

3 | Emanuel Schikaneder and the Theater auf der Wieden

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The Magic Flute was conceived and created specifically for the Theater auf der Wieden and its company of players, under the direction of Emanuel Schikaneder. Despite its status today as a work of genius, Schikaneder and Mozart's opera was not conceived in a vacuum, so understanding its vibrant theatrical context can help us avoid subscribing to what David Buch has called "the myth of singularity."¹ Like all works of art, *The Magic Flute* was a product of its time and place: Schikaneder and other librettists had written magical operas for the Theater auf der Wieden in the years immediately preceding 1791; Mozart and Schikaneder created roles with specific singers and their talents in mind; and other theaters were also presenting operas featuring similar characters and plotlines. Certain features of *The Magic Flute* adhere to traditions that were already in place at this theater – a plot that includes a serious couple as well as a comic one, for example, or the simple style of Papageno's entrance aria. And musical aspects of the opera, such as the role of the choruses, bear more resemblance to the works of the theater's regular or "house" composers than they do to the works of other composers that were also performed there.² The personnel of the Theater auf der Wieden were also influenced by other theaters in the city, particularly by the Theater in der Leopoldstadt, their main competitor. This chapter provides an overview of the Theater auf der Wieden under Schikaneder's directorship in the years leading up to the premiere of *The Magic Flute*, in order to situate the opera in its original performance venue.

The Freihaus auf der Wieden and Its Theater

Until 1850, the city of Vienna comprised only the area that is today's first district. It was encircled by a massive, defensive wall, which, in turn, was surrounded by a flat area called the glacis, which served to expose invading armies to the city's defenders. Abutting the glacis were the various suburbs or *Vorstädte*, all of which are today a part of the city of Vienna. In 1781, five

years after Joseph II announced his *Spektakelfreiheit*, which allowed private theaters to put on performances for profit, Karl Marinelli opened his Theater in der Leopoldstadt, the first suburban theater in Vienna. Schikaneder, who in 1786 was employed at the Burgtheater, appealed to Joseph for special permission to open a theater just like Marinelli's, but on the glacis, in a location where people living in three suburbs would have had easy access to it. Joseph turned down the request, but agreed that Schikaneder could open a theater within a Viennese suburb instead. In the end, it was a German actor and director, Christian Rossbach, who received permission from Joseph in 1787 to build a theater in the suburb of Wieden (which was incorporated as Vienna's fourth district in 1850).

The Theater auf der Wieden, as it came to be called because of its location in the eponymous suburb and its proximity to the Wieden river, was a two-story rectangular theater that could seat about 800 people and operated from 1787 to 1801. It was sometimes referred to as the Wiednertheater or the Schikanedertheater, but should not be confused with the Theater an der Wien, which replaced it in 1801 and still exists today. Although the Theater auf der Wieden was a free-standing building, it was situated within the perimeter of an enormous apartment complex in greater Vienna called the Starhembergisches Freihaus, after the Starhemberg family, which had owned the land as a fief since 1643. Four years later, upon payment of a thousand gulden to the court, the family was released from owing property taxes in perpetuity, hence the name "Freihaus."³ After several fires and much subsequent rebuilding, it became, by the end of the eighteenth century, the largest privately owned apartment complex in Vienna. The Freihaus encompassed 25,000 square meters (269,098 square feet), with 402 buildings of various sizes, and housed around 10,000 people. The floorplan of the building gives a sense of how large the Freihaus was, particularly if we note how the 800-seat theater, located below the third courtyard (*Hof*), comprises a small fraction of the total space (see Figure 3.1.). We know that by the mid-nineteenth century the complex boasted a concert hall, a library, a dance school, a sports center, and the businesses of countless artisans. With excellent drinking water to be had from its many wells, the Freihaus was essentially a self-contained city within the city. Tailors and shoemakers provided their services, and small shops sold everything from textiles, needles, and nails, to socks, pens, ink, and even violin strings.⁴ By adding a theater to the Freihaus, Rossbach, the first director, was probably hoping to take advantage of the patronage of a built-in audience.⁵

