

THE DON

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THE DON

THE subject of this paper is an opera considered by many to be the greatest ever written. *Don Giovanni* was composed in 1787 by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, with a libretto by Lorenzo DaPonte. With Mozart's many other operas, it is among the oldest works in the standard repertoire of modern opera companies, and it has remained extremely popular throughout its 180 years.

I shall not presume to present an analysis or appraisal of the Don's musical qualities, nor can I add anything significant to what has been written about Mozart. On that subject, here is what Franz Joseph Haydn had to say in a letter to Leopold Mozart, the father of Wolfgang Amadeus:

I declare to you before God, and as an honest man, that your son is the greatest composer I know.

More than a century later, Tchaikovsky wrote:

Mozart I love as the musical Christ. Incidentally, he lived almost as long as Christ. I think there is nothing sacrilegious in this comparison. Mozart was a being so angelic, so child-

like, so pure: his music is so full of unapproachable, divine beauty, that if anyone could be named with Christ it is he. . . . According to my deep conviction Mozart is the highest, the culminating point that beauty has attained in the sphere of music. No one has made me weep, has made me tremble with rapture, from the consciousness of my nearness to that something which we call the ideal, as he has done. . . .

After Haydn's and Tchaikovsky's words, I cannot add praise, and musical criticism of the Don I must leave to musicians.

Don Giovanni is, however, a fascinating dramatic work, and its librettist, Lorenzo DaPonte, is a literary figure worth investigating. Consider a man who was born a Jew, was ordained a Catholic priest, was once expelled from the Republic of Venice (a very tolerant state) for outrages against public morality, was married and had a large family, was the first professor of Italian Literature at Columbia University and died in the good graces of the Catholic Church. This was DaPonte. He is best remembered now as the author of the libretti for *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Così fan Tutte* and *Don Giovanni*, but he did not consider these his greatest works. When he died, 47 years after Mozart's death, he had no inkling that Mozart, and Mozart alone, would be his key to immortality in literature.

DaPonte's life began in 1749, in the town of Ceneda (which is now Vittorio Veneto), a part of the city-state of Venice. His original name was Emanuele Conegliano. His parents were both Jews. His mother died when he was five, and, when he was 14, his father was converted to Catholicism in order to marry a Christian girl. Emanuele and his two brothers were baptized with

their father. In accordance with a custom of the time, the family took new names, and Emanuele took that of the family's sponsor, the Bishop of the diocese, Monsignor Lorenzo DaPonte.

Young Lorenzo's education had been neglected during the period after his mother's death. This was remedied after his father's remarriage, when Monsignor DaPonte sponsored the boy and one of his younger brothers in the seminary at Ceneda. At the age of 23, he was ordained a priest and celebrated Mass for the first time.

Towards the end of his life, DaPonte wrote his memoirs, which are, in many respects, imaginative. Among other things, he does not disclose in them his original name, or his conversion to Christianity, or the fact that he was ordained.

DaPonte found seminary life confining. The logical next step in his life was a move to Venice, a city which, in 1773, was decadent, dissolute, and most stimulating to a brilliant young poet-priest, aged 24.

DaPonte very quickly found Venice to his liking. His first mistress was a member of the Tiepolo family. His second was the daughter of a Neapolitan duke, a girl who was being cruelly persecuted by a wicked step-mother. If it seems strange that a priest should behave in this manner, a word or two of explanation about 18th century Venice is in order. Religious vows in Venice were not regarded as a reason for curtailing one's social life. The leading convents vied for the privilege of providing a mistress to the Papal nuncio. Festivals were nearly continuous, and since, during festival time, everyone wore a mask in public, there could obviously be no scandal if a member of a religious order joined the festivities. There

were limits; it was considered bad form to conduct assignations in religious houses, and a priest who openly lived with his mistress, spending nearly all his waking hours in gambling dens, could expect eventual censure. So it happened that DaPonte was censured. He was forbidden by the Senate to hold a teaching post. The precipitating cause of this punishment was apparently a poem which referred slightly to the Doge, but DaPonte's reputation as a libertine did not help him.

