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OPERA – A GAME WITHOUT RULES

What is opera? This question was posed to ten masterclass participants, all of them young opera singers. The answer: silence. Only after some encouragement were a few hesitant, tentative suggestions proffered. One suggested: “the connection between words and music.” Another: “great emotions publicly performed”. A third – perhaps he had read something by Wagner – suggested: “Gesamtkunstwerk.” The correct and actually simple answer was not given.

“Favola per Musica” or “Dramma per Musica” was the name of this new art after its invention a good 400 years ago in Florence, and this expresses exactly what opera is. Telling a story through music – no, not telling: enacting! A plot expressed through music! Music is opera’s principle means of expression. As is the playwright’s text in a play, the rhythmically moving body in ballet, the moving images in film, hence the name “movie”. Music is thus the function of an event. It serves to express this event.

Here I already see a few raised eyebrows: “music serves? Doesn’t he know that in opera music reigns?” Be patient. We are not there yet. Firstly, the music serves. One might imagine an improvised opera, in which the music only serves as the bearer of expression, in which, similarly to the Commedia dell’Arte, the plot is restricted to just a few key words, in a so-called *canevas* or scenario, on the basis of which all participants perform the story through improvised music. Or consider the silent movie. There the pianist sat in front of the screen and followed the pictures. Douglas Fairbanks Junior approaches Mae West, and the pianist slowly modulates upwards chromatically. Now Douglas is very close, the pianist moves to a harmonically sultry tremolo – that’s the kiss – and ends with a hard *sforzato* – the slap which Mae plants on the face of the all-too-keen Douglas. In both cases, improvised opera and silent movie, the music only serves. In the second, it even serves another art form, namely cinema, to strengthen its effect.

It is only through the score that opera reaches its full heights. Once there is a score, however, the music reigns, sovereignly and unrestricted. Now everything has to conform to the score. Everything must be arranged and invented according to the score; it must remain related to the music put down in the score. Only through this does opera find its justification. If it were otherwise, you wouldn’t need opera, things could be better expressed in other art forms.

Opera music is therefore music for a purpose. Not just music in itself. The difference between music and music for a purpose is often rather unclear, although it is easy to explain. “g – g – g – es” in Beethoven’s 5th Symphony means: “g – g – g – es” and nothing more. It is absolute music, abstract music, albeit of the greatest emotional intensity, it is the musical material from which Beethoven builds the magnificent first movement of his symphony. “Zu Hilfe, zu Hilfe sonst bin ich verloren, der listigen Schlange zum Opfer erkoren“ (“Help, help, or I’ll be lost, a victim to this cruel snake”) and the accompanying, hustling, chasing, pulsating introduction with the snake-like movement in the bass from the *Magic Flute* is something totally different. Here, the music has to express and portray very concrete things:

namely, Tamino's panic in this unique situation and this specific condition. Music, the most abstract of the arts, is married with dramatic art in order to express something very concrete. The music is used for a purpose. Purists might even say: abused.

This difference between music and music for a purpose is often not clear in opera, sometimes even to the highest and most venerable ranks. They think they are making music, whereas in reality they are making music for a purpose. The difference is also often not clear to critics, who judge opera according to historical, musicological and aesthetic criteria – all worthy criteria – yet the decisive yardstick, namely that of the truthfulness and usefulness of the music for the given purpose and its realisation on stage, is seldom mentioned. People talk critically about the “duplication of the music” through the staging as if operatic music existed independently and is not instigated by the plot.

Speaking of usefulness raises the question: what does the music actually say? Isaac Stern, the great violinist, recounts how he was hired in his youth by the Russian bass Fjodor Chaliapin for a tour. What was a young violinist doing on the tour of a famous singer? Well, Chaliapin did not want to sing as much anymore and so had thought that between his arias the young man could perform a few little virtuoso pieces. This worked out quite well. They toured half of Russia, and Chaliapin did not take much notice of his partner. However, one evening he listened from the wings and at the end came out onto the stage booming, “my dear young friend, you sing beautifully on your fiddle, but you don't say anything.”