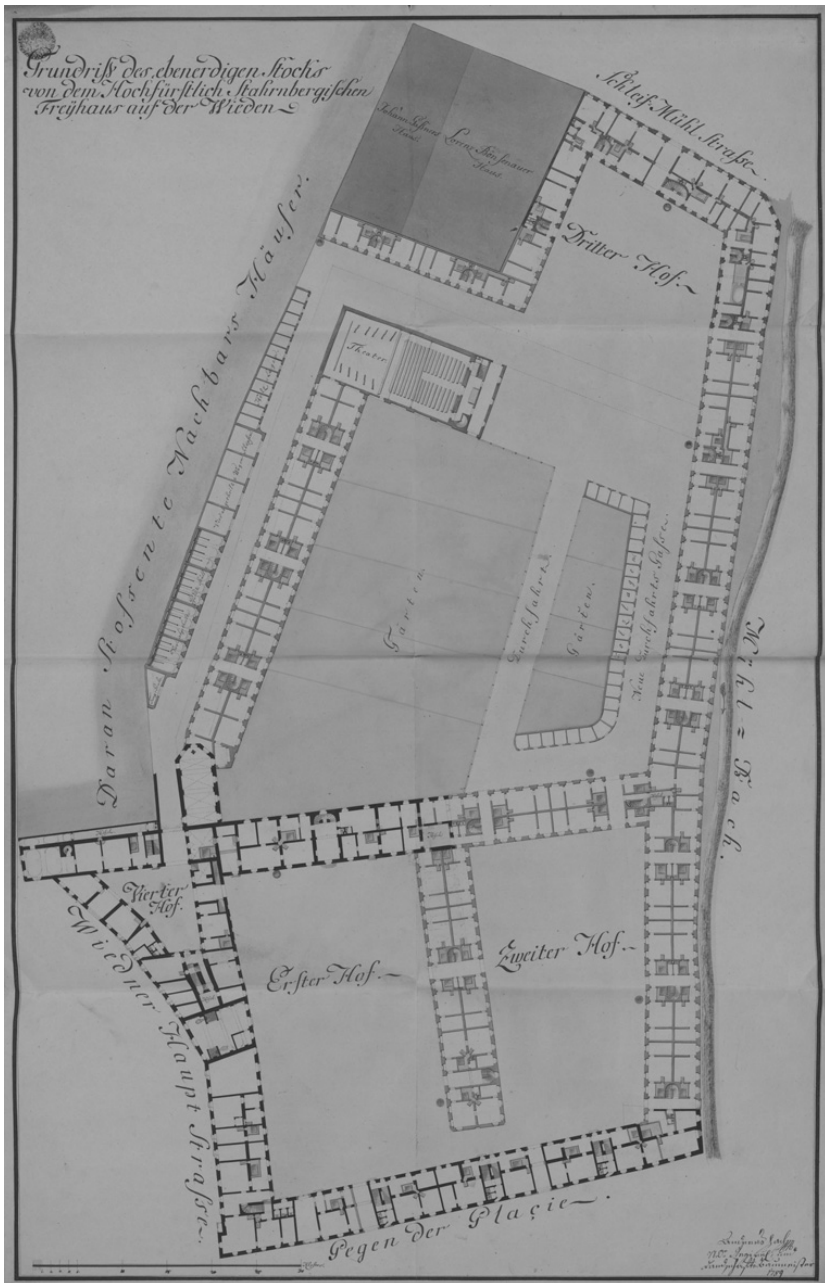


Figure 3.1 Plan of the ground floor of the Hochfürstlich Starhembergischen Freihaus auf der Wieden in Mozart's day. The Freihaus Theater can be seen above the garden. Andreas Zach, landscape architect, 1789. Pen, ink, and watercolor. Courtesy of the Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv/St. Pölten, Nö. Regierung (vor 1850), E 1 Zl. 22924 bei 19798 ex 1789.

The theater building commissioned by Rossbach (in which *The Magic Flute* would eventually premiere) was built by Andreas Zach, who was also responsible for renovations of the entire Freihaus. According to Michael Lorenz, the original plans for the theater show that its walls were of masonry, but the interior was made of wood, in keeping with the conventions of such buildings at the time. While it was not physically connected to the surrounding, far larger Freihaus building (it stood in the middle of a field), its tiled roof was taller than the apex of the Freihaus's roof.⁶ The plans for the theater also show a wooden passageway – one of six in the Freihaus – which was likely intended to allow audience members to cross the courtyard and arrive at the theater without muddying their feet.⁷ The theater's dimensions were thirty by fifteen meters, with almost half of that space occupied by the twelve-meter-deep stage area, presumably to allow for elaborate sets.⁸ Surviving engravings from some productions as well as descriptions of sets in contemporary press reports attest to their grandeur. Tall buildings and realistic trees flank singers as they descend into the ground on a moving platform in *Der Stein der Weisen* (The Philosopher's Stone), and a review of *Babylons Pyramiden* (The Pyramids of Babylon) refers to the theater's technical capability to surprise the audience with a rustic, hut-like exterior that gives way to show a large, impressive temple, or an enormous haystack that opens up to reveal many beautifully rendered rooms.⁹ As to the appearance of the interior of the theater, it was painted simply and included a proscenium arch flanked by life-size statues of a knight with a dagger and an elegantly masked lady, but it is unclear whether it looked this way from its early days. Entrance to the theater cost seventeen kreutzer to the parterre and seven to the upper floor.¹⁰