Being barred from teaching made it a little more difficult for DaPonte to obtain money for gambling and mistresses, but only a little more difficult. He traveled away from Venice briefly, met Casanova, who became a life-long friend, and then returned to Venice. He worked as a secretary, took on more mistresses and soon managed to get into real trouble. In his post as secretary, he lived in his employer's house together with his employer's son and daughter-in-law, a girl named Angioletta. Lorenzo and Angioletta became lovers, which seems to have been of no great concern to her husband. She became pregnant, which was of more concern to her husband. DaPonte was ordered to leave the household and resolved to take Angioletta with him. He induced her to leave by forging a letter which purported to contain threats on her life by her husband. Unfortunately, the two lovers decided to elope just as Angioletta's labor pains began. She gave birth in a street, moments after being carried out of a gondola. Not unnaturally, her husband refused to take back either Angioletta or the baby, and DaPonte was left in an embarrassing position. The baby was turned over to a foundling home, and the two lovers found a pleasant house near a church to which DaPonte was still attached

as a priest. Here he continued to say daily Mass until the Vicar General decided that he had overstepped the bounds somewhat. The Vicar General issued a solemn reprimand. This stopped DaPonte from saying Mass, but put no crimp in his enjoyment of Venice's many pleasures. Incredibly, after his previous experiences, he resumed writing scurrilous political verses. He also opened a dance hall at which many popular forms of entertainment were available.

The Venetian Inquisitors of State stepped in at this point. On charges of libertinage, blasphemy, sacrilege, seduction of a married woman and procreating illegitimate children, a punishment was devised to fit DaPonte's crimes. He was sentenced to 15 years' banishment from Venice.

DaPonte was broken-hearted at the banishment. In his memoirs he attributes the entire matter to the jealousy of fellow poets and the anger of politicians lampooned in his poetry. The State records of Venice tell a different story, however. Whatever the reasons for his punishment, we owe a debt of gratitude to the State Inquisitors, because they were the cause of DaPonte's move to Vienna, where he met and collaborated with Mozart.

Before reaching Vienna, DaPonte spent some time in the Austrian town of Gorizia, where he ingratiated himself with the local nobility by dedicating to them outrageously flattering verses. The cause of DaPonte's departure from Gorizia was in keeping with his entire way of life. Someone sent him a letter promising him a magnificent appointment as a court poet in Dresden. He promptly traveled there and discovered that the letter had been a forgery.

In Dresden, life was much the same. DaPonte made his living as a poet and fell in love. In typically awkward fashion, he fell equally in love with two sisters and could not decide which one he preferred. He apparently contemplated marriage and felt that holy orders were no obstacle. Curiously, he made one close friend in Dresden, a Jesuit priest to whom he dedicated some of the finest poetry of his life. While suffering over the decision as to which sister he preferred, letters arrived from Vienna warning his poet colleagues in Dresden about his ambitions. To make matters worse, the father of the two sisters removed them from the city in order to force DaPonte to declare his intentions. DaPonte's solution to his problems was to take the next stage to Vienna. By leaving when he did, he left behind friends instead of enemies, and he was able to take with him a letter of introduction to Salieri, the leading composer in Vienna at that time.

Vienna in 1782 was a city where poetry and music were held in high esteem. Maria Theresa had died two years earlier. Her successor, the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II, was not a devoted patron of the arts, but at least he was approachable. Although he was for the most part surrounded by dull-witted courtiers, Joseph had managed to break through their ranks and had come to know personally most of the principal musicians and authors of the city.

DaPonte's introduction to the composer, Salieri, was invaluable to him. Salieri first introduced DaPonte to Metastasio, who held the post of Caesarean Poet, the highest paid and most respected literary appointment at the Emperor's Court. Metastasio, who, incidentally,

supplied several libretti for Mozart himself, died shortly after DaPonte's arrival. DaPonte, along with every other poet in Vienna, hungered for the appointment as Caesarean Poet. On the face of things, DaPonte should have expected no chance of success for any Imperial appointment. Metastasio had been the foremost poet of Europe in his day; there were many poets in Vienna far better known than DaPonte, and nearly all of them had conducted their personal lives in a manner much less offensive to conventional morality. DaPonte, however, had one friend, and one was enough. Salieri took him to see Count Rosenberg, Grand Chamberlain and Director of the Imperial Theaters, and a close personal friend of the Emperor. Count Rosenberg, as a favor to Salieri, secured for DaPonte the appointment as Poet to the Imperial Theatres. DaPonte, who always had more ambition than sense, was disappointed at not being made Caesarean Poet. His feelings were somewhat soothed by the fact that the post of Caesarean Poet was never filled while he remained in Vienna, and he, therefore, occupied the most important literary post at the Court.