And Peter Cornelius, the composer of *The Barber of Baghdad* reports that Richard Wagner, at the dress rehearsal of the premiere of *Die Meistersinger*, cried out suddenly in exasperation, in his best Saxon dialect: “now the chaps are singing again!!” By this he meant the singers were producing only sound, thus making music instead of elucidating the purpose of the music he had composed.

So, what does the music say? How do we find out? For this, all participants – singers, directors, even conductors – must become “music detectives”. What does a music detective do? Exactly the same as a police detective. A police detective discovers a body murdered with a knife. The knife, however, is no longer there. Then, he finds a drop of blood on the ground, and another, and a third, leading towards the door. From these clues, he concludes that the murderer has carried the knife, dripping with blood, out of the door. He reaches conclusions about the event that played out here as a whole. A music detective does just this. A change of instrumentation here, the clarinet enters. A harmonic modulation or a dynamic change there, then a change of tempo. These are, so to speak, the music detective's drops of blood. From these, he makes conclusions about a certain situation that the music is expressing. In this way, he detects the reality behind the creation of the score and what caused the composer to write it in this way and not in another. The music detective must therefore research the incident in accordance with the score and take the necessary measures in order to portray the scene with the given music.

A further question emerges in this context: What is the orchestra? This question, posed to the aforementioned young opera singers, was also met with silence. At most, there was some unintelligible muttering to be heard: the orchestra is simply there and plays. Yes, that's what it does, no question about it. But what is it? Finally my answer: “the orchestra – it is you!”

The orchestra expresses what is happening to the character on the stage, the situation, the circumstances, action and reaction, and many other things. The orchestra – it is you! That's why you, the singer, have to know the orchestra and to know what is happening in it. Obviously the orchestra is also a lot more. The orchestra can be a comment, can create atmosphere, can establish a relationship and give meaning through "leitmotifs". Besides from this, it can combine the subjective expression of the performer, as well as the objective external perspective. It can even play against the action. For example a triumphal march, to which the victims of the triumph are presented on the stage. However, the first and most important function of the orchestra is to portray the characters on stage in all possible respects, which conversely means that they have to act in accordance with the orchestra.

If, however, the orchestra is expressing what is happening to the singer, then we need to go a step further. The singer must turn the tables and seemingly generate the music for the audience. He must give the orchestra a reason to sound like this or like that. He must get excited before the orchestra can play excitedly. If he doesn't do this, or does it too late, then the orchestra has no reason for excitement. The singer must therefore always be slightly ahead. That is, incidentally, also the case in everyday life. Before you say something, you must do two things: think and breathe! The music in an opera can only be understood and appraised in its relation to the events on the stage. For that you need to see what you hear. In a play, this apparent spontaneity is completely normal. Hamlet speaks his famous monologue "To be or not to be" as though the words arise from the character's situation in that very moment. Only when this is the case does the audience think, "yes, he's good, we believe him", although everyone knows that the words were written by Shakespeare 400 years ago. The same applies to the singer, only for him, music, emerges instead of words. We want to be able to believe him.

So what makes people believe him? How does the audience identify with the event on the stage? What allows the public to empathise, to cry or laugh with the performer? It is always said that in opera it's the singer's voice. Yet, strictly speaking, it is not the voice, but rather the sound of the voice. If a violinist plays Beethoven's, Violin Concerto we are not predominantly interested in his fiddle, but in the sound that the player creates with his instrument connecting Beethoven's great soul with his own. And it's the same for singers. The voice is the instrument. It is only the sound of the voice that touches people and awakens their interest in the character portrayed by the singer.

But what is the sound of a voice? Where does it come from? Here is my definition: "air + idea = sound." The singer releases air from his body and this air is transformed into a tone by the vocal chords. This tone now encounters the "idea", namely the imagination, of whether someone is sad or happy, aggressive or in love. A sad voice sounds completely different from a happy one and everyone hears immediately whether someone is aggressive or in love. So it is the breath transformed into a tone, which meets imagination, thus producing the vocal sound. And with this we are at the central point of all theatre: imagination.