Lorenz's extensive research on the history of the theater building shows that there were several attempts to expand its capacity of 800 seats by building either a new wing or an entirely separate building in a different courtyard of the Freihaus. A map of the planned expansion that Lorenz discovered shows what the actual second floor of the theater looked like, including private boxes and a spiral staircase.¹¹ These more ambitious plans, which date from around 1790, were probably curtailed due to financial problems, when the main backer of the theater, Joseph von Bauernfeld, faced financial ruin in 1793.¹² Schikaneder, the director at the time, had to pay off the creditors, and the owner of the theater, Anton von Bauernfeld, Joseph's brother, gave the building to his wife as part of a divorce settlement in 1794. The list of items from the theater that were transferred to Antonia von Bauernfeld includes everything from the

walls and the number of private boxes to the locations of the various benches and whether or not they were upholstered.¹³

Early Directors of the Theater auf der Wieden

Roszbach was already running performances of plays, ballets, and some operas in a temporary, wooden structure in the city center, when, on September 29, 1787, he announced in the *Wienerzeitung* that his new theater would be opening on October 7 and that, hoping to please all theater friends and benefactors, he would spare no expense and present a play with songs, a related *opera buffa*, and a plot-appropriate ballet of national character.¹⁴ Such mixtures of pieces were common for traveling troupes and catered to the taste of the Viennese public.¹⁵ We do not know the exact repertoire Roszbach presented on his stage, but there could not have been much of it since his directorship lasted a mere six months.

The next director, Johann Friedel, a writer and the leader of his own traveling acting troupe, took over, together with Eleonore Schikaneder (a member of the troupe and the estranged wife of Emanuel), in 1788. A number of oft-quoted reports claim a romantic relationship between these two, but since there are no primary sources to confirm it, this may be a result of theater gossip handed down through the generations.¹⁶ We do know that Emanuel and Eleonore were apart during this time, because he was in Augsburg with his troupe of opera singers. Friedel was better known and more successful as a writer, and his tenure as director was largely unsuccessful. His preference for Lessing and Schiller over more standard comic fare did not endear him to contemporary audiences, although it coincided with Emperor Joseph II's intention to elevate and promote German-language spectacles as part of his larger plan to unify German-speaking nations.

In a speech given on March 24, 1788, at the premiere performance of his directorship, Friedel begged the audience to be patient with him and not to expect too much.¹⁷ Reviewers criticized Friedel as inexperienced because of various directorial missteps; these included offering too many different shows in a row, with the result that the actors were underprepared, and scrambling to find enough performers to cover each type (*Fach*) of role – even assigning women to play male roles, as one outraged report notes.¹⁸ One writer acknowledged that these lapses might have been due to Friedel's ill health, but added that this was no excuse for subjecting audiences to ill-prepared actors reading rather than performing their parts from memory

or for reducing the role of reviewers to commenting on whether these parts were read poorly or relatively well.¹⁹

Thus far, Friedel's troupe had performed only plays, but in January of 1789 he made plans to introduce German-language opera. A German opera troupe was engaged to begin after Easter; the goal was to offer a wider variety of entertainment.²⁰ Even prior to Easter, Friedel brought opera, mainly in the form of a few German translations of Italian comic works, to the Theater auf der Wieden for the first time. The press deemed this move a financial calculation, comparing it to Schikaneder's earlier engagement with the state theaters and writing that although Schikaneder's previous performances in a Viennese theater had been mediocre at best, they nevertheless filled the house with a charmed Viennese public, always eager for more German-language opera.²¹ German opera, in other words, was immensely popular but panned by the critics. As the *Kritisches Theater Journal von Wien* damningly put it, "The theater was full, but the actors were empty."²² Friedel ran the theater for just a year and died after an extended illness on March 31, 1789, at the age of thirty-eight. Since she was female, the codirector, Eleonore Schikaneder, may have thought it unrealistic to run the theater by herself, so she sought the assistance of her husband, Emanuel. The years of his directorship represented a golden age, the most important period in the story of the Theater auf der Wieden and the one that produced *The Magic Flute*.

