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About this Title

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Translator's Note

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APROPOS of sundry experiences, it has struck me how little the audience at opera-performances was acquainted with the matter of the plot. High-classic operas, like "Don Juan" and "Figaro's Hochzeit," came out of it very well with uncorrupted youthful hearers, especially of the female sex, protecting them from any knowledge of the frivolities in the text—a thing which guardians and teachers may probably have counted on when they expressly commended those works to their pupils as a model of pure taste. That the happenings in "Robert the Devil" and the "Huguenots" were intelligible to none but the inmost circle of initiates, had much in its favour; but that the "Freischütz" too should remain in shadow, as I lately discovered, amazed me till a little thought convinced me that, although I had conducted this opera any number of times in the orchestra, I myself was still quite hazy as to many a passage in the text. Some laid the blame on our singers' indistinctness of delivery; when I objected that in dialogic operas such as "Freischütz," "Zauberflöte," ay, and our German translations of "Don Juan" and "Figaro," everything that explains the action is simply spoken, I was reminded that the singers of our day speak indistinctly too, and also that, for this very reason perhaps, the dialogue is abridged to unintelligibility. Nay, that here one passed from bad to worse; for with operas "composed throughout" one at least could arrive at sufficient understanding of the scenic action by assistance of the textbook, whereas in "aria-books" of dialogic operas such an aid was not forthcoming.—I have remarked that for the most part the German audience learns nothing at all of what the poet really meant with his libretto; often enough, not even the composer appears to know. With the French it is otherwise: there the first question is as to the "pièce"; the play must be entertaining [152] in and for itself, save perhaps with the lofty genre of "Grand Opera," where Ballet has to provide the fun. The texts of Italian operas, on the other hand, are fairly trivial as a rule, the virtuoso-doings of the singer appearing to be the main concern; yet the Italian singer cannot rise to the level of his task without a remarkably drastic enunciation, quite indispensable to his vocal phrasing, and we do the Italian operatic genre a great injustice when we slur the text of arias in our German reproduction. Mechanical as is the Italian type of operatic composition, I still have found that it all will have a better effect when the text is understood than when it isn't, since a knowledge of the situation and exact emotion will advantageously ward off the effect of monotony in the musical expression. Only with Rossini's "Semiramide" was even this acquaintance of no help to me; Reissiger's "Dido abandonata," which earned its composer the favour of a Saxon monarch, I do not know—any more than F. Hiller's "Romilda."

According to the above observations one might simply attribute the German public's love of opera-performances to its pleasure in hearing the separate 'numbers,' as purely melodic entities per se. Now, the Italians long ago attained great skill in manufacturing such pieces, so that it was very late before the German composer dared to vie with them. When Mozart had to compose the "Zauberflöte" he was worried by a doubt if he would do it right, as he "had composed no magic operas before." With what aplomb, on the contrary, he treated "le nozze di Figaro": on the set foundation of Italian opera buffa he reared a building of such perfect symmetry, that he well might decline to sacrifice a single note to his cut-demanding Kaiser. What the Italian threw in as banal links and interludes between the 'numbers' proper, Mozart here drastically employed to animate the situation, in striking harmony with just this exceptionally finished comedy-text that lay before him. As in the Symphony of Beethoven the very pause grows eloquent, so here the noisy half-closes and cadences which might well have held aloof from the [153] Mozaritan Symphony give a quite irreplaceable life to the scenic action, where craft and presence of mind fight—lovelessly I—with passion and brutality.
Here the dialogue becomes all music, whilst the music converses; a thing that certainly was only possible through the master's developing the orchestra to such a pitch as never before, and perhaps to this day, had been dreamt of. On the other hand the earlier isolated pieces became thereby fused into what appeared so complete a work of musics that the admirable comedy on which it stood might finally be altogether overlooked, and nothing heard but music. So it seemed to our musicians; and Mozart's "Figaro" was given more carelessly and indistinctly day by day, till at last we have dropped to a mode of performing this work itself that leaves our teachers no scruple about sending their pupils to the theatre on Figaro nights.

We will not discuss again to-day the effect of these instances of public vandalism on the German's sensibility to the genuine and correct; but it cannot be unimportant to note their misleading influence on the drafts and finished products of our operatic poets and composers. Forsaking all their native field, they first must seek an entrance to the ready-made Italian Opera; which could only lead to the nearest possible imitation of the Italian "cabaletta," with the abandonment of every broader mode of musical conception. Upon due "rhyme and reason" of the whole no weight was to be laid: had it done any harm to the "Zauberflöte," composed for a German text and spoken with German dialogue, that the villain was suddenly changed to a hero, the originally good woman to a bad one, making utter nonsense of what had happened in the first act? Only, it fell hard to the German genius to master the Italian "cabaletta." Even Weber in his earliest youth still tried in vain to make something of the "coloratura" aria, and it needed the heart-stirring years of the War of Liberation to set the singer of Körner's lays on his own feet. What we Germans received with the "Freischütz," has fallen to few nations' lot.