All theatre is based on imagination – without imagination, everything on the stage is dead. The good news is that one can train imagination just like the biceps. A trained imagination will immediately turn everything into a vivid image. The basic element of the theatre is imagination, a reality created from imagination under the law of the "Magic If" – "if only it

were like that”. This is where imagination sets in. Every child has it. A piece of wood becomes a spaceship for him to navigate through the universe. Then, in the next moment, the spaceship becomes a lightsaber, because the young child is acting out Star Wars. And then the piece of wood changes again, into a ship, so that the child pirate can sail through the Caribbean. His mother’s call goes unheard since the child is living in his reality created by the imagination. This talent, creating reality from imagination, is the basic condition of all performing arts, irrespective of the specific genre.

Of course, opera singers are not actors, and should not be actors. They are “music-performers”. The difference is clear: the actor of Hamlet can say his monologue slowly and pensively; “To be or not to be ...” He can, however, also shout it out, cynically, quickly, laughing: “... that is the question.” He can compose his own melody, so to speak. He is free to do so. This is not the case for the music-performer. He is bound to the score. But he also can only be believable and authentic if he lets the music emerge from a reality created by his imagination.

So, imagination controls the sound of the voice, as well as the expression of the body. Some ancient peoples only had one word for breath and soul. Completely plausible, since without breath, there is no soul, and without soul there is no more breath. The means of transport for the soul – since it is this which is ultimately transferred from the performer to the audience – is the breath, which controls both body and voice.

The body is in fact the first instrument. In terms of our evolution, it was there millions of years before there was a voice. The Ichthyosaurus could express itself without ambiguity through its body. The voice only came along much later. Yet they belong together. Both, being controlled by the breath – or if you prefer, by the soul – form the unity of vocal sound and bodily expression. From this a sort of body-score should emerge, derived from the music, connecting with the musical score, so that they become one, with the aim: embodiment of music.

These are in short the basic elements of opera. They are largely unknown. The consequences are rarely reflected, let alone put into practice. Opera is unconscious of itself. It is hardly surprising then that, unlike all other performing arts, it has not developed a craft of its own during the four hundred years of its existence, a canon of rules and techniques that one must know and master before practicing the art. There is no ballet without years of body training, no film without skilful handling of the camera. Kabuki performers practice for many years before they are even allowed on the stage, not to mention Chinese opera with its artistic and acrobatic miracles.

Opera has naturally developed such a technical canon for singing but not for performing. And singing is not performing. The result: a young singer does his vocal exercises a hundred thousand, perhaps even half a million times, before he becomes a singer. But he doesn’t even practice a sequence of musical movements three times. Not because he doesn’t want to, but because nobody has told him that this is just as important as his vocal training for achieving the necessary unity between his body and his voice.

In this wasteland of lawlessness, opera, as I have tried to express in the title of this paper, has developed into a game without rules. Anything goes, everything is allowed. For example, in my profession of stage director, this is what constantly happens: if someone declares at the top of his voice that he doesn't know opera, cannot read music, is, in fact, unmusical and generally doesn't like music at all, then he will quite possibly find one or several intendants who urge him towards stage direction as a "man of groundbreaking new ways". Similarly, I am waiting for an invitation by the medical faculty to carry out a heart operation. Naturally with a great deal of media participation. This would then be the desired "event". In both cases, that of the opera and that of my heart patient, the final diagnosis will likely be: operation successful, patient dead. From such absurdities arises the discrepancy between the opera institution, which deals almost all the time with the most banal elements of the profession, and the opera- works, the best examples of which are true miracles of humanity.

To defend the honour of the singers, it has to be said that, under the most adverse conditions, they often do a lot right, due to talent and instinct. Yet the right things are often not taught, are not codified, everything is left to chance. To remedy this, I asked myself: are there any rules and techniques which might be suitable as a basis for a practical canon of opera? In order to find out, I have, together with my students all over the world, systematically researched, tried and tested, carried out cross checks, occasionally even provoking through extreme experiments. And yes, to our own surprise, we found over a hundred such techniques and rules which can be explained, taught, learned, practiced and finally mastered and used.