Characters and Repertory

The first work to premiere under Schikaneder's directorship of the theater was his own *Der dumme Gärtner im Gebürge, oder die zween Anton* (The Stupid Gardner in the Mountains, or The Two Antons), with music by Johann Baptist Henneberg and Benedikt Schack. Schikaneder himself played Anton, a character intended as competition for the popular Kasperl, a comic figure who reigned at the rival Theater in der Leopoldstadt. Anton never achieved Kasperl's level of acclaim in Vienna, but both characters represent a tradition in Viennese comedy that originates in the much older Hanswurst figure, popularized by Josef Anton Stranitzky in the first half of the eighteenth century. With roots in the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, this largely improvised comic type allowed Stranitzky and later performers the freedom to create a witty lower-class or servant character, who could outmaneuver his aristocratic or bourgeois masters while improvising lines that were relevant to, or even critical of,

contemporary society. Much of the appeal of such comedy lay in making the upper classes look ridiculous. It was for this reason that Empress Maria Theresia had attempted to control improvised comedy in 1752, finally banning it in 1770, at which time a protocol for censoring theatrical works was established.²³ Nevertheless, improvised comedy continued in full force through the reign of Joseph II. Even a theater reviewer was shocked by what Kasperl was able to get away with on the stage of the Theater in der Leopoldstadt in 1789 as he offended morals and religion, to say nothing of good taste.²⁴

Papageno is the most famous of these lower-class characters, whose lineage continued into the nineteenth century. Having inherited their main features, he is generally bumbling, good-hearted, cowardly, and ruled by his appetites, but he deviates from them in that he says nothing in *The Magic Flute* that is particularly subversive. Characters such as Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, also share Hanswurstian features. Whereas in Mozart's time such figures were associated more with silliness and coarse humor, the nineteenth-century successors of Hanswurst returned to criticizing authority, not only through improvised lines they might have sneaked into the written text but also in the development of a type of metalanguage that was an unexpected by-product of the censorship process – a censor struck an offensive word from a libretto and replaced it with an innocent one – and the performer, through nuance, could convey the original offensive meaning, presumably much to the delight of the audience.²⁵

On a visit in 1768, Leopold Mozart was unamused by the undying popularity of Hanswurst and characters of his ilk among the Viennese and called their antics “foolish stuff.”²⁶ But the elitist opinion of Mozart, senior, was in the minority. The Viennese loved their Hanswursts, Antons, and Kasperls.²⁷ Wanting to capitalize on the popularity of *Der dumme Gärtner*, Schikaneder created six sequels featuring Anton over the next six years. In 1791 Mozart wrote his Variations K. 613 on “Ein Weib ist das herrlichste Ding auf der Welt” (A woman is the most wonderful thing in the world), a popular aria from the second Anton opera, *Die verdeckten Sachen* (The Obscured Things).²⁸

On November 7, 1789, Schikaneder presented Paul Wranitzky and Karl Ludwig Gieseke's opera, *Oberon, König der Elfen* (Oberon, King of the Elves), initiating a new era in Viennese popular theater that culminated in *Die Zauberflöte*.²⁹ *Oberon* was enormously successful, and Schikaneder's rival Karl Marinelli, director of the Theater in der Leopoldstadt, took notice and began presenting competing magical operas in his theater. *Oberon* was

novel, not only because it was a magically themed and newly written German-language opera, but also because magical aspects were a central rather than an incidental part of the misadventures of an Anton or Kasperl figure.³⁰ There had been magical operas in Vienna before this time, of course, but the subject of the supernatural was treated differently then. During the reign of Maria Theresia (1740–80), magic on the stage had been frowned upon because it was thought to encourage superstition and to detract from religious teachings.³¹ But under her son Joseph, censorship around magic on the stage was loosened, and later operas such as *Oberon* and *The Magic Flute* employed aspects of the supernatural to transmit Enlightenment morals. For example, Sarastro's powers of good are related to the sun, the Queen of the Night's evil powers are connected to the moon, and the rites undergone by Pamina and Tamino emphasize fortitude and wisdom. The religious-seeming ceremonies and even quasi-religious figures like Sarastro would not have made it past the censor prior to 1780. Joseph's successors (Leopold II and Francis II) tightened censorship laws again, but with more emphasis on eradicating political and sexual content than magical or anti-religious material.³²

The centrality of magic was not the only similarity between *Oberon* and *The Magic Flute*. Both operas include a couple subjected to various difficult trials, a magical instrument (in *Oberon* it is a horn), music that compels villains to dance, and the use of coloratura to indicate supernatural power. *Oberon* is a trouser role, written for soprano and premiered by one of the central figures of Schikaneder's troupe, Josepha Hofer, who, in addition to being Mozart's sister-in-law, was also the first Queen of the Night.³³ Other than *The Magic Flute*, *Oberon* was perhaps the best-known magical opera of its time, and it was performed widely outside Vienna, for example in Frankfurt and Hamburg.³⁴ One reason so many other Viennese magical operas, both those contemporary with and especially later than *The Magic Flute*, never captured the imagination of audiences outside the city could be their connection to the so-called *Lokalstück* (local farce). This tradition of popular comic pieces included numerous references to either Viennese landmarks or local incidents that someone in Vienna would have understood, but that made them less accessible to people living elsewhere.³⁵

Since theaters and their offerings were a major source of entertainment for the public, people frequently attended the same show multiple times. In Mozart's day, even the upper echelons of society attended the Theater auf der Wieden and its rival houses. Leopold II and his wife, Maria Luisa, for example, brought the visiting Sicilian court to a performance of *Der Stein der Weisen* (1790), having also attended a performance of the same opera

nine days earlier. The nobility often rented boxes for an entire season, sometimes in more than one theater, which gave them (or their friends) the opportunity to attend all performances of all the works in any given season. The theater provided a place of entertainment, and repeated attendance could bring great familiarity with the repertoire, but it was also a useful venue for conducting business deals and pursuing romances – eighteenth-century opera audiences were hardly as quiet and polite as twenty-first-century ones.

