

Cooper C.

Montclair, New Jersey

Hell's Vengeance Boils in my Heart

Oil on canvas

My piece is inspired by The Queen of the Night Aria from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. I really love opera and this piece is such a famous, memorable, beautiful, and incredibly difficult piece to sing. The scene I painted depicts the Queen of the Night encouraging her daughter Pamina to kill the evil Sarastro. I was inspired by Baroque paintings that depicted parables and myths, and I wanted my piece to convey a sense of drama.

Since this project was an opportunity to "go big" with my art, I decided to create a large oil painting. This painting is the biggest and most detailed painting I have ever made and includes subjects like fabrics, landscapes, and portraiture. This painting was an arduous process. I started with monochromatic underpainting and then went in with colored paints. I wanted to maintain a cohesive color scheme, and used mostly blues, blacks, and grays in my background to achieve a moody and mysterious ambiance. I choose a barren and dark background to highlight the two figures as well.

I struggled with various aspects of the painting, from perfecting the Queen's face, to the coloring of the stone. This project allowed me to experiment with oil painting, a skill I learned here at Oxbow. I am still learning and understanding oil paint as well as my own personal style.

This piece was an experiment for me, and I am incredibly happy with how it turned out. This painting taught me a lot about my own artistic style, as well as how to deal with artistic frustrations and roadblocks. Ultimately, with diligence and hard work, my painting paid off and I am incredibly happy and satisfied with the piece I created.

The Magic Flute, an Opera of the Enlightenment



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The Oxbow School

OS46

Writers Note: In this paper, I explored opera and opera's relationship with the real world, specifically in the case of Mozart: The Magic Flute.

Mozart is one of the world's best composers, and his compositions, such as his requiem, have stood the test of time. He operated in a changing world where daily life was upended by enlightened thinking and political revolution. The world was changing around Mozart, yet he, in his short life, would not let it pass him by. Devoted to the Church and the at times anti-Christian freemasons, Mozart was firmly in both camps and ideologies. His works, such as *The Magic Flute*, reflect both his personal beliefs and the shifting political landscape of his time. This opera is a parable of the dangers of revenge, power, and lies. *The Magic Flute* by Mozart is a representation of the enlightenment and is a vehicle for furthering his own political agenda and beliefs.

Opera has historically been used as political or social parables. In between the Revolution and the July Monarchy in France, opera investigated and inspected the revolutionary experience, both exalting and critiquing, without pushing any political or ideological agenda (Grey). During the French revolution, opera shifted from a courtly and aristocratic pastime to an ideological vehicle (Josephs 976). Opera was intended as an underpinning to the fledgling French Republic (Josephs 977). Opera, though seen as a symbol of the rich and powerful, is ultimately for the masses. It does not require literacy or a deep understanding, it is simply a spectacle of powerful voices, majestic costumes, beautiful sets, and thought-provoking stories.

The Magic Flute is not only a popular and attractive fable, but a powerful, impactful, and moving story (Arblaster, 33). A likely part of this opera's importance and popularity is due to its political and ethical idealism (Arblaster, 36). It is an opera that, though a fable and fairy tale, uses symbolism to completely represent its time.

First off, it is necessary to understand the at times confusing plot of the opera. *The Magic Flute* tells the story of Tamino, saved by the Queen of the Night who encourages him to rescue her daughter Pamina from the evil sorcerer Sarastro using a magic flute. While rescuing Pamina; Tamino, at the Temple of Reason, learns that Sarastro is not evil, but good and that the Queen of the Night is actually evil and trying to exact revenge on Sarastro for stealing her perceived position as steward of the temple. Tamino decides to join Sarastro's enlightened brotherhood and has to pass tests of silence, fire, and water. When Pamina informs her mother she intends to join him in the brotherhood, The Queen of the Night orders her to stab Sarastro. The most known aria, widely regarded as one of the most popular and most difficult arias to sing in all of opera, occurs at this moment when the Queen of the Night is close to triumph. Eventually, The Queen of the Night is vanquished and the opera ultimately ends on a happy note with enlightened thinking ultimately triumphing over darkness.

The opera is a fight between good and evil, between light and darkness. Its power lies in its clear symbolism. The Queen of the Night is regent of darkness, obscurity, and to some degree prejudice and ignorance. The opera is a bildungsroman, from ignorance to enlightenment and knowledge. Yet in this bildungsroman, not everything is as it seems. This opera is also a story of deception and deceit. Those who appear benevolent are actually the opposite, worried mothers turn out to be bloodthirsty at the expense of their daughters. This opera warns of the dangers of unchecked ambition and the toxicity of vengeance.

The Queen of the Night Aria, or *Hell's vengeance burns in my heart*, is one of the most important pieces from the show as well as opera as a whole. It is a staggeringly difficult piece, set in the D minor scale with a vocal range of two octaves, with jumps to C₆. The aria is known for its

extremely high staccato notes, and the vocal jumps needed to achieve these staccatos. The lyrics match the piece of music's dramatic flair:

Hell's vengeance boils in my heart,
 Death and despair blaze about me!
 Feels not through you Sarastro pains of death,
 Then you will not be my daughter anymore:

Disowned be you forever,
 Abandoned be you forever,
 Destroyed be forever
 All the bonds of nature ("Der Hölle").

The Queen of the Night is deceptive and power-hungry, which is very much represented in her aria. She switches from a benevolent and worried mother to a malicious and vengeful one, intent on getting revenge on Sarastro, who she views as taking her rightful place in the temple. Ultimately, she is vanquished for her selfishness and deception, and goodness triumphs (Schikaneder et al. 2).