Yet we are not about to trace the historic evolution of German Opera—which I have already discussed at length elsewhere—but rather to explain the peculiar difficulty of that evolution by this Opera's fundamental faults. The chief of these I find in the criminal vagueness that has disfigured all our opera-performances from the beginning to this day, as I stated from personal experience in my prefatory words, and whose cause—the librettist's and composer's involuntarily accustomed standard for the degree of plainness needful to an operatic story—has been touched on in the previous paragraphs. The so-called "Tragédie lyrique," which reached the German from abroad, remained indifferent and unintelligible to him so long as the "Aria" did not take his fancy by its marked melodic structure. This Aria form of melody passed over into German Opera as the sole aim and end of the composer, and necessarily also of the poet. The latter felt that he might take his ease in the text for an aria, as the composer had his own musical scheme of extension, interchange and repetition of themes, and needed an entirely free hand with the words, which he would repeat at pleasure either as a whole or in part. Long lines could only hamper the composer, whilst a strophe of about four lines was ample measure for one section of an aria. The verbal repetitions necessary to fill out the melody, conceived quite apart from the verse, even gave the composer opportunity for pleasant variations of the so-called "declamation" through a shifting of accents. In Winter's "Opferfest" we find this rule observed throughout: there the "Inka," for instance, sings one after the other:

Mein Leben hab' ich ihm zu danken—
mein Leben hab' ich ihm zu danken;

and repeats a question in the form of answer:

Muss nicht der Mensch auch menschlich sein?—
Der Mensch muss menschlich sein.

Marschner once had the grave misfortune, in his "Adolf" von Nassau," to triplicate
the part of speech "hat sie" ("has she") on a particularly incisive rhythmic accent:

![Musical notation]

Even Weber could not avoid the temptation to vary the accent: his "Euryanthe" sings: "Was ist mein Leben gegen diesen Augenblick," and repeats it as: "Was ist mein Leben gegen diesen Augenblick"! This sort of thing leads the hearer away from any serious following of the words, without affording adequate compensation in the purely musical phrase itself; for in most cases it is a mere question of musico-rhetorical flourishes, such as shew out the naivest in Rossini's eternal "Felicitä"s.

It seems, however, that it was not solely a delight in free command of flourishes, that prompted the composer to his arbitrary dealings with morsels of the text; no, the whole relation of our imaginary Verse to the truthfulness of musical Accent placed the composer from the first in the alternative of either declaiming the text in strict accordance with the accent of daily speech and common sense, which would have resolved the verse with all its rhymes into naked prose; or, regardless of that accent, completely subjecting the words to certain dance-schemes, and giving free rein to melodic invention. The results of this latter method were far less disturbing, or even destructive, with the Italians and French than with ourselves, because their speaking-accent is incomparably more accommodating and, in particular, not bound to the root-syllable; wherefore also, they do not weigh the feet in their metres, but simply count them. Through our bad translations of their texts, however, we had acquired from them that peculiar operatic jargon in which we now thought fit, and even requisite, to declaim our German lines themselves. Conscientious composers were certainly disgusted at last with this frivolous maltreatment of our tongue: but it never yet struck them that even the verse of our first-class [156] poets was no true, no melody-begetting verse, but a mere elaborate sham. Weber declared it his duty to faithfully reproduce the text, yet admitted that, were he always to do so, he must say goodbye to his melody. In fact it was just this upright endeavouer of Weber's to preserve the set divisions of the verse-text and thereby make the thought intelligible, which, coupled with his adherence to a melodic pattern for the resulting incongruences, led to that indistinctness whereof I promised an example from my experience. This occurs in Max's Arioso in the "Freischütz": "Durch die Wälder, durch die Auen." Here the poet had committed the egregious blunder of furnishing the composer with the following verse:

"Abends bracht' ich reiche Beute,  
Und wie über eig'nes Glück—  
Drohend wohl dem Mörder—freute  
Sich Agathe's Liebesblick."

