Magic Flute'

Author(s): F. Erckmann

Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 62, No. 945 (Nov. 1, 1921), pp. 766-767

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/908954>

Accessed: 02-01-2016 01:42 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Musical Times Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Speaking of the periodical in question—*Musical Opinion*—‘A. J. S.’ says:

I suppose its complete independence involves a considerable widening of its standards, and it is anyhow to the credit of the paper that its editorial columns make no concession to its advertisement pages.

If ‘A. J. S.’ wishes to test this latter point we advise him to send to the editor a denunciatory review of a work advertised in the pages referred to. Of course his denunciations would be declined, or would be watered down. And why not? The advertisers in a journal are its customers. Every business man, from the coster on the kerb to Mr. Selfridge in his Bargain Basement, lives by favour of his clients, and would think twice before offending them. Why should we expect the publisher of a musical journal with space to sell by the inch to be more foolhardy than any other business man? Works for review sent by an advertiser can be judged with frankness only if they are first-rate. The feeble ones must be passed over or dealt with discreetly. There must be some ‘concession,’ however slight, just as there must be give and take in all business relations. The journal ‘A. J. S.’ so highly praises has every virtue he claims but one—‘complete independence.’ As this virtue is possessed by no other musical journal in this country (or in any other, so far as we can discover), we are sure its proprietors will not mind the fact being pointed out.

In this connection we note that Mr. Percy Scholes, in the current issue of the *Music Student*, speaks of that paper as being ‘financially independent.’ But as the *Music Student* is owned by a firm of educational and musical publishers, and as thirty of its sixty pages are devoted to advertisements, we fail to see where ‘independence’ of any kind comes in. Again we do not imply that the magazine is any the worse for that; we merely want to blow away the foggy views that hang around this question. The plain, brutal fact is, that under present conditions a musical journal cannot exist without the backing of a powerful publishing firm, or of an institution or group of institutions.

How little this fact need interfere with its breadth of outlook is easily proved. The *Musical Times*, the *Musical News and Herald*, the *Sackbut*, the *Musical Standard*, the *Monthly Musical Record*, the *Choir*, and *Fanfare* are all owned by music publishers. Yet, to quote Mr. Edwin Evans’ article again, ‘there is scarcely one that can be regarded, in the narrow sense, as a house organ.’ A reader may as a rule go through their pages without being aware of the fact that they are owned by music publishers. As to our own policy in this respect, we hope we may be forgiven for quoting once more the testimony of Mr. Ernest Newman, especially as it applies also to some of our contemporaries. In the *Observer* of May 18, 1919, he said:

Except that they have naturally wished to make their papers as sound business propositions as possible . . . the owners of the present musical journals do not come

any more than the owners of any literary or political journal do under the reproach of betraying a trust for money. When has the fact that the *Musical Times*, for example, belongs to Messrs. Novello & Co. stood in the way of free discussion in its columns of most subjects under the sun? I say most subjects, because one is naturally barred. No man in his senses would expect Messrs. Novello & Co. to allow the *Musical Times* to be used for *disparaging* their own publications, any more than we should expect the *Daily News* to print articles against cocoa, or the *Tablet* articles against religion. Messrs. Novello have used their journal singularly little to push their own publications, while the paper has afforded a free platform for every musician who has had anything to say that was worth saying. The wares of other publishers have had much more space allotted to them in the editorial columns of the *Musical Times* than the wares of Messrs. Novello have.

If ‘A. J. S.’ wants a more generous measure of independence than that credited to us by his predecessor on the *Birmingham Post*, we fear he will have to wait a long, long while for it.

One other point. Mr. Scholes thinks there are too many musical journals. He says that ‘the proper policy at present is not to bring into existence new musical papers, but to combine, consolidate, and improve those that already exist.’ We do not agree. In this, as in most other things, what is wanted is not combination, but competition, fierce but friendly. Only in that way can improvement come. ‘Combine’ sounds good—a variant of ‘Union is strength.’ But how it is liable to work out in practice is well shown by the recent combination of the *Music Student* and the *Musician*. The latter has had an experience similar to that of the young lady who went for a ride on a tiger:

They returned from the ride
With the lady inside . . .

At all events, we see no trace of the *Musician* since it went for a ride with the *Music Student*.

THE JUBILEE OF THE ‘MAGIC FLUTE’

SEPTEMBER 30, 1921

A hundred and thirty years have elapsed since the first performance of ‘Die Zauberflöte,’ and still Mozart’s masterwork stands in ‘splendid isolation,’ solitary and misunderstood. Its glorious melodies raise the enthusiasm of listeners: its golden humour rejoices the hearts of men. But who can say: ‘I have grasped the hidden meaning of the work’? While acknowledging the great value of the music, men have ever declared the text a piece of nonsense, and this opinion has become tradition. Is it possible that the great Mozart could have written such divine music to a silly fairy-tale?

