

Salieri

AND VIENNESE OPERA

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS / CHICAGO AND LONDON

Der Rauchfangkehrer

On his return to Vienna on 8 April 1780, Salieri rejoined Joseph's private musical group. Although the first concert in which he took part, that same day, was devoted to the performance of excerpts from two of the operas written during his Italian trip, it is clear from Mosel's account that Joseph had German opera on his mind:

After the concert was over, Salieri was instructed to attend, the same evening, the "National Singspiel," to use the name given by the emperor to the German opera troupe he had established at his own expense shortly before Salieri's departure for Italy and had continued to support. "You must then tell me," the monarch added, "if the opera troupe and the whole organization has made progress during your absence."

Mosel does not mention what opera Salieri heard, but we know that Grétry's *Lucile* received its eighth performance that evening in the Nationaltheater.²⁵

Mosel's narrative continues:

when he [Salieri] was next present at the chamber concert, the emperor asked him as soon as he saw him, "Well, what do you think of our National Singspiel?" Salieri, who was in fact delighted with what he had heard and seen, answered that he found this musical theater wonderfully perfect in every respect.

"Now you must compose a German opera," said the emperor. Salieri suggested that one of the five operas that he had written in Italy be translated into German. "No translation" replied the emperor, smiling. "An original Singspiel!" "Your Majesty," answered Salieri, "I would not know how to begin composing an opera in German; I speak it so badly . . ." "Well," the emperor interrupted, still smiling, "then this work will serve as an exercise in the language. Tomorrow morning I will direct Count Rosenberg to have a German libretto prepared for you."²⁶

The death of Joseph's mother Maria Theresa on 29 November 1780 was followed by the closing of the theaters for two months, delaying the production that resulted from Joseph's command. Salieri's first German opera, *Der Rauchfangkehrer* (*The Chimney Sweep*), reached the stage of the Burgtheater about a year after Joseph commissioned it, on 30 April 1781. Salieri's librettist was Leopold von Auenbrugger, a Viennese physician of some distinction whose acquaintance with the composer went back at least as far as 1774, when he served as a witness at Salieri's wedding.

Der Rauchfangkehrer derives much of its humor and dramatic interest from the interaction of social classes. Volpino ("Little Fox"), an Italian chimney sweep and musi-

25. Michtner, 463; Hadamowsky, *Hoftheater*, 1:79.

26. Mosel, 72.

cian, is engaged to Lisel, a cook in the house of the young widow Frau von Habicht ("Hawk"). The middle-class Frau von Habicht and her stepdaughter Nannette are the objects of amorous advances by the petty noblemen Herr von Bär and Herr von Wolf. Volpino puts into action an elaborate trick that he hopes will result in a dowry for him and Lisel. With his musical skills he charms both widow and stepdaughter into falling in love with him. Then to Bär and Wolf he proposes a deal by which he will reject the two women in exchange for a handsome dowry. The little fox outsmarts the bear and the wolf. After a suitable amount of confusion and misunderstanding, Volpino's plan is successful, and the opera ends with all the principal characters happily anticipating marriage.

In spite of the German text *Der Rauchfangkehrer* is in many ways more Italian than German: both libretto and music remind one more of opera buffa than of north-German Singspiel or opéra-comique. In its length it represents an expansion of the Viennese Singspiel as cultivated by Umlauf, whose *Die Bergknappen* has one act and *Die pücefarbnen Schuhe* two. Salieri's opera has three full acts, like most opere buffe written before 1780, with thirty-two numbers (*Die pücefarbnen Schuhe* has twenty-one). Both acts 1 and 2 end with finales.

Auenbrugger provided Salieri with aria texts to which he could respond with all the musical devices of opera buffa. The catalogue aria that in Goldoni's skillful hands became a standard aria type makes its appearance here as "Bei meiner Seel'," sung by Fischer in the role of Bär. The long text with short lines, with its incorporation of foreign words and musical terminology, invited musical commentary from Salieri as irresistibly as Boccherini's catalogue of musical instruments "Non vo' già che vi suonino" (in *L'amore innocente*) had a decade earlier.