Schikaneder's Troupe

The Theater auf der Wieden's performing troupe easily numbered fifty people without counting the supporting staff, which included subdirectors (dance master and prompter, for example), composers, orchestral players, administrative staff, set builders, and painters.³⁶ Life in the theater was very much a family affair: there were many married couples within the troupe, and children often began participating at a young age. Schikaneder, in addition to his work as director and librettist, continued as performer, most famously playing Papageno in *The Magic Flute* and, true to this type, other rustic, comic characters, notably the lead role in *Der Tiroler Wastel* (Wastel from Tyrol), which became another one of the theater's most popular offerings.³⁷ Schikaneder's older brother, Urban, was also a member of the troupe and originated the role of the First Priest in *The Magic Flute*; Urban's daughter, Anna, may have played the role of the First Boy, although that is not indicated on surviving playbills.

In 1796, the theater's performing personnel could be divided into three separate troupes, consisting of eight male and eight female singers (including Emanuel Schikaneder), ten male and five female actors (including Eleonore Schikaneder), and five male and three female dancers, as well as two grotesque dancers and twelve *Figuranten* or extras. Grotesque dancers, or *grotteschi*, combined French ballet techniques with pantomime and more daring, acrobatic movements that came from Italy.³⁸ There could be overlap between these three groups, as perhaps one actor was also an accomplished dancer, and some actors may also have filled out the chorus, which is listed as having only five members between 1793 and 1794.³⁹ A performer could, for example, have played kindly older men and funny servants but might also have sung tenor roles in opera. The listings of personnel from closer to Mozart's time seem to mainly divide the performers by gender rather than *métier*, which implies that over time there was

less overlap and more specialization, perhaps as the theater became more successful and could hire more personnel.

Not much is known about the men responsible for how the sets looked: on the playbill for the premiere of *Die Zauberflöte*, Joseph Gail is listed as the set painter and someone named Nesslthaler as the designer. Contemporary reviews of this and other shows at the theater frequently indicate that sets and decorations were magnificent, but offer few details. Reviewers tended to comment if something was particularly unusual, such as when, in 1797, actual cannons were rolled onto the stage during the second part of Schikaneder's *Der Tiroler Wastel* to honor Archduke Karl's military achievements. The librettos of most of the operas from the Theater auf der Wieden describe the scenery in some detail, and the *Allmanach für Theaterfreunde* from 1789 to 1790 includes twelve engravings by Ignaz Albrecht of scenes from operas or plays that confirm the variety of sets used in this theater. All of the scenes show that great attention was paid to perspective and giving the illusion of depth: they show details, for example, of the interior of a house, depicting its row of decorative plates above the door, or of an outdoor scene with a realistic-looking mill wheel; and two illustrations from *Der Stein der Weisen* show the use of a platform on which performers could stand if they needed to sink into or rise from the depths. Albrecht's engravings are also important because they provide the only known images of some of the main performers at the theater.⁴⁰

Suburban Theaters in Contemporary Reviews

With the exception of *The Magic Flute*, much of the music in works performed at the Theater auf der Wieden earned a reputation for being third-rate. That may be partly due to confusion about chronology and which works were being reviewed. Reviews from the years around 1791, the year of *The Magic Flute*, were frequently positive, and some writers were even impressed by the quality of the music. In the earlier period (for instance, under Friedel), shows at the theater had generally earned less favorable reviews, in which critics objected to the quality of the performances rather than to the music itself. And later, in the nineteenth century, as the repertoire tended toward lighter fare, in which music played a more ancillary role, there was a marked increase in negative reviews that commented on the banality of the plots and the simplicity of the music. But Mozart's Viennese decade (1781–91), which corresponds roughly to the reign of Joseph II, was a unique and particularly creative time in the city.

Since censorship was loosened during this time, there were more creative possibilities to explore, particularly in operas and plays, the texts of which were generally more heavily censored than those in books.