Fear not! I'm not going to demonstrate all one hundred rules and techniques. But I do want to mention a few to give you an idea of what this is all about. At first glance, some seem completely obvious. For example, each expression, whether from a human or an animal, has an addressee. People speak to each other, or with themselves, or with God, or to an animal, or with an image of someone or something. Each prayer is aimed at a higher being, each fight, mental or physical, has an opponent. Hamlet, already quoted, discusses "to be or not to be" with himself. Xerxes sings Handel's famous funeral- Largo, which actually is a Larghetto and an Aria, to his beloved tree. In the case of abstract or imagined addresses, it is recommendable to speak personally to one of the green emergency exit lights on the second balcony. "Cruda sorte, Amor tiranno" – green light (*Isabella, L'italiana in Algeri*). "Komm Hoffnung, lass den letzten Stern der Müden nicht erbleichen" – green light (*Leonore, Fidelio*). "Se vuol ballare il signor contino" no, not the green light, instead Figaro sings to the door which leads to the Count's apartments. The dog, snarling threateningly, wants to warn the intruder. The crocodile does not debate this at all, but quickly devours the addressee. Once more, there is no living expression without an address. There is only one single, sad exception to this universal rule: bad opera. See for yourself the next time you visit an opera.

Another rule is that of the "5W+H". A singing student comes into the lesson, a good looking bass with a magnificent voice. "What do you want to work on?" – "King Philipp's Aria from *Don Carlos*." – "Oho! Reaching for the stars straight away! But we'll give it a go. Who are you?" – "Me?" – "No, not you, the character that you are playing." – Ah yes, a king." – "Right, a king. Where?" – "Spain?" – Yes, Spain, of course." – "When?" – (Pause) – "Have you ever heard of his great counterpart, Queen Elizabeth I, not Elisabeth II who lives today" – (another pause) – "by Shakespeare?" – He lights up: "Yes, there was a film! (he meant

*Shakespeare in Love*). “There you go! But I didn’t want to test your history knowledge, I rather wanted to know where and when the king sings the aria. In which room? At what time of day or night?” – “I don’t know.” – “In his studio or in his bedroom. And the time is given in the text you are singing. The first light of the day comes through the window.” – “Actually, yes, I am singing that.” – “There you go. And now you probably understand the long cello introduction and can draw conclusions from it about the condition of the poor king and what he is doing.” – “Which cello introduction?” – “Well, at the start, the sad descent into gnawing rumination, then the slow circling, agonising movement of the violins which even springs into the upper octave at double speed and almost drives him to insanity, due to the dreadful suspicion that torments him: ‘Ella giammai m’amò.’ Who is ‘Ella’?” – “No idea. And the répétiteur has never played the introduction. We have always started from where I sing.” – “Ah, well, ‘Ella’ is his queen and what keeps the king awake all night is the terrible suspicion that she is cheating on him with his own son.”

If you overlook the student’s sparse historical knowledge, then you cannot actually reproach him. Nobody had told him what his future job would be about. The singing teacher should have taught him that he can only shape an aria meaningfully if he knows the context in which it is sung. The répétiteur should not only have drilled him on the notes, but also should have explained their meaning. If you think that all this is exaggerated, it is unfortunately not the case. It happens on almost a daily basis at music academies as well as in rehearsals at opera houses. Therefore, I have established the rule of the “5W+H”, namely “WHO am I? WHERE am I? WHEN am I? WHAT do I do or want to do? WHY do I do it or want it? And HOW do I do it or want it? Although this does not describe the whole character, at least it is a kind of warrant. As with the police, searching for someone yet unknown. With this basic information, our music detective can begin his work.

A further rule is: Comfort is the enemy of expression. Perhaps you might be thinking that I am being provocative again. After all, singers must sing with the required level of comfort! Indeed they should. The discomfort should not go so far that the diaphragm is constricted and the singing is hindered. What is meant can best be shown with the help of Rembrandt. For his picture *Joseph telling his dream to Jacob*, he produced several preliminary sketches. The first shows Jacob sitting comfortably, with little Benjamin between his knees, listening to Joseph, placed directly in front of him explaining his dream.

All very well, but Rembrandt was not satisfied, tension was lacking. The second sketch shows Jacob, again sitting with Benjamin between his knees, but Joseph is now standing to the side so that Jacob has to turn away from Benjamin and towards Joseph. Less comfortable, but obviously more interesting. But that still wasn’t enough for Rembrandt. The third sketch shows little Benjamin on the other side so that Jacob is now forced to twist quite uncomfortably around in order to listen to Joseph. Jacob has now become very expressive and what Joseph has to say becomes highly interesting, since such discomfort would not be accepted if what was being told was not of great importance.