Bei meiner Seel', dies wäre viel,
 Kein Sänger singt all's, was er will;
 Er hat sein Ziel.
 In dem lobt man nur,
 Passagen, Bravour,
 Im tönenden Gesang,
 Hat jener den Rang,
 Der zwickt den Falset,
 Und wird sehr erhebt.
 Man staunt bei dem Mann,
 Die Tiefe des Ton.
 Wo bleibt das *Crescendo*?
 Wie klingt das *Calando*?
 Die schmelzende Bindung,
 Die schmachttende Schwindung?

Wie sind die Gruppetten,
 Tenuten, Falseten?
 Das *Liscio Staccato*?
 Das *Tempo rubato*,
 Dann das Sincopiren,
 Und and're Manieren?
 Kurz: das Portament;
 Das Trillern am end'?
 Bei meiner Seel', das wäre viel!
 Kein Sänger singt all's, was er will,
 Er hat sein Ziel.

[Upon my soul, that would be too much! No singer sings everything that he would like: he has his limits. In this singer one praises only *passaggi*, *bravura*; that one has earned his rank by the beauty of his *cantabile*. This one squeaks the falsetto and is highly exalted; that one excites admiration for the depth of his tone. Where is the *crescendo*? How does the *calando* sound? The languishing *legato*, the yearning *diminuendo*? How are the *gruppetti*, the *tenuti*, the *falsetti*? The *liscio* [simple] *staccato*, the *tempo rubato*? Then the syncopation and the other devices? In short, the portamento, and the trill at the end? Upon my soul, that would be too much! No singer sings everything that he would like: he has his limits.]

Salieri's setting incorporated many of the musical elements that his audience would have expected from an Italian aria for comic bass. But the aria conveys, perhaps under the inspiration of the singer who first performed it, an attractive sense of individuality. Salieri managed to imbue even his conventional marchlike opening melody in D major with a melodic distinctiveness rare in arias written for *buffi caricati* (ex. 9.5). He responded to words written especially for Fischer ("Die Tiefe des Ton") with music written for him: low F# sustained over four and a half measures, reinforced by horn, cellos, and bassoons on the same pitch and double basses an octave lower (ex. 9.6).

Another comic aria whose ancestry in opera buffa Viennese audiences may well have recognized is Bär's "Zwei tausend Gulden Kapital." The question that Bär repeatedly asks himself—"Herr Bär, was wirst du tun?"—identifies this as an aria of indecision. By setting it in Eb, Salieri acknowledged a tradition of arias of indecision in this key that went back to the 1730s.

The anonymous author of *Meine Empfindungen im Theater*, a commentary of Viennese theater published in 1781, probably had "Bei meiner Seel'" and "Zwei tausend Gulden Kapital" in mind when discussing Fischer's performance: "His excellent singing, his voice's infinite low register, which remains pleasing and pure down to the lowest notes, and his pleasant, light upper register, his artistry and style make him one of the greatest singers; but his acting makes him also a good actor, as long as one gives him roles that suit his rather fat body and his mature appearance. He played Herr von

EXAMPLE 9.5 Salieri, *Der Rauchfangkehrer*, act 1, "Bei meiner Seel'," mm. 1-19 (A-Wn, Mus. Hs. 16611; facsimile, New York, 1986)

Allegro moderato *Bär*

Bei mei-ner Seel', dies wä - re

[f] *p*

Str., Ob., Bn., Hn.

viel; kein Sän - ger singt all's was er

will, kein Sän - ger singt all's was er will;

er hat sein Ziel, er hat sein

(Continued on next page)

EXAMPLE 9.5 (continued)

Ziel, er hat sein Ziel, er

hat sein Ziel.

cresc. ff

EXAMPLE 9.6 *Der Rauchfangkehrer*, act 1, "Bei meiner Seel'," mm. 106–13

Man staunt bei dem Mann die Tie - fe des Ton

Bär excellently; and in many intelligently acted moments he helped the unintelligent libretto.”²⁷

Auenbrugger and Salieri introduced Habicht and Nannette with a device characteristic of Goldonian opera buffa, in which it was normally limited to parti buffe. Volpino, at the keyboard, accompanies Habicht in a performance of the first stanza of a German song, which they read from a printed anthology. In the spoken dialogue that follows, Nannette tells Volpino: “You will now accompany me in the second strophe of the same song.” This procedure might have reminded Viennese audiences of similar pairs of numbers in *La buona figliuola*, *Il mercato di Malmantile*, and Salieri’s *La locandiera*. The