Let us briefly examine the history of the libretto. The full meaning of the masterworks of the German classics—of Lessing, Wieland, Herder, Goethe—cannot be grasped without the admission of the influence of Freemasonry, with its purely human character, embracing the civilised world during the second half of the 18th century. Yet nowhere are the masonic ideas expressed more powerfully and

more artistically than in the 'Magic Flute.' Mozart was a member of the oldest Lodge, 'Zur gekrönten Hoffnung,' at Vienna. No egotism had caused him to become a Freemason, but real humanity, the wish to help others. He composed masonic songs, choruses, and cantatas, which are, as it were, preparatory studies to the 'Magic Flute.' When Schikaneder (1751-1812), an actor, theatrical manager, and a friend of Mozart, first broached the subject of the 'Magic Flute,' he did not mean to suggest a Masonic opera. The subject was taken from Wieland's 'Dschinnistan,' a collection of fairy-tales (vol. iii.), and the first Act was written when he heard that two other operas on the same subject, with music by Wenzel Müller, were about to be produced. This caused him to alter the character of the story altogether. It has been suggested that Karl Ludwig Gieseke, a member of Schikaneder's theatrical company, who had written several successful plays, was the author of the 'Magic Flute.' Gieseke was a member of Mozart's Masonic Lodge, and he had actually worked at the plot of the 'Magic Flute' from a Mason's point of view; but it has been definitely proved by Komorzynski* that he did not possess the poetic gift to write the text to Mozart's opera. Doubtless he had a share in the work, since it can now be shown that Schikaneder himself was a Freemason and a member of the Lodge 'Die Wachsende zu den drei Schlüsseln' at Regensburg.† Up till 1790 Freemasonry was in a flourishing condition. All the leading men in literature, art, and politics, including the Emperor Joseph II., were Freemasons. After the year 1790 the Roman Catholic Church began furiously to attack the Order. Under Leopold II. (1790-92) the patronage of the nobility was withdrawn, and Freemasonry seemed to require an apology. It will never be ascertained whether Schikaneder himself evolved the happy thought of placing his subject under the waning star of the Masonic Order, or whether other factors were instrumental in this respect. Doubtless Mozart, himself an enthusiastic Freemason, caused Schikaneder to give the fairy-tale of Wieland a deeper significance. He watched over the plot and its symbolism, giving Masonic ideas a pronounced expression, and leaving the technical part to the experienced Schikaneder. Thus the text to the 'Zauberflöte' is a mottled work. Schikaneder did not take the trouble of revising the first Act according to the suggestions of Mozart and Gieseke. Hence there is a break in the characterisation of the persons, who in the second part are developed in quite a different manner from what had been planned in the fairy-tale-like first Act. Yet there is no cause to criticise too severely. The knowledge of the damage is its own correction, for Mozart has with his sublimely uniform artistic music supplied that which is wanted. The music becomes a means of inspiring the highest ideals of man; it lays bare the deeper meaning of the somewhat superficial lines; it takes away the commonplace character and reveals the harmony of truth and love.

'Die Zauberflöte' was first performed on September 30, 1791, in the theatre 'Auf der Wieden,' without great success, and the authors were much disappointed. The audience did not under-

stand the significance of the work. A Berlin report of October 9 says:

The new machine comedy, 'Die Zauberflöte,' with music by our Kapellmeister Mozart, which was given at great cost and much scenic splendour, did not achieve the desired success because the plot and language of the piece are too bad.

Nevertheless Schikaneder gave the opera again and again. Within twelve months he could book the hundredth performance, after a lapse of four years the two hundredth, and the 'Magic Flute' pursued its triumphant course.

Schikaneder has been accused of having treated Mozart shamefully by printing and selling abroad the score of the 'Magic Flute.' When Mozart died (1791) the opera was hardly known in Germany. He could not, therefore, have called Schikaneder a rascal, nor accused him of reaping great profit out of the joint work. Probably Schikaneder thought that with Mozart's death he had no obligations towards the family. Frau Mozart, and Nissen, her second husband, naturally made a great hubbub, and the many enemies of Schikaneder are responsible for this fable of his knavery.

Although the success of the 'Magic Flute' was assured, the opera could not save Freemasonry in Austria. The Emperor Francis II., himself an enemy of the Order, closed in 1795 all Austrian Lodges. Mozart did not live to see the effect of these drastic measures. He had died not knowing that his masterwork was destined to bestow the laurel wreath of the martyr upon Freemasonry.

F. ERCKMANN.

SOME ITALIAN COMPOSERS OF TO-DAY

By GUIDO M. GATTI

VIII.—VINCENZO TOMMASINI

During the first ten years of this century there were to be found at Rome some composers—all from the Santa Cecilia school of composition—who may be triumphantly produced as arguments against the faded legend of the ignorance of Italian musicians—ignorance that is, of those things not strictly belonging to their art. This accusation is now, we repeat, absolutely unfounded; not so was it, alas! in the 19th century, when composers hardly realised the distance in poetical, human, and literary values that lies between a drama of, say, Shakespeare and a play by Scribe, Legouv, or Sardou. And of this ignorance there is no lack of examples in Italy and perhaps also in other countries.

The Roman composers of whom I speak were intimately acquainted with the secrets of art, considered as the expression of beauty, and had a good knowledge of general literature, the plastic arts, and philosophy—or at least so much philosophy as is strictly necessary for the right understanding of artistic matters.

Three of their number have interested us particularly, viz., Domenico Alaleona, Vittorio Gui, and Vincenzo Tommasini. They are about the same age, and, although possessing different temperaments and aims, have spent some years in the same surroundings. I will speak of the first in a future article; to the second, reference has already been made in a hasty sketch in the October number of the *Musical Times*; the present chapter is devoted to Vincenzo Tommasini, whose name should not be quite unknown in England—at least not to those who have followed the performances of the Russian Ballet.

* Emanuel Schikaneder. 'Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Theaters.' (Berlin, 1901.)

† Beyer. 'Schikaneder und seine Beziehungen zum Freimaurerbunde.' (Bayreuth, 1912.)