Closely linked with this rule is the technique of setting up obstacles. I learned it from the great actor and director Fritz Kortner. He hated compromise and pushed his actors to the extreme. Nothing could satisfy his obsession with expression. I had the terrifying luck of rehearsing with him as an acting student. After long, nerve-racking hours, the scene finally

seemed to work to some extent. The old man, however, kept on moaning: “Everything is too smooth, I need obstacles.” We actors looked to the heavens: “My God, we’re half dead and now he wants obstacles.” He noticed this, “Yes, you’re rolling your eyes thinking that the old man is gaga. But he’s not gaga. You just don’t know that expression is created by obstacles!” It was only years later that I realised how right he was and today I am grateful to him for this marvellous lesson. In general, people don’t want to show their inner self, they try to hide it. An obstacle lets it burst out and become clearly perceptible. If somebody looks out to the door and bends sideways to see something that the doorpost would otherwise hide, then his expression is greater and the object that he wants to see becomes more interesting. The obstacle – the doorpost – allows the person looking to become more expressive. Now he wants to go through the door and a chair stands in his way. He collapses down onto it in desperation because he has just lost a million. Or he kicks it angrily into the corner, full of rage about the scam which has cost him the million. And because the whole thing turns out to be a mistake and he has in fact won a million, he jumps over the chair with joy. Each time, the chair – the obstacle in his way – prompts a strong expression that the performer would certainly not have been able to show without it.

Another highly practicable technique I learned from the famous baritone Tito Gobbi, who used his stage skills very deliberately: “How you place your feet is the role”. You might try it yourselves, by letting a peasant or a sailor come along with his legs apart, as opposed to a prince who views the world from above with a noble leg position. Or by showing Master Beckmesser, the archetype of a pedantic critic, walk in a stork-like way, to virtually spear the mistakes with his pointy beak. The feet link the performer to the ground and determine his posture. How many tenors, supposedly portraying fiery lovers push their tones clumsily with their legs apart – the very image of unintentional humour. They have not been taught any better.

A key rule with a lot of derivatives states that “equal is boring.” Two performers, who stand in the same posture in front of the public, as happens most of the time, are boring. Not being the same, however, is interesting. The one who sings should therefore be further upstage in relation to the one who listens, who stands in front with his back to the audience. This makes for tension and counter-tension. All great painters arrange their figures in this way. Rembrandt shows Christ on the cross, in the light, and in front the dark silhouette of a Roman soldier. Goya has the lascivious young beauty walk behind and downstage the old hag selling her to the highest bidder. All singers are magically attracted towards centre stage. How boring! Left and right side are equal without tension. If need be, the middle is a place for a king, before whom the court bows. Much more interesting is the position in the golden section, roughly at one third of the stage opening with the short tension on one side, and the long tension on the other. This is also often acoustically the most advantageous spot, called the “Callas point” on the stage of La Scala. Here, one also stands almost automatically at an angle to the ramp, which is better than parallel to it, which I call the “pancake position.” There are lots of other examples confirming that similarity is boring.

Very important, and which is rarely observed, is “being ahead”. While the singer sings a phrase, mentally he must already be preparing for the next. With the great conductor Herbert von Karajan, the musicians were, as the saying goes, safely “on Abraham’s lap”, because he always made it totally clear what was coming next. I wanted to find out how he did this and

eventually asked him. “I don’t know”, he muttered, “I do my yoga in the morning.” I insisted, “You are conducting one thing and yet you are already at the next. That’s almost schizophrenic.” – “No, trizophrenic.” (That’s not a word, but he used it anyway.) – “Trizophrenic! I give the entry cue and then must immediately soften the horn that is too load, and at the same time I’m already preparing the next tempo change. You could say, the cue is the present, the horn is already the past, and the tempo change is the future.” In fact, all musicians – not just the conductor – need to work on these three levels simultaneously, especially singers. Preparing for what happens next in the music is of greatest importance. You can’t learn this overnight; it requires a lot of practice. From Karajans “Trizophrenia” comes what I call the “flow of life” in the musical performance.