27. Herr Fischer war Herr von Bär—sein vortreflicher Gesang, die unendliche Tiefe seiner Stimme, die angenehm und rein bis in den letzten Ton bleibt, und seine leichte angenehme Höhe, seine Kunst und Weise machen ihn zu einem der größten Sänger; aber sein Spiel macht ihn auch zum guten Schauspieler, wenn man ihm nur solche Rollen zutheilet, die seinem etwas fetten Körper und gesetzten Ansehen anpassen. Den Herrn von Bär hat er recht vortreflich gespielt, und durch manche raisonnirte Stelle dem unraisonnirten Gedichte nachgeholfen (*Meine Empfindungen im Theater*, Erster Quartal [Vienna, 1781], 193).

delicate melody with gavotte rhythms to which Habicht and Nannette sing the "German song" is accompanied by an attractive mixture of bowed and plucked strings that represents Volpino's keyboard playing.

Like Umlauf (and following his own earlier practice in opera buffa) Salieri wrote no parti serie; but that did not keep him from indulging in all the extravagant virtuosity associated with that kind of role. He wrote brilliant coloratura arias for both his leading ladies, saving the most dramatic vocal display for his protégée Cavalieri in the role of Nannette.

Nannette's "Wenn dem Adler das Gefieder" (the text develops the zoological imagery already evident in the names of some of the characters) is a worthy successor to the bravura arias sung by Cavalieri in *La finta scema* and *Die Bergknappen*, both of which are in the same key of C major. The heavy orchestration (trumpets and drums, oboes, bassoons, and strings) and impressive length of the orchestral introduction (twenty-eight measures) announce the importance of this aria even before Nannette begins to sing. The vocal line, with its marchlike dotted rhythms and fiery coloratura reaching repeatedly up to high C and once to high D, is typical of those written for Cavalieri.²⁸ This is the kind of music in which she excelled: a display of musical brilliance that required little in the way of acting.

The author of *Meine Empfindungen im Theater* described Cavalieri's performance in *Der Rauchfangkehrer* with enough detail for us to visualize her rendition of "Wenn dem Adler":

Cavalieri . . . who has earned a reputation among connoisseurs as one of the leading singers and who delights the ears even of those who know nothing of music, played Fräulein [Nannette]. Her acting gets better every day and one notices how much more trouble she takes when she performs together with others whose acting has attained greater energy, more exactness, and greater skill. In speaking she is still not natural enough: she still emphasizes the last syllable of words too much and shortens the last word of the sentence so much that she becomes difficult to understand. Her use of the arms is still a little too stiff; they are bent forward too much and not relaxed enough. And yet she already is capable of great expression. She has a fine sense of decorum in her bearing and her countenance, and she will soon satisfy us as an actress as much as she delights us with her voice.²⁹

28. Gidwitz, "Vocal Profiles of Four Mozart Sopranos," 57–58, discusses "Wenn dem Adler" briefly in the context of other music written for Cavalieri by Salieri and other Viennese composers.

29. Demoiselle Cavalieri, die den Ruhm der Kenner als eine der ersten Sängerinnen für sich hat, und durch ihren schönen Gesang auch das Ohr des Nichtkenner vergnügt, spielte das Fräulein—Ihr Spiel wird täglich besser, und man bemerket, wie viel mehr Mühe sie sich giebt, wenn sie neben anderen spielt, deren Spiel höheren Schwung, mehrere Richtigkeit und sichere Festigkeit erhalten hat.—Im Sprechen hat sie noch zu wenig Natur, stößt die Endsylben noch zu viel, und verkürzt die letzten Worte der Rede meist so sehr, daß sie dadurch unverständlich wird. Ihr Armspiel ist noch ein wenig zu steif, zu viel hervogebogen und nicht gelöst genug—aber doch hat sie schon sehr vielen Ausdruck in ihrer Gebärde und Mine, hat einen