Mozart at this same time was already a well known figure in Vienna and had achieved a considerable reputation as a composer of opera. Such works as *La finta Giardiniera*, *Il Rè Pastore*, *Idomeneo* and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* were already behind him. Joseph II had attended the opening night of *Die Entführung* and is reported to have said, "Excellent, excellent, only there are rather too many notes in it, my dear Mozart." To which Mozart replied, "Exactly as many, Your Majesty, as are necessary."

Mozart also had married Constanze Weber in August,

1782 and was now permanently settled in Vienna. He and his wife were living in a flat in the home of a wealthy patron of the arts, who brought about the first meeting of Mozart and DaPonte, sometime in 1783. It is fascinating, though fruitless, to speculate on how the two got along. DaPonte's memoirs are maddeningly silent on his relationship with Mozart. As I mentioned previously, he had no conception of the fact that his fame would be linked to Mozart's in the future. He did, however, recognize Mozart's genius to some extent and said, in his memoirs, that Mozart was "gifted with talents superior perhaps to those of any other composer in the world, past, present or future," and that Mozart possessed a "divine genius."

Mozart, at least, has left a record from which we can gain some insight into his thoughts on the relationship of music and drama in opera. For example, while working on *Die Entführung* in 1781, he wrote to his father:

... I should say that in an opera the poetry must be altogether the obedient daughter of the music. Why do Italian comic operas please everywhere—in spite of their miserable libretti—even in Paris, where I myself witnessed their success? Just because there the music reigns supreme and when one listens to it all else is forgotten. Why, an opera is sure of success when the plot is well worked out, the words written solely for the music and not shoved in here and there to suit some miserable rhyme (which God knows, never enhances the value of any theatrical performance, be it what it may, but rather detracts from it)—I mean, words or even entire verses which ruin the composer's whole idea. Verses are indeed the most indispensable element for music, but rhymes—solely for the sake of rhyming—the most detrimental. Those high and mighty people who set to work in this pedantic fashion will

always come to grief, both they and their music. The best thing of all is when a good composer, who understands the stage and is talented enough to make sound suggestions, meets an able poet, that true phoenix; in that case no fears need be entertained as to the applause even of the ignorant. Poets always remind me of trumpeters with their professional tricks! If we composers were always to stick so faithfully to our rules (which were very good at a time when no one knew better), we should be concocting music as unpalatable as their libretti.

In the letter just quoted, Mozart referred to Italian comic opera. It should be explained that, in the 1780's, there were two major classes of Italian opera. *Opera seria* was the older form. It consisted of florid solos, which served as showpieces for the great voices of the male singers, including the *castrati*; separated by recitatives containing all the dramatic action. *Opera buffa* on the other hand was a newer, more flexible medium in which ensemble singing was permitted and in which the arias did not stop the action but rather kept it going. As can be seen from the letter just quoted, Mozart found the *opera buffa* form, in general, more to his liking. His greatest operatic works, however, including *Don Giovanni*, are not susceptible to any strict classification as to form.

When Mozart and DaPonte met in 1783, there was apparently no instant rapport or close personal friendship. To Mozart, DaPonte was one of many prominent Viennese librettists; to DaPonte, Mozart was one of many composers and by no means the most distinguished of his contemporaries. Salieri, Paisiello and Martini were at least as well known in Vienna at the time. In fact, the first product of Mozart's and DaPonte's collaboration, *The Marriage of Figaro*, was written only because DaPonte

and Salieri wrote a total flop, *Il Ricco d'un Giorno*, and DaPonte was not too much in demand by composers as a result.