Now, Weber really takes the trouble to phrase these lines in strict accordance with their sense and sequence: he therefore makes a break after the parenthesis "drohend wohl dem Mörder," and begins the closing line with "freute"; but as that makes the line much longer, he feels obliged to employ the verb—so important for a connection with the second line—as a preliminary 'arsis' (Auftakt); whereas the pronoun "sich," merely introduced to supplement the verb, receives the stronger accent of the following beat. This certainly has resulted in an entrancing strain of melody:

![Musical notation]
Not only is the poet's verse as such, however, revealed as an absurdity, but, for all the distinctness of its musical phrasing, the sense has become so hard of understanding that, accustomed to merely hear it sung, it was only after this unintelligibility had one day struck me, that I discovered the true connection of ideas. A similar difficulty arises in further course of the same aria through the favourite poetic trick of dissociating words for sake of rhyme; and here the composer unfortunately makes things worse by repeating the parenthesis:

"Wenn sich rauschend Blätter regen,
Wähnt sie wohl, es sei mein Fuss,
Hüpft vor Freuden, winkt entgegen—
Nur dem Laub—nur dem Laub—den Liebesgruss."

Moreover "Fuss" and "Liebesgruss" are here intended to rhyme. The first time Weber accentuates thus:

\[
\text{Liebesgruss.}
\]

the second time thus:

\[
\text{Liebesgruss.}
\]

where the wrongful accent gives the rhyme, but the right discloses that these words do not rhyme. And so we have a flagrant instance of the utter folly of our whole literary scheme of Verse, which wellnigh always rests on end-rhymed lines, though it is only in the finest verses of our greatest and best-reputed poets that the rhyme, through being genuine, has a determinant effect. Nor has this genuineness or spuriousness much troubled our German composers heretofore; rhyme to them was rhyme, and they paired off their last syllables in true street-minstrel fashion. A striking example is offered by Naumann's melody, so popular at one time, to Schiller's Ode to Joy: [158]

\[
\text{Freude, schöner Götterfunken,}
\text{Wir betreten feuertrunken,}
\text{Tochter aus Elysium,}
\text{Himmelsche, dein Heiligtum.}
\]

Now take Beethoven, the Truthful:

\[
\text{Freude, schöner Götterfunken,}
\text{Wir betreten feuertrunken,}
\text{Tochter aus Elysium,}
\text{Himmelsche, dein Heiligtum.}
\]
For sake of the imaginary rhyme, Naumann put the verse's accents all awry: Beethoven gave the proper accent, and, doing so, revealed the fact that in German compound words it falls on the first component, so that the hinder section, bearing the weaker accent, cannot be used for rhyme; if the poet does not hold by this, the rhyme is only present to the eye, a literature-rhyme: to the ear, and thus to both the feeling and a vital understanding, it vanishes away. And what a pother this wretched rhyme creates in all musical composition to verbal texts: twisting and disfiguring the phrases into utter gibberish, to be not so much as noticed in the end! In Kaspar's great aria I lately searched for a prior rhyme to correspond with the last line, "Triumph, die Rache gelingt," as I had never heard it in the singing, and therefore thought that Weber must have added this clause on his own authority: however, I succeeded in finding "im Dunkel beschwängt," which, hastily strewn between "umgebt ihn, ihr Geister" and "schon trägt er knirschend eure Ketten," without any musical caesura, had never struck me as a rhyme before. In truth, what use had the composer for this rhyme, when he merely wanted words, eh! syllables, to give the singer his share in a tempestuous musical phrase that properly belongs to the character istic orchestral accompaniment alone?

I believe this example, which I only hit upon at random, will afford the easiest introduction to a further inquiry into the mysteries of operatic melody. The meagre doggerel verse, often built of simply empty phrases; the verse whose sole affinity to music, its rhyme, destroyed the words' last shred of meaning, and thereby made its best conceits quite valueless to the musician—this verse compelled him to take the pattern and working-out of characteristic melodic motives from a province of music which had thitherto developed in the orchestral accompaniment to a lingua franca of the instruments. Mozart had raised this symphonic accompaniment to such high expressiveness that, wherever consistent with dramatic naturalism, he could let the singers merely speak to it in musical accents, without disturbance of the rich melodic woof of themes or break in the musical flow. And herewith disappeared that violence towards the word-text; whatever in it did not call for vocal melody, was understandably intoned. Yet the incomparable dramatic talent of the glorious musician only perfectly accomplished this in so-called opera buffa, not to the same degree in opera seria. Here his followers were left with a great difficulty. They could see nothing for it, but to keep the utterance of passion invariably melodious; since the threadbare text gave them little help, and wilful repetition of its words had already made them deaf to any claims of the librettist, they finally set the [prose part of the] text itself, with just as many repetitions as the purpose needed, to melodic-looking phrases such as Mozart had originally assigned to his characterising orchestral accompaniment. In this wise they thought to give their singers always "melody" to sing; and to keep it in perpetual motion they often buried all the text, if there was rather too much of it, beneath such a mass of scales and runs, that neither song nor text could be discerned.—Whoever wants a fairly striking instance, let him study the Templar's great air in Marschner's "Templer und Jüdin"; say the allegro furioso from "mich fasst die Wuth" onwards, where the composition of the final verses is specially instructive: for in one breath, without the smallest pause, stream forth the words:

"Rache nur wolt' ich geniessen;  
Ihr allein mein Ohr nur leihend  
Trennt' ich mich von allen süßen,  
Zarten Banden der Natur,  
Mich dem Templerordenweihend."

Here the composer halts; for the poet's having tackled on a

"Bitt're Reue fand ich nur."

after the full-stop, just to make a rhyme for "Natur," seemed really too bad: only after two bars of interlude does Marschner allow this strange addendum to appear, of course in
breathless roulades as before. Thus the composer believed he had "melodised" everything, even the wickedest. Nor was it better with the elegiac-tender, whereof the same air of the Templar affords us evidence in its Andante (3/4): "in meines Lebens Blüthezeit"—the second verse, "einsam in das dunkle Grab," being sung in Ballad fashion to the exact tune of the first, saving for that elegance of melodic embellishment which has brought this genre of German vocal music to the verge of the ridiculous. The composer opined that the singer would always like "something to sing": the great bravura fireworks of the Italians did not go off quite briskly with the German; on "Rache" at most, did one feel it incumbent to risk a run up and run down. In the "Cantabile," on the contrary, one found those minor prettinesses, particularly the "Mordente" and its derivative grace-notes, which would shew one had one's taste as well. Spohr brought the agréments of his violin-solos into his singers' airs, and if the melody, apparently composed of these extras, turned out a nothing-saying weariness, at like time it strangled the verse that had been making signs of having something to say. With Marschner—beside the manifest traits of genius that occur so frequently (in that great Templar-air for instance) and now and then ascend to positive sublimity (for instance in the choruses introducing the second finale of the same opera)—we meet an almost preponderant mawkishness and an often astounding incorrectness, mostly due to the unfortunate delusion that things must always go "melodiously," i.e. must everywhere [161] be "tuney." My departed colleague Reissiger complained to me of the failure of his "Schiffbruch der Medusa," in which, as I myself must admit, there was "so much melody,"—which I had at like time to take as a bitter allusion to the success of my own operas, in which, you know, there was "so little melody."—

This wondrous Wealth-of-melody, which emptied its horn of plenty on the just and unjust, made good its squandered riches by an—alas! not always skilful—annexation of all the musical gew-gaws current in the world, mostly filched from French or Italian operas and huddled up pell-mell. Against Rossini there was many an outcry: yet it was merely his originality that vexed us; for as soon as Spohr's violin-solo was exhausted for the trimming of the "Cantabile," Rossini's march-and-ballet rhythms and melismi flocked into the freshening Allegro almost of themselves: nothing again, but yards of "melody." The overture to the "Felsenmühle" still lives at our garden-concerts and change-of-guards, though we hear no more the March from "Mosé"; in this case German patriotism, to the shade of Reissiger's great satisfaction, would seem to have gained the victory.