A year after the first performance of *Der Rauchfangkehrer* Mozart exploited Cavalieri's virtuosity on an even grander scale in *Die Entführung*. "Martern aller Arten," over twice as long as "Wenn dem Adler," was Mozart's emphatic answer to the C-major showpieces that Umlauf, Salieri, and other Viennese composers wrote for her between 1775 and 1782 and his enthusiastic contribution to the Viennese tradition of concertante arias for coloratura soprano that Salieri had fostered since the early 1770s. Mozart simultaneously paid tribute to and parodied Salieri's concertante effects, he surpassed the orchestral splendor of "Wenn dem Adler," and he showed off Cavalieri's "agile throat" (as he put it in reference to another aria)³⁰ even more brilliantly than her teacher had.³¹

Salieri probably intended the title role in *Der Rauchfangkehrer* as something of a self-portrait. Volpino is not only a chimney sweep but an Italian musician residing in a German-speaking capital city (a Viennese audience would have thought of Vienna itself); he speaks faulty German and insists, at every chance he gets, on singing in Italian and having his music students sing in Italian. This results in the inclusion in *Der Rauchfangkehrer* of no less than four arias in Italian, two sung by Volpino and one by each of his students (a fifth aria begins with an Italian phrase). One, perhaps two Italian arias might have been justified by the precedent of occasional arias in foreign languages in Goldoni's librettos and those of his followers, such as Boccherini's *La fiera di Venezia* and De Gamerra's *La finta scema*.³² But four arias in Italian amounted to an impudent and witty subversion of the idea of German opera. Keeping in mind Salieri's initial response to Joseph's commission, it is tempting to think that he expressed, in the guise of sly Volpino, what he as an Italian musician thought of German opera in the Burgtheater and of his assignment to write a Singspiel. Instead of serving, as Joseph smilingly put it, "as an exercise in the [German] language," the composition of *Der Rauchfangkehrer* served Salieri as an exercise in the ingenious incorporation of Italian language and musical style into a supposedly German opera.

Salieri needed a fine comic actor to bring off this self-parody. He found one in Gottfried Heinrich Schmidt, of whom the author of *Meine Empfindungen im Theater* wrote: "The poet owes him thanks for having taken this role, for through his good, fine acting (in which he did not however descend to vulgar buffoonery, but at the same time let no comic opportunity slip away unused) the book's tediousness and absurdities were made bearable."³³

schönen Anstand, und bald wird sie uns auch als Schauspielerin eben so genug thun, als sie uns durch ihre Stimme entzückt (*Empfindungen*, 191–92).

30. Mozart to his father, 26 September 1781, in *MBA*, 3:163.

31. On "Martern aller Arten" see Thomas Bauman, *W. A. Mozart: Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Cambridge, 1987), 77–82.

32. "En enfant timide," in act 2 of *La finta scema*.

33. Herr Schmid spielte den Volpino; und der Dichter darf ihm Dank wissen, diese Rolle übernommen zu haben; denn durch sein gutes und schönes Spiel, in dem er nicht bis zum niedrigen Lustigmacher herab-

Volpino claims that he studied in Italy with the great musico Carlo Broschi, also known as Farinelli. Broschi was a close friend of Metastasio; this helps explain why Volpino knows Metastasio's poetry. So did Salieri and many members of his audience in the Burgtheater, who probably recognized as settings of Metastasio's verse the Italian songs that Volpino assigns to his students. "Se più felice oggetto" (sung by Frau von Habicht, with phrases sung by Volpino correcting her faulty pronunciation) is from the first act of *Attilio Regolo*; the recitative "Basta, vincerai: eccoti il foglio" and aria "Ah non lasciarmi, no" (sung by Nannette) are from the second act of *Didone abbandonata*.³⁴ The quotation of "Ah non lasciarmi, no" in a comic opera may have reminded some members of the audience of an opera buffa. Paisiello's *Le due contesse* (first performed in Rome in 1776 and later the same year, probably under Salieri's direction, in Vienna) parodies Dido's plea by having Livietta, a maidservant, quote from it in the middle of a comic aria.³⁵

Salieri occasionally made fun, in his Italian arias, of the bel-canto style associated with Metastasian opera seria, as when he had Volpino, in "Augelletti che intorno cantate" (yet more birds!), sing a roulade up to high D. By switching from tenor to soprano clef Salieri asked Volpino, like Bär in "Bei meiner Seele," to sing falsetto. (Salieri, who called for falsetto quite frequently throughout his career,³⁶ obviously liked this comic technique, one that Haydn also exploited often but that Mozart, in contrast, seems to have consistently avoided.)