A few months after meeting DaPonte, Mozart wrote to his father, "Our poet here is now a certain Abbate da Ponte; he has an enormous amount to do in writing pieces for the theatre and he has to write *per obbligo* an entirely new opera for Salieri (*Il Ricco d'un Giorno*) which will take him two months. He has promised after that to write a new libretto for me. But who knows whether he will be able to keep his word—or will want to? For, as you are aware, these Italian gentlemen are very civil to your face. Enough, we know them! If he is in league with Salieri, I shall never get anything out of him. But indeed I should dearly love to show what I can do in an Italian opera!"

Two years later the Salieri opera was completed, performed and laid an egg. DaPonte was at liberty, and Mozart suggested adapting the Beaumarchais political satire. This must have appealed to DaPonte, in view of his past activities in Venice. In fact, the Emperor had just banned performances of the Beaumarchais play in Vienna, but DaPonte and Mozart between them were able to persuade him that their *Marriage of Figaro* would be non-controversial.

Does DaPonte tell us in his memoirs how he and Mozart worked together? He does not. He says only that, for six weeks, ". . . as fast as I wrote the words, Mozart set them to music." This is plainly false. Mozart had been working on the music, and wrote about it to his father, long before he got DaPonte interested in the project.

Figaro was first performed in Vienna on May 1, 1786, and was a moderate success. In Prague, however, where it was first performed seven months later, it was a howling success, and it led directly to the commissioning of a new opera by the impresario of the Prague Opera.

When Mozart asked DaPonte to write a libretto for this commission, he was not able to obtain the single-minded cooperation he had had in the composition of *Figaro*. DaPonte was riding high in Vienna, partly because of the success of *Figaro*, but more because of his success with a libretto for Martini's opera, *Una Cosa Rara*. In addition, some of DaPonte's more important rivals were currently in eclipse due to their own failures. DaPonte did agree to do a libretto, and suggested the Don Giovanni story, but he simultaneously accepted two other commissions, one from Martini and one from Salieri. Mozart readily agreed to using the already well known Don Giovanni legend, and the composer and librettist set to work.

DaPonte wrote in his memoirs that he told the Emperor about his plan to write three libretti simultaneously. The Emperor, according to DaPonte, replied, "You will not succeed." DaPonte answered, "Perhaps not, but I am going to try. I shall write evenings for Mozart, imagining I am reading the *Inferno*; mornings I shall work for Martini and pretend I am studying Petrarch; my afternoons will be for Salieri. He is my Tasso!"

DaPonte reports that the Emperor found these parallels apt. DaPonte described his working conditions as follows:

I returned home and went to work. I sat down at my table

and did not leave it for twelve hours continuous—a bottle of Tokay to my right, a box of Seville snuff to my left, in the middle an inkwell. A beautiful girl of sixteen—I should have preferred to love her only as a daughter, but alas . . . !—was living in the house with her mother, who took care of the family, and came to my room at the sound of the bell. To tell the truth the bell rang rather frequently, especially at moments when I felt my inspiration waning. She would bring me now a little cake, now a cup of coffee, now nothing but her pretty face, a face always gay, always smiling, just the thing to inspire poetical emotion and witty thoughts. I worked twelve hours a day every day, with a few interruptions, for two months on end; and through all that time she sat in an adjoining room, now with a book in hand, now with needle or embroidery, but ever ready to come to my aid at the first touch of the bell. Sometimes she would sit at my side without stirring, without opening her lips, or batting an eyelash, gazing at me fixedly, or blandly smiling, or now it would be a sigh, or a menace of tears. In a word, this girl was my Calliope for those three operas, as she was afterwards for all the verse I wrote during the next six years. At first I permitted such visits very often; later I had to make them less frequent, in order not to lose too much time in amorous nonsense, of which she was perfect mistress. The first day, between the Tokay, the snuff, the coffee, the bell, and my young muse, I wrote the two first scenes of *Don Giovanni*, two more for the *Arbore di Diana*, and more than half of the first act of *Tarar*. . . . I presented those scenes to the three composers the next morning. They could scarcely be brought to believe that what they were reading with their own eyes was possible. In sixty-three days the first two operas were entirely finished and about two-thirds of the last.