Schikaneder's decision to hire two singers who could also compose – Schack and Gerl – as well as the influx of highly qualified court musicians, who came to the theater due to the closure of one of the court theaters, resulted in musical performances of particularly high quality. The overlap of *métiers*, as troupe members frequently took on duties other than their official or major ones, was important in creating the special environment that was the Theater auf der Wieden. David Buch has pointed out that people like Schack and Gerl helped set this theater apart from the other suburban houses.⁴¹ Certainly, the collaborative approach to composition that produced *Der Stein der Weisen* seems more pronounced at the Theater auf der Wieden than elsewhere in Vienna. But we should not overstate the success of the theater simply because of *The Magic Flute*.

Other suburban houses, and most especially the Theater in der Leopoldstadt under the direction of Karl Marinelli, easily enjoyed as much acclaim for their shows as did the Theater auf der Wieden. Of course, we might do well to consider acclaim and quality separately, and the wide-ranging tastes of Viennese audiences are important to consider: one reviewer, after noting the success of the premier of *The Magic Flute* and the magnificence of its decorations and costumes, commented in his subsequent sentence on the success of the competing play that same night at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt, which featured an actor dressed as an orangutan as its main character.⁴² More serious examples of well-crafted works at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt are Wenzel Müller's *Das Sonnenfest der Braminen* (The Brahmins' Sun Festival, 1790) and *Das Donauweibchen* (The Nymph of the Danube, 1798), with music by Ferdinand Kauer. At least one prominent scholar holds that, apart from *The Magic Flute*, the quality of the pieces at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt was higher than those at the Theater auf der Wieden.⁴³ It seems that throughout this period Schikaneder paid close attention to the Theater in der Leopoldstadt and frequently modeled aspects of his works on those of its best-known writers, Joachim Perinet and Karl Friedrich Hensler.

Recipes for Success

Suburban theaters were important entertainment venues for the Viennese public, and their personnel were expected to continually produce new works. As such, it is unsurprising that Schikaneder wrote sequels or reused

plot structures that he knew would be successful; *The Magic Flute* and some of Schikaneder's other important magical operas derive source material from Christoph Martin Wieland's collection of fairy tales entitled *Dschinnistan*. One of these, *Der Stein der Weisen*, was a particularly important model for *The Magic Flute*. Much of the plot of *The Magic Flute* rests on the twist that the Queen of the Night is not the wronged mother she at first appears to be, but a vengeful, power-hungry sorceress, and that Sarastro is not a throne-usurping child abductor, but a unifying ruler governed by reason. Similarly, *Der Stein der Weisen* presents two powerful magician brothers, one of whom (Eutifronte) convinces the hero (Nadir) that he must kill the other brother (Astromonte) to save his beloved Nadine. Eventually, Nadir realizes that Astromonte is actually the good brother.⁴⁴ In both operas, it is an initially wronged party who turns out to be evil: since he was the second-born son, Eutifronte was denied the philosopher's stone by his father, and it is presumably because she is a woman that the Queen of the Night was denied her husband's throne, which was given instead to Sarastro. The similar, often rhyming names of the couples, as well as the pairing of an upper-class couple with a lower-class one, are common features of fairytales; Pamina and Tamino are equivalent to Nadir and Nadine, while Papageno and Papagena are equivalent to Lubano and Lubanara.⁴⁵ In scenes involving Eutifronte, Lubanara, and Lubano, Eutifronte's evil (in this case he kidnaps Lubanara) is augmented by his blackness, just as Monostatos was considered more threatening to Pamina because of his dark skin.

Further evidence of a type of house efficiency is the composition of the music by more than one composer. The first of the *Anton* series is one example, but the best known of the theater's collaboratively written *Singspiele* is *Der Stein der Weisen*. The most obvious composer for this work is Henneberg, who, as the official composer and *Kapellmeister* of the theater, would have been expected to write the music for any new pieces to be performed and to conduct the orchestra, but Gerl (the first Sarastro) and Schack (the first Tamino) also composed parts of the opera. There is evidence that Mozart composed a duet and two sections of the finale for it.⁴⁶ This collaborative approach speaks to the speed and efficiency with which new works needed to be written, so that they could be rehearsed quickly and then performed. A contemporary Viennese author likened the process of composing at the theater to building a house, where each person contributes a different part to create a whole. Composition and performance were intimately intertwined in a manner quite foreign to present-day notions of opera – most often understood as the creative product of one

person brought to life by interpreters. As the Viennese author noted, this older process was certainly the fastest way to bring a work to the stage.⁴⁷

Schikaneder's method of creating new works for his theater can be understood as a template that included similar sets of characters and then allowed for the adjustment of plot and setting and the addition of new music. This was a profitable way to run the business because performers could be placed into roles that were written to emphasize their individual strengths, thereby appealing to the audience. The focus, musically speaking, was always on writing for the appropriate voice types available within the troupe, but it was also important to keep the type of character (e.g., comic, old, lower-class) and audience expectations in mind.