"Augelletti" may be primarily parodistic in intent; but elsewhere, and nowhere more obviously than in "Ah non lasciarmi, no," Salieri reveled with apparent sincerity in the vocal beauty encouraged by Metastasio's mellifluous verse (ex. 9.7). To depict Volpino's keyboard accompaniment Salieri combined strings played pizzicato and coll'arco, just as he did with the pair of Lieder sung earlier by Habicht and Nannette.

Salieri set the five lines of blank verse preceding this aria as simple recitative, in which Volpino teaches Nannette (as Metastasio taught Salieri and Salieri must have taught Cavalieri) the proper declamation of Metastasio's poetry. When Nannette mispronounces the g in "foglio," Volpino corrects her. Salieri provided no music for Volpino, who either repeated Nannette's notes or recited the words without music (ex. 9.8).

Salieri began *Der Rauchfangkehrer* with a one-movement overture whose relatively thin texture and orchestration may reflect his two years in Italy. It lacks flute, bassoon,

fällt, aber auch keine komische Gelegenheit vorbeyschlüpfen läßt, ohne sie zu benützen, ist vieles von dem Langweiligen, Abgeschmackten des Buches erträglich geworden (*Empfindungen*, 192–93).

34. Volkmar Braunbehrens, *Maligned Master: The Real Story of Antonio Salieri* (New York, 1992), 75, seems to have been first to recognize Metastasio's poetry in *Der Rauchfangkehrer*.

35. "Sapete che dicea," in act 2 of *Le due contesse*; see Hunter, "Some Representations of Opera Seria in Opera Buffa," 92–95.

36. Among the operas in which Salieri required falsetto are *L'amore innocente*, *La finta scema*, *Il ricco d'un giorno*, *Prima la musica e poi le parole*, *Il talismano*, and *Falstaff*.

EXAMPLE 9.7 *Der Rauchfangkehrer*, act 3, "Ah non lasciarmi, no," mm. 1-6

Cantabile

VI. I *arco*

VI. II *pizz.*

Vla. *arco*

Nannette

Ah non la-sciar-mi, no, bell' i - dol mi - o; di

Basso *pizz.*

sforz.

f *p*

sforz.

chi mi fi - de - rò

f *p*

≈ Ah, do not leave me, no, my beloved; whom will I be able to trust?

and timpani parts, while the trumpets merely double the horns. With this small orchestra he made effective use of textural and dynamic contrast, limiting the texture to octaves until the entrance of oboes and horns at measure 9 and withholding the full ensemble until the forte assai at measure 13 (ex. 9.9). The overture is missing from the autograph score. Its absence probably has something to do with Salieri's reuse of most of it as the overture to a later opera, *La cifra*.

EXAMPLE 9.8 *Der Rauchfangkehrer*, act 3, simple recitative before "Ah non lasciarmi, no," mm. 1-7

Nannette *Volpino*

Ba - sta, vin - ce - sti: ec - co - ti il fo - ghlio. Basta, vincesti: eccoti il foglio.

Basso

Nannette

Ba - sta, vin - ce - sti: ec - co - ti il fo - ghlio.

≈ Enough, you have won; here is the paper.

EXAMPLE 9.9 *Der Rauchfangkehrer*, overture, mm. 1-14 (A-Wn, Mus. Hs. 16518)

Allegro presto

p

Str.