It should be pointed out that, in fact, DaPonte spent a good deal more time on the libretto of *Don Giovanni*,

working closely with Mozart. It seems incredible that a masterpiece resulted from all this. When the subject matter of *Don Giovanni* is considered, there is perhaps even more cause for wonder.

The Don Giovanni–Don Juan story was a cliché even in 1787. Its origins can undoubtedly be traced to the beginnings of literature. The particular version which DaPonte and Mozart used goes back to the early 1600's, in Spain, where a monk named Tirso de Molina wrote a play about a lascivious nobleman named Don Juan. As does the Spanish monk's play, DaPonte's libretto follows its hero, Don Juan–Don Giovanni, through numerous seductions and attempted seductions to a final scene in which the unrepentant Don is dragged screaming to the fires of Hell by the stone statue of his victim in the opening scene, the Commendatore.

The poet, Lamartine, has an interesting commentary on the writing of *Don Giovanni*. He wrote:

It is thus that *Don Giovanni* had to be written, by an adventurer, a lover, a poet, a man of pleasure, with a disordered mind inspired by wine, love and glory, between the temptations of debauchery and divine respect for innocence, a man without scruples, but not without terror of heaven's vengeance. DaPonte, nearly impenitent himself, wrote the drama of his own life in the drama of *Don Giovanni*.

This may have a grain of truth in it, but it is not one commonly recognized. It is pertinent, at this point, to consider why *Don Giovanni* should be dealt with seriously as a dramatic work. Modern audiences in general take little note of libretti and especially little note of libretti in languages other than their native tongue. It has even been said of *Don Giovanni* that it is a master-

piece in spite of its libretto. It is pointed out, for example, that DaPonte stole liberally from a version of the Don Juan legend by a contemporary librettist named Bertati. This is unquestionably true, but it is also true that DaPonte improved on Bertati's work throughout.

There is an even more widespread objection to giving DaPonte any of the credit for *Don Giovanni*. This is the view that an opera is simply an excuse for performing arias and ensembles in which the music provides all the beauty and the total source of enjoyment. I hardly need say that I reject this view. If any of my listeners, whose Italian is rusty, wish to judge *Don Giovanni's* literary qualities for themselves, there is, fortunately, an excellent English translation available, made by W. H. Auden. It has even been performed on television, and it is several notches above the usual English renderings of opera libretti.

If we look to DaPonte for an appraisal of his contribution to *Don Giovanni*, we find, characteristically, a willingness to take most of the credit. As I mentioned earlier, there were, in the late 18th century, two principal classes of Italian opera, the *opera seria* and *opera buffa*. Mozart wrote operas in both classes, but *Don Giovanni* he called a *dramma giocoso*. He used this description for no other opera. It is an appropriate one because *Don Giovanni* has serious themes not found in *opera buffa*, and comedy not found in *opera seria*. The mixture of comedy and tragedy is hardly unknown in literature. Shakespeare's works are proof enough of that. Mozart's operas, however, are the first great works of art in music to combine comedy and tragedy. It is a logical question then to ask, to whom goes the credit, Mozart or DaPonte?

In his later years, in America, DaPonte had conversations with an American doctor, who raised this question. DaPonte's answer was that Mozart had conceived of *Don Giovanni* exclusively as a serious work and that he, DaPonte, had introduced all the comic elements, including the ideas for such arias as *Batti, batti* and *La ci darem la mano*. Mozart probably turned in his unmarked grave if this information reached him. It may be that DaPonte contributed important ideas to *Don Giovanni's* plot and structure, but it defies belief that he was the sole originator of the farcical aspects of the opera. For one thing, nearly all the previous versions of the story had comic elements, and Mozart was surely as aware of them as DaPonte.

In any event, the collaboration of composer and librettist, and of tragedy and comedy, produced a work which inspires admiration sufficient for the vanity of either Mozart or DaPonte.