Operas presented at rival theaters, particularly at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt, clearly influenced *The Magic Flute*, although it is difficult to determine with certainty whether the source of influence was a plot feature, a type of stock character, or a particular example of that feature or character in a single work. *Das Sonnenfest der Braminen*, set to Müller's music with a libretto by Karl Friedrich Hensler, was first performed on September 9, 1790, at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt, and is an excellent case in point. The preface to the libretto emphasizes that the work was intended to honor the upcoming double wedding of Archduke Francis, the future emperor, and his younger brother, Archduke Ferdinand. Although the plot is different from that of *The Magic Flute* and rather like other operas of the period – long-lost family members are rediscovered and cross-dressing leads to an amusing mix-up – several of its other features remind us of Schikaneder and Mozart's work. Worship of nature, including the sun, is central, and there are many solemn, priestly choruses with prayers directed at two deities, Brama and Wistnu. Importance is placed on the relative unworthiness of those who do not belong to this priestly caste and on a belief that people can only truly be trusted once they have been initiated. There are two main lower-class characters in *Das Sonnenfest der Braminen*, one a gardener and the other a comic servant, who resemble Monostatos and Papageno, respectively. There is confusion at their initial meeting, and their subsequent conversation concerns Black Hottentots stealing their master's beloved; the gardener mentions stealing kisses and that his urges keep leading him to the hut of two female characters. The Papageno figure discusses girls and wine – the good things in life – and is particularly cowardly when faced with anything serious or life-threatening. He also makes light of the priestly traditions and sings an aria, "Adieu! du schnöde, böse Welt!" (Farewell! you disdainful, wicked world!), when he thinks he is going to die. There are other similarities as well: the male lead character's

first sung words are “zu Hülfe” (prefiguring Tamino’s “Zu Hilfe”); one main female character begs the highest figure of authority for her freedom (as when Pamina asks Sarastro for hers); and the other leading female sings about whether the feeling she is experiencing is love and decides “Ja ja, nein nein, die Liebe muß es seyn” (very much as Tamino sings in “Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön”).

How should we understand this partial list of similarities between *Das Sonnenfest der Braminen* and *Die Zauberflöte*? We could look to stock characters and situations to explain them (servant characters are always ruled by their base instincts), or we could assume that some similarities are more specific than general (in 1790 and 1791, sun-worshipping priests might have been just the right enticement to bring audiences to the theater). Either way, this example of *Das Sonnenfest der Braminen* invites us to consider just how cognizant of each other’s productions Schikaneder and his rivals were. Character types, plot lines, and literal lines from operas were easily absorbed and transferred to others. In this brief overview of the Theater auf der Wieden, I have tried to set *The Magic Flute* in the immediate context of the stage on which it premiered. It may not be possible to recover or entirely recreate this theatrical culture, but knowing more about the Theater auf der Wieden, its company of singers and actors, and other operas produced on its stage and in rival theaters can help us to understand *The Magic Flute* not merely as a work of “singularity” but as part of a repertory. It should be clear that the messy collection of works being performed around *The Magic Flute* both at the Theater auf der Wieden and at rival theaters can be considered an important source for understanding Mozart and Schikaneder’s opera.

Notes

1. David J. Buch, “The House Composers of the Theater auf der Wieden in the Time of Mozart (1789–91),” *Min-Ad: Israel Studies in Musicology Online* 5/2 (2006): 14.
2. *Ibid.*, 18.
3. Michael Lorenz, “Neue Forschungsergebnisse zum Theater auf der Wieden und Emanuel Schikaneder,” *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 4 (2008): 2; Andrea Harrandt and Christian Fastl, “Freihaustheater auf der Wieden,” *Oesterreichisches Musiklexikon* online article, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1553/0x00020888> (accessed July 26, 2021).
4. Else Spiesberger, *Das Freihaus* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1980), 61–62.