Yet it was not solely those ineffective importations of Italian and French melismatic and rhythmic nick-nacks, that feathered German operatic melody, but the sublime and hearty further taxed the four-part male chorus so passionately practised since the last half-century. Spontini attended a performance of Mendelssohn's "Antigone" in Dresden, against his will; he soon left it in contemptuous dudgeon: "c'est de la Berliner Liedertafel!" 'Tis a sad tale, the incursion of that miserably thin and monotonous beer-chant, even when raised to the rank of a Rhine-wine song, with which the Berlin composer of the opera "die Nibelungen" (1) himself could not dispense.—It was the genius of Weber that led the Opera into noble pathways of the National by introducing the German men's-chorus, to which he had given so splendid an impetus by his songs [162] of the War of Freedom. Its uncommon success moved the master to lend its character to the chorus that takes a dramatic part in the action: in his "Euryanthe" the dialogue of the principal characters is repeatedly arrested by the chorus, which unfortunately sings entirely in the strain of the four-part glee, by itself, unrelieved by any characteristic movement in the orchestra, almost as if these passages were intended to be cut out as they stand for the Liedertafel books. What here was most surely meant nobly, perhaps in opposition to the stereotyped employment of the Italian chorus to merely accompany the aria or ballet, led Weber's successors into that eternal nothing-saying "melodic" chorus-ing which, together with the aforesaid aria-tuning, makes out the entire substance of a German
opera. Whole breadths are covered by this "melodic" general-muster, without a single striking moment to tell us the cause of the unbroken drench of melody. For an example I return to the operas of that else so highly talented Marschner, and point to his so-called Ensembles, such as the *Andante con moto* (9/8) in the second finale of his *Templer*, "lässt den Schleier mir, ich bitte"; as also (for a model) the introduction to the first act of the same work, with special reference to the first strophe of the male chorus: "wir lagen dort im stillen Wald, der Zug muss hier vorbei, er ist nicht fern, er nahet bald und glaubt die Strasse frei," sung to a hunting-tune; and in further progress of the piece, the extraordinary melodising of the strictest dialogue by aid of unimaginable repetitions. Here dramatic melodists may learn how long a fair number of men can indulge in an 'aside' on the stage; naturally it can only be done through their standing in rows with their backs to the forest, and facing the audience—which in its turn pays no heed to a man of them, but patiently waits for the end of the general "melody."

To the intelligent spectator the spoken dialogue in such an opera often comes as a positive relief. On the other hand this very dialogue betrayed composers into the belief that the musical numbers embedded in the prose must always be of lyric kind; an assumption quite justified in the "Singspiel" proper, for there one only wanted vocal "Intermezzi," while the piece itself was recited in intelligible prose, just as in Comedy. Here, however, it was "Opera"; the vocal pieces lengthened out, arias changed places with concerted "Ensemble" numbers, and at last the "Finale," with all the text, was put at the musician's disposal. And these separate "numbers" must all be telling in themselves; their "melody" must never flag, and the closing phrase must be rousing, clamorous for applause. Already the music-dealer had been taken in eye: the more effective, or merely pleasing single pieces that one could extract, the more valuable the work to the trade. Even the pianoforte-score must begin with a table-of-contents cataloguing the numbers under the rubric of "Aria," "Duet," "Trio," "Drinking-song," and so on throughout the whole length of the opera. This continued when "Recitative" already had ousted the dialogue, and the whole had been given a certain show of musical cohesion. To be sure, these recitatives weren't much to speak of, and contributed no little to the ennui of the opera-genre; while "Nadori" in Spohr's *Jessonda,* for instance, delivered himself of the recitative: "still lag ich an des Sees Fluthen—

\[\text{\textbf{\textit{und las im Ve-da.}}}\]

one simply was all impatience for re-entry of the full orchestra with definite tempo and a set "melody," let it be put together ("composed") as it might. At end of these redeeming numbers one must be able to applaud, or things looked black and the number would have to be left out in time. In the "Finale," however, quite a little tempest of delirium must be caused; a kind of musical orgy was needed, to bring the act to a satisfying close: so "Ensemble" was sung; every man for himself, all for the audience; and a jubilant burst of melody with a soaring final cadence, appropriate or not, must waft the whole into due ecstasy. If this also fell flat, the thing had failed, and the opera was withdrawn.—