What makes it especially difficult to appraise *Don Giovanni* fairly as a dramatic work is the lack of a fixed, agreed-upon final version, polished and approved by both composer and librettist. As we have noted, DaPonte wrote his book in a tearing hurry, with his mind on two other operas and a 16 year old temptress. Mozart was in no less a rush. There is the famous story about his writing the overture at the last minute and handing the manuscript score to the orchestra in Prague barely in time for them to sight read it at the first performance. What is less well-known is that Mozart worked under severe burdens. His father died after he started work on the opera. This was a terrible blow to him, but it could not and did not interrupt his output of other works. These include, be-

tween March and August 1787, the Rondo for Piano in A minor, two arias, a Rondo for horn, two string quintets, six songs (including *An Chloe*), a piano sonata, a piano and violin sonata, the serenade *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* and last but not least, the *Musical Joke*. All this was done, mind you, in addition to his work on *Don Giovanni*.

To complicate matters further, the singers engaged for the premiere at Prague were exceptionally difficult to please, and were more than generous in suggestions for what they considered improvements. Between the last minute polishings at Prague and the subsequent changes introduced for the later performances in Vienna, there is simply no way of knowing what Mozart and DaPonte would have settled upon as their own ideal version of *Don Giovanni*.

Take, for example, Don Giovanni's serenade in the 2nd Act to Donna Elvira's maid, *Deh, vieni alla finestra*. It was inserted because the baritone who sang the title role in Prague felt slighted at being given too few solos. The singers at Prague in the roles of Leporello and Masetto also demanded, and got, additional solos. When the opera was taken to Vienna, still more changes were necessary. The Don Ottavio in Vienna could not manage *Il mio tesoro*, but would not settle just for having it cut out. Mozart thereupon added *Dalla sua pace*, which went into Act I. All subsequent performances, however, have kept both *Dalla sua pace* and *Il mio tesoro*. The dramatic sense of this is dubious. It turns Don Ottavio into a somewhat pathetic figure, while his fiancée, Donna Anna, appears throughout the opera as a strong character.

The Viennese Elvira also added to the dramatic prob-

lems. She insisted on an additional solo and was given *Mi tradi*, which Mozart tacked on at the end of a low-comedy scene which, in turn, had been inserted to give the Viennese something extra to laugh at. The comedy scene is now almost always eliminated on the grounds that it is totally out of keeping with the action surrounding it, but *Mi tradi* is too beautiful to be cut. As a result it is simply left in as one more anticlimax to the already anticlimactic Scene II of Act II.

The most controversial of all the questions concerning what should or should not be cut is the question of what should be done with the final sextet, which follows the Don's descent into Hell. The scene in which the Commendatore's statue enters, grasps the Don's hand and drags him down into the inferno is almost unbearably dramatic. The Don's refusal to repent and his final scream are capable of chilling any audience, even though they directly follow a farcical bit of by-play between the Don and Leporello. The final sextet seems in a way to be totally superfluous. It is true that it ties some loose dramatic ends together, but it appears to provide, for the most part, only the most simple-minded moral commentary on the life and death of the Don.

It is often said that Mozart cut the final sextet from the Vienna performances because he considered it superfluous. It is also said that he cut it because the Viennese audiences could only sit still for a limited period of time. Research has lately shown that perhaps it was not cut at all for the Vienna performances. Modern opera companies usually leave it in. W. H. Auden translated the sextet, but the NBC Opera Company did not use it in their television performance of the opera.

There is certainly no last word on whether the sextet does or does not belong in an ideal performance of *Don Giovanni*. If the opera ends with the Don's death, the opera appears to be a tragedy marred by the addition of unsuitable comic passages. This cannot be the case, and my own conclusion is that the sextet belongs where it is, both from a dramatic and musical standpoint. To draw further parallels from Shakespeare, it may be noted that *Hamlet* does not end with the death of the prince, nor does *Julius Caesar* end with the death of Brutus, nor does *Romeo and Juliet* end with the death of the lovers.

It is also interesting to consider, especially if one is inclined to look for moral lessons in dramatic works, that the sextet has some dramatic points of its own that are worth looking at. The Don's final scene shows him being dragged to Hell while a chorus of demonic voices sings awesome promises of what is in store for him. But the sextet says, "Let the rogue remain then with Proserpina and Pluto," a fate distinctly out of keeping with traditional Christian teachings on this subject. The final verse of the sextet is "The death of evil men is always equal to their life." There is a moral here; I don't think that it is necessarily the moral that the average opera listener will find.