5. Franz Hadamowsky, *Wien, Theatergeschichte: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Vienna: Jugend und Volk, 1988), 504.
6. Lorenz, "Neue Forschungsergebnisse," 4; Spiesberger, *Das Freihaus*, 42.
7. Lorenz, "Neue Forschungsergebnisse," 5.
8. *Ibid.*, 4.
9. David Buch, "'Der Stein der Weisen,' Mozart, and Collaborative Singspiels at Emanuel Schikaneder's Theater auf der Wieden," *Mozart-Jahrbuch* 2000, 114; "Recensionen," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 1/5 (October 31, 1798): cols. 72–80, at col. 73.
10. Lorenz, "Neue Forschungsergebnisse," 4.
11. *Ibid.*, 7.
12. Spiesberger, *Das Freihaus*, 50.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Christian Rossbach, *Wienerzeitung*, September 29, 1787. The theater actually opened a week later, on October, 14, 1787; Hadamowsky, *Wien, Theatergeschichte*, 505.
15. Hadamowsky, *Wien, Theatergeschichte*, 505.
16. Lorenz, "Neue Forschungsergebnisse," 5–6.
17. Johann Friedel, *Antrittsrede bei Eröffnung des Theaters im hochfürstl. Stahrenbergischen Freihauses auf der Wieden* (Vienna: Joh. Jos. Jahn, 1788).
18. Otto Erich Deutsch, *Das Wiener Freihaustheater* (Vienna: Deutscher Verlag für Jugend und Volk, 1937), 9, 11.
19. *Kritisches Theater-Journal von Wien*, February 19, 1789 (Vienna: Mathias Ludwig, 1789), 53–55.
20. Deutsch, *Das Wiener Freihaustheater*, 10.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Kritisches Theater-Journal von Wien*, January 8, 1789 (Vienna: Mathias Ludwig, 1789), 232.
23. James Van Horn Melton, "From Image to Word: Cultural Reform and the Rise of Literate Culture in Eighteenth-Century Austria," *Journal of Modern History* 58/1 (1986), 121–23.
24. *Kritisches Theater-Journal von Wien*, March 14, 1789 (Vienna: Mathias Ludwig, 1789), 119–28.
25. Lisa de Alwis, "Censorship and Magical Opera in Early Nineteenth-Century Vienna" (PhD dissertation, University of Southern California, 2012), 37.
26. "That the Viennese, generally speaking, do not care to see serious and sensible things [performances], have little or no understanding of them, and only want to see foolish stuff, dances, devils, ghosts, magic, Hanswurst, Lipperl, Bernardorn, witches and apparitions is well known, and their theaters prove it every day." Lipperl and Bernardorn are two other characters derived from Hanswurst. Leopold Mozart to Lorenz Hagenauer, January 30, 1768, in MBA, I:254.

27. Egon R. von Komorzyński, *Emanuel Schikaneder* (Berlin: Behr's Verlag, 1901), 27.
28. David J. Buch, *Two Operas from the Series Die zween Anton, Part 2: Die verdeckten Sachen (Vienna, 1789)* (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2016), 301–06.
29. Peter Branscombe has noted that Gieseke's libretto is "hardly more than a mild revision" of a libretto entitled *Hüon und Amande* by Friederike Sophie Seyler. COH, 28.
30. De Alwis, "Censorship and Magical Opera," 112.
31. *Ibid.*, 2–3, 10–12.
32. *Ibid.*, 55, 58.
33. COH, 28; David J. Buch, *Magic Flutes & Enchanted Forests: The Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Musical Theater* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 292–93.
34. Deutsch, *Das Wiener Freihaustheater*, 16. *Oberon* was performed in Frankfurt in 1790 as part of the festivities surrounding the coronation of Leopold II as the new Holy Roman Emperor, which Mozart also attended. According to Deutsch, the opera was given twenty-four times over the next six weeks.
35. De Alwis, 110–11.
36. *Wiener Theater Almanach für das Jahr 1796* (Vienna: Joseph Camesina, 1796), 46–50.
37. Wastel is a shortened form of Sebastian.
38. Kathleen Kuzmick-Hansell, "Eighteenth-Century Italian Theatrical Ballet," in *The Grottesque Dancer on the Eighteenth-century Stage: Gennaro Magri and His World*, ed. Rebecca Harris-Warrick and Bruce Alan Brown (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 20–23.
39. Joseph Sonnleithner, *Wiener Theater Almanach für das Jahr 1795* (Vienna: Joseph Camesina, 1795), LIV.
40. David Buch, "Newly-Identified Engravings of Scenes from Emanuel Schikaneder's Theater auf der Wieden," *Maske und Kothurn* 48/1–4 (2002): 370.
41. Buch, "House Composers," 15.
42. Dexter Edge, "The earliest published report on the premiere of *Die Zauberflöte* (1 October 1791)," in *Mozart: New Documents*, ed. Dexter Edge and David Black, first published March 16, 2015, updated December 6, 2017, www.mozartdocuments.org/documents/1-october-1791/ (accessed March 22, 2023).
43. Peter Branscombe, "The Singspiel in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Musical Times* 112, no. 1537 (1971): 228.
44. For David Buch's extensive work on this and other operas at the Theater auf der Wieden, see Buch, *Magic Flutes & Enchanted Forests*, 294–314.

45. For more on the aspects of his operas that Schikaneder tended to repeat, see Buch, "Die Zauberflöte, Masonic Opera, and Other Fairytales," *Acta Musicologica* 76/2 (2004): 207–08.
46. David Buch, ed., *Der Stein der Weisen* (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2007), xii.
47. *Wiener Theater Almanach für das Jahr 1794* (Vienna: Kurzbeck, 1794), 188; Buch, "House Composers," 16.