Coupling the above considerations with the utterly chaotic vocalising of most of our singers—their want of finish aggravated by the want of style in such tasks—we must candidly admit that German Opera indeed is bungler's work. We must confess it even in comparison with French and Italian Opera; but how much more when we apply the
requirements that should necessarily be met by a drama on the one hand, an independent piece of music on the other, to this pseudo-artwork kept in hopeless incorrectness!—In this Opera, taken strictly, everything is absurd, up to what a god-given musician offers up therein as original-melodist. For definitely so-called "German Opera" such a one was Weber, who sent to us his most enkindling rays of genius through this opera-mist, which Beethoven shook off in anger when he scored his diary with: "No more operas and such-like, but my way!" And who shall dispute our verdict on the genre itself, when he recalls the fact that Weber's finest, richest and most masterly music is as good as lost to us because belonging to the opera "Euryanthe"? Where shall we find this work performed to-day, when even Sovereign heads are more easily inclined to the "Clemenza di Tito" or "Olympia"—if something heavy must really be dug up for their wedding or jubilee festivities—than to this "Euryanthe" in which, 'spite all its name for tedium, each single number is worth more than all the Opera seria of Italy, France and Judea? Such preferences, beyond a doubt, are not to be simply set down to the somnolent discrimination of the Prussian Operatic College of Directors; but, as everything there is governed by a certain dull, but stiff-necked academic instinct, from such a choice we may gather that beside those works of undeniably firm-set style, though very cramped and hollow genius, the best of "German operas" must needs look incomplete and therefore unpresentable at Court. Certainly all the sins of the Opera genre come out most strongly in this work, yet solely because its composer was in mortal earnest this time, but still could do no more than try to cover up the failings, nay, absurdities of the genre by a supreme exertion of his purely-musical productiveness. To revive my old figure of speech, that in the marriage to beget the grand United Artwork the poet's work is the masculine principle, and music the feminine, I might compare the outcome of this penetration of the Euryanthe text by Weber's genius with the fruit of the union of a "Tschantha" with a "Brahminess"; for according to Hindu belief and experience a Brahmin might beget from a Tschandala woman a quite goodly child, though not one fitted for the rank of Brahmin, whereas the offspring of a Tschandala male from the superbly truth-bearing womb of a Brahmin female revealed the outcast type in plainest, and consequently in most revolting imprint. Moreover in the conception of this unlucky "Euryanthe," you must remember, the poet-father was a lady, the music in the fullest sense a Man! When Goethe thought that Rossini could have written quite passable music for his "Helena," it was the Brahmin casting his eye on a buxom Tschandala maiden; only in this case it is scarcely to be supposed that the Tschandala girl would have stood the test.—

In the first part of my larger treatise on "Opera and Drama" I long ago tried to expound the mournful, nay, heart-rending lessons to be drawn from Weber's work last-named; in particular I endeavoured to shew that even the most richly-gifted melodist was in no position to turn a collection of verseless German verses for a poetic-posing operatic text into a sterling artwork. And Weber, beyond being one of the most pre-eminent of melodists, was a bright-witted man with a keen eye for all trash and humbug. With the young musicians who came after, he soon fell into a certain disesteem: God knows what mixtures of Bach, Handel and so forth, they concocted as the very newest recipes: but none of them ventured to face the problem which Weber seemed to have left unsolved; or if any did, he gave it up after a brief but laboured attempt. Only Kapellmeisters went gaily on composing "operas." In their installation-contracts it was written that they must enrich the Court-opera conducted by them with a new product of their fancy every year. My operas "Rienzi," "der fliegende Holländer," "Tannhäuser" and "Lohengrin," are given gratis at the Dresden Court-theatre to this day, because they are reckoned to me as Kapellmeister-operas from the period of my life-appointment there; I therefore have to pay a curious penalty for these operas having fared better than those of my colleagues. Happily this calamity affects myself alone; I know of no other Dresden opera-composer whose works have survived his Kapellmeister-ship, except my great predecessor Weber; but from him they asked no opera expressly written for the
Court-theatre, as in his time Italian Opera alone was deemed compatible with human dignity. His three famous operas Weber wrote for theatres elsewhere.

Apart from this nice enrichment of the Royal Saxon Court-theatre's repertoire by my modest, but now over-thirty-years-enduring works, not one of the afterbirths of Weberian Opera has had any real subsistence at the other Court-theatres either. Incomparably the most significant of them, were the first operas of Marschner: for some time their author was kept erect by the great unconcern with which, untroubled by the problem of Opera itself, he let his melodic talent and a certain idiomatic trick of maintaining his music, not always very new, in constant active flow, work out their own salvation. But the contagion of the new French Opera caught him as well, and soon he lost himself past rescue in the shallows of the poorly-schooled Not-highly-gifted. In face of Meyerbeer's successes one and all stood still and timid, were it only for good manners: not until recent times did one dare to follow up the creations of his style with Old-testament abortions. (2) "German [167] Opera," however, was on its deathbed till it happened at last that the still opposed, but less and less disputed successes of my own works seemed to have set pretty well the whole German composer-world in alarm and eager competition.