How does comedy occur? On the stage, one has intentions, one insists on points of view and, when necessary, one fences with others. Nobody is comical a priori. Whether or not something is perceived as comical, perhaps through an incongruent situation, an unforeseen, contradictory outcome or through something else, is for the public to decide. Comedy does not arise on the stage, but rather in the auditorium. The relationship between comedy and tragedy is generally not very well reflected. All great comedies are just prevented tragedies. The good citizens of Windsor are about to hang Falstaff when he recognises Bardolfo, and everyone has to laugh. Ford says “By God, if I hadn’t laughed, you would now be hanging up there.” In *The Marriage of Figaro*, Figaro is condemned to marry Marcellina or pay his debts to her. He has no money, so he has to marry her. He fights for his life like a rat in a cage, makes the most absurd claims that he is noble and does not have to answer to the court. Gold and jewels have been found on him, which shows that he is of noble descent. All laugh at him. The count, who is starting to find this all too silly, waves him aside and goes. At the very last moment, Figaro calls after him: “e sopra tutto, I also have this sign on my arm”. Marcellina says: “a spatula?” “Yes”, says Figaro, “How do you know?” And Marcellina erupts, “Rafaello!” her son abandoned as a baby child. Of course, this is comical, but what would have happened if the count had left just one second earlier and Figaro had no longer been able to add this bit about the sign? Where would we have gone then? To *King Oedipus*, the original tragedy at the beginning of European theatre, in which the son marries the mother and produces his own siblings with her. Just one second! Tragedy and comedy are that close to one another. This also is worth being taught so that the awkward comic ham acting comes to an end on the opera stage, which the aforementioned Kortner fittingly described as “Hoppla da Vega Theatre”.

And staying with Kortner, here’s another revealing remark from him, a real discovery that especially applies to opera: “The reassurance theatre”. The performer “reassures that he loves or hates, yet he neither hates nor loves.” You can experience this all too often: the orchestra animated, singing at the highest degree of passion, and yet something is missing. The condition is lacking, the expanding breath of great emotion, which would make all this believable. The body, especially the singer’s hands, betray him and convey that “it’s not at all so bad; the orchestra doesn’t really need be so animated.” The singer reassures! The reality of his performance, created from imagination, is lacking. There is a lot of reassuring in opera, and the transition from doing to being, which is actually the final aim of all theatre, is rarely achieved.



Pressure and intensity are constantly confused. You often see a singer suddenly jerk forwards and downwards, his muscles tense, sometimes reminiscent of a turkey picking at grain. That is pressure. Intensity is always breath. Great emotion requires great breath – the opposite of pressure. What characterises important operatic works is their emotional depth and width. If we, as normal healthy people, have a heart temperature of 37 degrees, Mozart, Verdi or Wagner, have occasionally 370 degrees. How should we poor interpreters cope with this?

And finally, the most important of all rules! It is hardly teachable and yet without this first and last rule all others are of no avail. It says: “Touch the heart!”

There are obviously exceptions to these rules. The dialectics of rules and breaking rules has always been the motor of any artistic development. This applies to individual artists as well as to the entire genre. All great artists were rule breakers. Mostly due to necessity, because they couldn't express what they felt with the existing set of rules. Rules are obviously conventions, agreements. The first convention in opera is, for example, expressing things through music. The obvious requirement being for anybody dealing with opera to master the music, otherwise one would be better off dealing in other art forms. Our relationship with convention is, however, very confused. Expecting every small provincial director to present something never before imagined, never before seen, completely unheard of outside of the convention is obviously nonsense. It was Nietzsche who said that convention, far from hindering great art, is the condition of great art. The genius proves himself in the way he deals with, changes and expands conventions. Such reflections also belong to the profession, in order to be able to deal with masterworks on an adequate level.

Of course, now arises the question of how such a set of rules and techniques could be brought into current opera. My answer: education and changes in the profession. Both are connected to one another.

Young opera artists from all fields meet the opera institution, in which they work or for which they are educated, with a great deal of scepticism. They know that it is inadequate and suffer as a result on a daily basis. They want to be better trained and have more artistically appropriate working conditions. Everything that helps them to better understand and use the foundations of their profession is generally welcome to them. They are not the problem, but rather the teachers and the circumstances. The traditional curriculum of opera-training must be redrafted and extended. By overcoming traditional mental barriers, the necessary changes could be introduced into opera training without too much difficulty. A lot has already been set in motion here.