The Magic Flute is an allegory of power, truth, revenge, and enlightened thinking. It is Mozart's final and one of his most powerful works. Though a complete fantasy, its reverberations are still felt today, its music still connects to the general public. Its many layers of symbolism have captivated audiences for centuries, its moving music sacred in opera.

The Magic Flute is a Masonic opera, due to Mozart's Masonic membership. Mozart was a Mason from 1784 to his death in 1791 (MacPherson). The Freemasons were men who believed in enlightenment values like freedom, equality, and liberty; they met in Masonic lodges which proliferated across Europe in the 18th century. This membership deeply influenced his work and life as well as his final opera *The Magic Flute*.

Though a fairy tale, *The Magic Flute* contains many hallmarks of Masonic initiation and symbolism. Tamino represents the transformation of an isolated individual into a man of social responsibility, nobility, and enlightenment (Spaethling, 53). The induction of Prince Tamino,

where he emerges from darkness into the light of the temple, references the Masonic metaphor: "to seek the light". It is of the struggle between light and dark, between truth, freedom, and enlightenment with superstition, judgment, and prejudice (MacPherson).

The Magic Flute is a great example of entertainment where artistic performance was used to influence the audience's ethics to be more in line with Mozart's own Masonic ideals. Performed for the first time in 1791 in Vienna when Emperor Joseph II's reforms were shifting the city's culture to be more in line with enlightenment ideals, (MacPherson). *The Magic Flute* was also a vehicle to spread Mozart's own political ideologies. Though conjectural, Mozart and Schikanderder, who wrote the libretto of the opera, saw *The Magic Flute* as propaganda to spread Masonic and enlightenment beliefs and continue the hope for a better world that the French Revolution had spurred (Arblaster, 36).

Furthermore, there are many social and political undertones in this opera, with the various characters representing various people or ideals present in Mozart's Time. The Queen of the Night possibly represents the anti-Masonic Empress Maria Theresa, whereas Tamino can represent Joseph II with a hope for better governance, and Pamina as the Austrian people. Joseph II was the King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor from 1765 to 1790. He reformed the Habsburg monarchy and is considered an enlightened and humanist monarch for his attempts to amend the monarchy to embody enlightenment ideals (O'Brien). Maria Theresa was firmly anti-Masonic and shut down the Masonic lodge of which her husband was a part, forcing him to escape through the back staircase. Comparatively, Sarastro represents the moral, reason, nobility, and good-naturedness of German enlightenment thought. He is a noble and altruistic symbol of Masonic ideals (Spaethling, 54). The fates of characters like the Queen of the Night, vanquished, may

represent Mozart's ultimate desire for the ideals that The Queen of the Night represents, to disappear.

The opera also portrays the conflict between church, state, science, and enlightenment. During the Enlightenment, religious fanaticism and orthodoxy were challenged by people such as Voltaire and Jefferson. Freemasonry threatened both the church and the royal state and was further exacerbated by its rapid spread. Freemasonry became an enemy of both church and state and was oftentimes punished or persecuted by both. From the perspective of religious conflict, the Queen of the Night represents superstition, judgment, prejudice, intolerance, or the Catholic Church. The Queen of the Night intends for Tamino to bring Pamina back to her so that they could live happily, yet under the eye of the queen; "Extra ecclesiam nulla salu" ("No salvation outside the Church") (MacPherson). Papageno, the cowardly bird-like man, can represent the general populace. The Queen of the Night kept Papageno in line with a diet of cookies and wine, much like sacramental bread and wine.

Masons saw the Queen of the Night as Madame Blavatsky wrote; "intolerant, bigoted and cruel to all who do not choose to be its slaves." That description is very much in line with the Queen during Act 2 (MacPherson). Yet, Mozart was a devout Catholic, and some of his most important pieces are related to catholicism, such as his requiem; so it is interesting to view his opera from such a perspective.

Is it possible that this view of the opera, as a parable of religious conflict, is complete conjecture and completely the opposite of Mozart's intent. The truth will never be known, but ultimately, this opera is important enough that we still question its meaning.

Its musical importance today really drove me towards this opera. I have always loved opera. Some of the most moving and awe-inspiring pieces I have heard are opera pieces. The

beautiful sets, costumes, and voice, combined with the crescendos of an orchestra have always inspired and impacted me.

I have heard the Queen of the Night aria countless times, as have most of the world without even knowing so. It is an impactful and awe-inspiring piece. It's incredibly moving, especially Diana Damrau's version of the song. Ultimately what drew me to this song is how dramatic it is, both musically and lyrically. Though the listener may not understand what is being said, they certainly can feel the emotion behind it. This piece's drama and emotion made me want to portray it in a very large oil painting. I wanted my piece to be similar to other large oil paintings depicting parables or stories, and I wanted my piece to be dramatic.

Overall, the *Magic Flute* is a powerful opera, its music captivating. It has been performed countless times in countless ways, but no matter what it is incredibly impactful. Yet, it is not only a beautiful opera but a political and symbolically important opera as well. It is a representation of its time, of the struggles between fanaticism and enlightenment. It is not only an important part of opera history but an important part of human history as well. It is a time capsule to the ideological struggles of the past even though it is complete fiction. The opera's power lies therein, in its ability to bring the past to the present and to impact audiences just as much as it did in 1791.

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