Long years ago I noticed symptoms of this movement. My successes at the Dresden Court-theatre even then drew F. Hiller, and later R. Schumann also, into my vicinity; at first, no doubt, just to see how it arrived that on an important German stage the operas of a thitherto entirely unknown German composer could lastingly attract the public. That I was no remarkable musician, both friends believed they had soon detected; so that my success appeared to be founded on the texts I had penned for myself. Indeed I also was of opinion that, as they now were brooding operatic plans, they should first of all procure good poems. For this they begged my help; but declined it again when things came to the point—I presume for fear of shabby tricks that I might play them. Of my text for "Lohengrin" Schumann remarked that it could never be composed as an opera; wherein he differed from Upper-Kapellmeister Taubert of Berlin, who later on, after my music also had been finished and performed, declared that he should like to set its text all over again for himself. When Schumann was compiling the book of his "Genovefa" no argument of mine could dissuade him from retaining the lamentably foolish third act as he had framed it; he took offence, and certainly imagined that I wished to spoil his very best effects. For effect he aimed at: everything "German, chaste and pure," but with a piquant dash of mock unchastity, to be harrowingly supplied by the most un-human coarsenesses and lownesses of the second finale. A few years ago I heard a most carefully prepared performance of this "Genovefa" in Leipzig, and could but find that the revolting and offensive scene which ends the third act of Auber's "Bal masqué," founded on similar motives, was quite a dainty bon mot compared with this sickening brutality of the chaste German effect-composer [168] and librettist And—marvellous! Never have I heard a solitary complaint about it. (3) With such energy does the German control his inborn purer feelings when he means to pit one man—Schumann for instance—against another—e.g. myself—For my part, I perceived that I could have been of no earthly use to Schumann.

But—this was in the good old times. Since then the Thirty-years' Zukunftsmusik War broke out, as to which I cannot quite ascertain whether it is yet deemed ripe for a Westphalian treaty. At anyrate there was a fair amount of opera-composing again in the years of war themselves, prompted perhaps by the very circumstance that our theatres were doing less and less business with the French and Italian wares they used to live on, whereas a number of German texts from my dilettantish pen, and actually composed by my own unaided self, for long had furnished them with good receipts.

Unfortunately I have been unable to gain any closer acquaintance with the creations of the neo-German Muse. They tell me that the influence of my "innovations" in the dramatic style
of music may there be remarked. Notoriously I am credited with a "manner" [or "line"—"Richtung"], against which the deceased Kapellmeister Rietz of Dresden was predisposed, and the departed Musikdirektor Hauptmann of Leipzig directed his choicest sallies; I fancy they were not the only ones, but quite a number of masters of all sorts were, and probably still are, unfriendly toward this "line." In the Music-schools and Conservatoria it is said to be sternly tabooed. What "line" may be taught there, is not clear to myself; all I know is, that mighty little is learnt: someone who had studied composition for six whole years at one of these establishments, gave it up at the end. It almost seems that the learning of Opera-composition must proceed in secret, outside the High Schools; so that he who falls into my "line," had best keep a look out! But it is less a study of my works, than their success, that appears to have sent many an academically-untaught to my "manner." In what the latter consists, to myself is most unclear of all. Perhaps in the recent predilection for medieval subjects; the Edda and the rugged North, in general, have also been taken in eye as quarries for good texts. Yet it is not only the choice and character of its opera-texts that seems to have been of weight to the by all means "new" line, but several things besides; in particular that "composing-throughout," and above all a never-ceasing interference of the orchestra in the singers affairs—a mode with which one was the more liberal as a good deal of "manner" had lately arisen in the instrumenting, harmony and modulation of orchestral compositions.

I scarcely think that in all these things I could give much useful instruction; as I luckily am neither asked for it by anyone, at most I might give—unbidden—the following little counsel out of pure good-nature.

A German prince with a turn for composing operas (4) once asked friend Liszt to procure my aid in the instrumenting of a new opera by his Highness; in particular he wanted the good effect of the trombones in "Tannhäuser" applied to his work, in which regard my friend felt bound to divulge the secret that something always occurred to me, before I set it for the trombones.—On the whole it would be advisable that sundry composers adopted this "manner": to myself, indeed, it is of scanty profit, for I never can compose at all when nothing "occurs" to me; and perhaps the generality are wiser not to wait for such "ideas." With regard to the dramatic branch, however, I would indicate the best device for positively forcing such "occurrences."

A young musician whom I also once advised to wait for ideas, asked sceptically how he was ever to know that the idea he might get, under circumstances, was really his own. This doubt may arrive to the absolute Instrumental-composer: in fact our great Symphonists of the "now-time" [170] might be counselled to turn any doubt as to the ownership of their stray ideas into downright certainty, ere others do it for them. Dramatic composers of my "manner," on the other hand, I would recommend to never think of adopting a text before they see in it a plot, and characters to carry out this plot, that inspire the musician with a lively interest on some account or other. Then let him take a good look at the one character, for instance, which appeals to him the most this very day: bears it a mask—away with it; wears it the garment of a stage-tailor's dummy—off with it! Let him set it in a twilight spot, where he can merely see the gleaming of its eye; if that speaks to him, the shape itself will now most likely fall a-moving, which perhaps will even terrify him— but he must put up with that; at last its lips will part, it opens its mouth, and a ghostly voice breathes something quite distinct, intensely seizable, but so unheard-of (such as the "Guest of stone," and surely the page Cherubino, once said to Mozart) that—he wakes from out his dream. All has vanished; but in the spiritual ear it still rings on: he has had an "idea" ("Einfall"), a so-called musical "Motiv"; God knows if other men have heard the same, or something similar, before? Does it please X.Y, or displease Z? What's that to him? It is his motiv, legally delivered to and settled on him by that marvellous shape in that wonderful fit of absorption.