The actual difficulty with changes begins at the doors of opera houses, since the mortal sin of opera is that it does not learn! You can twist and turn it as you like, opera just doesn't learn! Look back through the history of this art form. From time to time, there have been wonderful islands on which the musical theatre has bloomed and things have emerged which should never have been reversed. Gluck was such an island. Wagner, Mahler in Vienna, Felsenstein in Berlin. And each time, the great ocean of dilettantism came and washed away these islands. Afterwards, everything was as it had been before.

Once again, the curse of opera is that it does not learn. Unless it has to, that is! Real necessity will force opera houses to organise themselves differently than they currently do. The economic basis will become as unsustainable as the production methods are outdated. These, however, are only the means. Above all, opera must formulate its artistic purposes clearly and intelligently in terms of content, if it wants to be taken seriously. If fewer and fewer people go to fewer and fewer performances – as is the case in many countries – then a point will be reached at which the many no longer want to pay for the few. The popular European custom of paying 30 Euros for a ticket and along with it receiving 150 Euros as a gift from subsidisers will not be accepted much longer by society. And in fact, is all this not again resembling the feudal times of the absolutist Karl Eugen, Duke of Württemberg, who sold his subjects as soldiers in order to finance the opera for his aristocratic court society?

Anyone feeling uncomfortable with the current organization of opera should take a look at history of opera, where he will find himself in the best of company. Shortly after the invention of the new art form, its first great master, Monteverdi, complained bitterly in his letters about restrictions placed upon it. Gluck's fits of rage were both known and feared in Vienna as well as in Paris. Mozart's furious letter to the Mannheim Court Councillor Klein about the situation in Vienna is nothing in comparison to Wagner's lifelong fight against the conditions of opera in his time. And Verdi, in his old age, summed up in a letter to his publisher: "For my part, I declare that never, never, never!! has anybody succeeded in performing all the effects that I had composed. Nobody!!! Never ever!!! Neither singer, nor conductor.. Never. Never!!!!"

Verdi's condemnation of opera should, however, not be the last word here. Instead, I would like to comment on another aspect of opera which, despite all the suffering from its insufficiency, makes it quite irresistible and, I believe, also fit for the future. Opera can do something which no other art form can, which, in a certain way, even links it to the most advanced modern knowledge of the world. Every other art form must choose a cut-out of the world. A picture is always such a cut-out. Film is based on a series of images, mostly in shot and counter-shot. The camera must choose. Even a novel, with the quickest mental leaps or associations requires a chronological sequence. And although a sculpture can be seen from all sides, this cannot happen at the same time. To see the other side one has to go around. Music alone, and especially opera, is different. Take a canon for two voices: "Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques dormez-vous." You can hear the two voices, each one on its own and also together at the same time. You can add a third, fourth and fifth voice and make it an ensemble. Still you hear each individual voice as well as all of them together at the same time. Furthermore, a comment can be heard. For example, voice one lies, and voice four knows this and is amused about it. What's more, the orchestra lets everybody know that a son with a sword will emerge in the future from the present constellation on the stage. Now it is a Leitmotif. And if all that is not enough, one can also make God's point of view audible: God, who looks upon his creatures and has his own thoughts about each, linking the objective aspects with the subjective. Always everything individually and simultaneously. I don't know of any other art form which can present such a complete, multi-dimensional world view as opera. This multi-dimensionality links it with modern astrophysical aspects of the world which are based on a multidimensional universe. The very latest hypotheses even go as far as to say that there are lots of other universes apart from ours, that we exist in a multiverse, simultaneously emerging

and collapsing in many dimensions. On a small scale, opera can also do this and practices it daily. In its best moments, it can give us an idea of what can be sensed, even if it lies beyond human understanding. Ancient people called it “the Harmony of the Spheres”. I’m going to stop here and come back from multi- and universe to our earth. Here it can be said: In view of the wonderful possibility of representing the world multidimensionally through music, the opera business should endeavour to take better care of opera. Then opera may have a bright future.