[simile]

+Ob., Hn.

p

+Tr.

f assai

Der Rauchfangkehrer was moderately successful in Vienna, performed nine times during the rest of 1781 and three more times during 1782.³⁷ It achieved this number of performances despite unanimous criticism of the libretto, which seems to have touched a raw aesthetic nerve when read by critics who wanted to judge it as spoken drama or its aria texts as poetry. The comments of one anonymous Viennese critic are typical: "Never were reason, taste, and the art of poetry more wickedly desecrated than in this opera. It is wretched from beginning to end, miserable, and nonsensical, and one must pity the excellent Salieri that he had to expend his fine talent on such worthlessness."³⁸

The last performance of *Der Rauchfangkehrer* in the Burgtheater took place on 5 July 1782, less than two weeks before the premiere of *Die Entführung*, Mozart's first opera for the Viennese court theaters since the ill-fated *La finta semplice* of 1768. Mozart had arrived in Vienna in March 1781, a few weeks before the premiere of *Der Rauchfangkehrer*. He must have known Salieri's opera well, and he must have hoped to outdo it. There can be little doubt that the success of *Die Entführung* contributed to the final abandonment of *Der Rauchfangkehrer* by the Viennese court theaters.

Although never revived in the court theaters, *Der Rauchfangkehrer* was taken up by the suburban theaters as they gained strength in the 1780s. The Theater in der Leopoldstadt presented Salieri's opera several times in 1785 and the Theater auf der Landstrasse revived it again in 1790.³⁹

Salieri's opera enjoyed considerable success on German stages for several years. The libretto continued to be the object of disdain, as in the remarks appended to an anonymous arrangement of the libretto prepared for the production of *Der Rauchfangkehrer* in Berlin in 1783. In describing the aria texts as wretched (*elenden*), the editor used a word that had been applied to the entire libretto by the Viennese critic quoted above. Unable to believe it to be an original German work, he suggested that "its origins lie in the ruins of an Italian opera buffa."⁴⁰

In 1783 Leopold Mozart asked his son to send him a copy of Salieri's score, probably in anticipation of a production in Salzburg. When Wolfgang responded in a letter of 10 December 1783 he described the opera (again probably referring to the libretto rather than the music) using one of the same words, *elendes*, that had occurred to critics in Vi-

37. But Bauman's characterization of *Der Rauchfangkehrer* (in his introduction to the facsimile of the autograph score) as "the hit of the [1781] season" is something of an exaggeration. Paisiello's *Die eingebildeten Philosophen* (*I filosofi immaginari*), which came to the stage a month after Salieri's opera, was performed thirteen times in 1781 and eleven times in 1782, clearly surpassing *Der Rauchfangkehrer* in popularity.

38. Nie ist Menschenvernunft, Geschmack und Dichtkunst ärger entweiht worden, als in dieser Oper. Sie ist vom Anfange bis zu Ende elend, jämmerlich und unsinnig, und man mus den vortreflichen Salieri beklagen, daß er sein schönes Talent an solchem Wust hat verwenden müssen (*Allgemeiner Theater Almanach von Jahr 1782*, 57).

39. Angermüller, *Leben*, 2: 60–61.

40. Quoted in Angermüller, *Leben*, 2: 59–60 n. 1.

enna and Berlin: "I'm writing in the greatest hurry to tell you that I have already bought *Der Rauchfangkehrer* for 6 ducats and have it at home. . . . To judge from your letter, you think that *Der Rauchfangkehrer* is an Italian opera. No, it is German and, on top of that, a wretched original play, the author of which is Herr Doctor Auernbrucker of Vienna. You will remember that I told you about it, that Herr Fischer parodied it publicly in the theater."⁴¹ Mozart's last sentence may refer to a letter that is now lost, or perhaps to conversations that took place during his recent visit to Salzburg (July–October 1783). In view of the Italianate qualities of *Der Rauchfangkehrer*, the liberal use of the Italian language within it, the fact that its composer had written no German operas before, and the Viennese practice of making Singspiele by translating opere buffe into German, it would not be surprising if Leopold, like the anonymous editor in Berlin, assumed that *Der Rauchfangkehrer* was originally an opera buffa.

41. Mozart to his father, 10 December 1783, in *MBA*, 3:296. Bauman argues (in his introduction to *Der Rauchfangkehrer*, n. 6): "The context makes it clear that Mozart refers only to the text, not the opera as a whole, as Michtner would have it (*Das alte Burgtheater*, p. 100). Mozart certainly would not have spent six ducats for the score and then have it sent to Leopold had he considered Salieri's music 'wretched.'"