But one only gets these inspirations when one doesn't ply for opera-texts with
theatre-dummies: to invent "new" tunes for such, is uncommonly hard. We may take it that Mozart has exhausted all the music for those same dramatic masquerades. Clever men have praised his texts, that of "Don Juan" for instance, as the half-sketched programmes for a stage masque, with which they say his music corresponds so admirably because it reproduces even the most passionate of human situations as an always pleasantly diverting game. Though this view is easy of misconstruction, and above all may wound as derogatory, it was seriously meant, and involved that widely-accepted [171] verdict of our Æsthetes on Music's true office which it is so hard to combat till this day. Only I think that Mozart, while elevating this art—exposed, in a certain and very deep sense, to the charge of frivolity—to an æsthetic principle of Beauty, at like time completely exhausted it; it was his own: whoever thought to follow him, merely bungled and bored.

The stock of "pretty melodies" is out, and without "new ideas" there cannot be much originality remaining. Wherefore I advise the "new-mannered" to keep a keen eye on his text, his plot and characters, for inspirations. But whoso has no time to wait for the results of such a scrutiny (to many it has so happened with their "Armin"'s and "Konradin"'s!), and finally contents himself with stage-dummies, processions, shrieks of vengeance, storms in a teacup, and all the dance of death and devils, at least I warn him not to employ for the musical outfit of such mummery those attributes of the "manner" which have issued from communion with the true-dream shapes I spoke of above, as he would only make a muddle of it. For he who has looked those figures in the face, has had a difficulty in drawing on the store-room of our masking music to plainly re-compose the motive they had given him: frequently there was nothing to be done with the squaring of rhythm and modulation, since it is somewhat different to say "It is," from "Let us say" or "He believes so." Here thestraits (Notth) of the Unheard-of bring often new necessities to light, and the music may haply weave itself into a style that might much annoy our Quadrature musicians. Not that that much matters: for if he who makes strange and startling modulations without that Want is certainly a bungler, so he who does not recognise the compulsion to modulate forcibly in the proper place is a—"Senator." The worst of it is, that the "new-mannerist" assumes that those occasional unheard-of-nesses have now become the common property of all who have footed the "line," and that if only he lays them on thick enough, his dummies will at once look something like. But they look very bad, [172] and I can't blame many an honest soul of the German Reich for still preferring to hear masque-music correctly built according to the lines of Quadrature. If only there were Rossinis to be had! I am afraid, however, they have come to an end.—

After all, there won't be much to learn from my jottings of to-day; my counsels, in particular, will prove quite useless. Indeed under no conditions would I pretend to teach how men should make, but merely to guide them to a knowledge of how the made and the created should be rightly understood. Even for this a really lasting intercourse were requisite; for only by examples, examples, and again examples, is anything to be made clear, and eventually something learnt: but effectually to set examples, in our domain, we need musicians, singers, finally an orchestra. All these the minions of our Culture-ministries have at their hand in schools of the great cities: how they have contrived that nothing right will yet come of our music, and that even at the change-of-guard the pieces played grow daily worse, must remain a modern mystery of State. My friends are aware that two years back I thought it would be useful if I mixed a little in the thing myself; what I wished, however, seemed to be viewed as undesirable. I have been left in peace, for which I may be thankful in some respects. Only I regret to have to remain so incomplete and hard of understanding when I feel moved at times, as with the above, to throw a ray of light on much that touches our world of music. May it be adjudged to this evil, if the present article is found more agitating than instructive: luckily it is written for neither the Kölnische, the National-, nor any other world-Zeitung, and whatever is amiss in it thus stays among ourselves.
Notes

Note 1 on page 12
H. Dorn; see Vol. III. p. 261.—Tr.

Note 2 on page 15
Goldmark's "Königin von Saba," for instance.—Tr.

Note 3 on page 15
In England they give it to Academy young ladies and gentlemen to perform!—Tr.

Note 4 on page 16
The Late Duke of Coburg.—Tr.