There have been innumerable studies, critiques and analyses of *Don Giovanni*. The German poet Hoffmann, whom we remember as the subject of *Tales of Hoffmann*, made probably the first psychological study. Kierkegaard analyzed the opera. Schopenhauer put it in the same class with Hamlet and Faust. George Bernard Shaw said of the Don, he ". . . was the first Byronic hero in music." Wolf-Ferrari was puzzled: "Mozart can be charming too when

he has to; but if he is to be regarded as *only* charming . . . how is one to account for the Commendatore for example, where joking is no longer possible?" Tchaikovsky, as we have seen, thought highly of Mozart; he wrote: ". . . the scenes with Donna Anna, her heart-rending grief, her thirst for vengeance, are rendered by Mozart with such compelling truth that they can be compared in depth of expression only with the best scenes in Shakespeare's tragedies."

Psychoanalysts, of course, have found the Don a fertile field. The Don may have been loved too little by his mother; he may have been loved too much by his mother; or he may have been a latent homosexual who was striving to prove his virility in his many seductions. Or perhaps the opera dramatizes an ideological conflict between pagan heroism and Christian spirituality. Or perhaps Don Giovanni is a crusader for equal rights for women. All of these have been suggested, any of them may be partly correct.

Four years after the premiere of *Don Giovanni* in Prague, Mozart was dead, buried in Vienna in a pauper's grave. His musical output had never slackened, and in fact, he collaborated once again with DaPonte after *Don Giovanni*. Their last work together, *Così Fan Tutte*, is yet another masterpiece.

With the benefit of hindsight, we might consider that DaPonte's importance to the world ended with the death of Mozart, but it is abundantly clear that, in 1791, DaPonte did not think so. In his memoirs, the writing of *Così Fan Tutte* is referred to in half a sentence, and there is no mention whatever of Mozart's death. In fact, more than half of DaPonte's memoirs are devoted to his life

after 1791, which is a pity because his life was never again so interesting as in the Venice and Vienna days. It did not, however, become a life of dull daily routine.

Shortly before Mozart's death, DaPonte managed again to become embroiled in a political scandal and was forced to leave the city of Vienna. He moved to Trieste, where he divided his time between amorous affairs and letters and poems imploring the new Emperor Leopold to allow his return. In a letter of Mozart quoted earlier, Mozart referred to DaPonte as "Abbot," and it seems that this title was one which DaPonte readily accepted, making no efforts to conceal his background as a priest. As in his youth in Venice, he also made no efforts to conduct his life as a good priest should.

In Trieste, DaPonte met Miss Nancy Grahl when he was engaged to act as broker for a marriage between her and an old friend of DaPonte's. DaPonte performed this duty faithfully enough for a while, until it became clear to him that he had made a bad mistake by not becoming her suitor himself. At that point, fate intervened. The fiancé wrote a letter to Nancy's father in which he showed more interest in her dowry than in her qualities as a person. In a fit of rage, the father suggested that DaPonte marry Nancy himself. DaPonte accepted on the spot, and a wedding of some sort took place on August 12, 1792. I say a wedding "of some sort" because there is no trace of the ceremony in the official records of Trieste. Be that as it may, DaPonte and his Nancy lived as man and wife thereafter, and despite DaPonte's profligate past, they lived together very happily.

After the marriage, DaPonte decided that it was time to leave Trieste. He and his bride set off first toward

Paris, but stopped on the way in Bohemia to visit DaPonte's old friend Casanova. Casanova at the time was engaged in writing his own memoirs and the newly-wed couple spent several happy weeks with him. When it came time to move on, news arrived of the revolution in France, and DaPonte changed his destination to London, where he knew a number of opera singers and was confident of finding employment. DaPonte found employment in London all right, but he also found intrigue and chicanery in the opera world of that city exactly as he found them in Vienna. DaPonte supported himself in London first with commissions to write libretti and later as poet to King's Theatre, the principal opera house of the day. In order to keep this post, he found it necessary to guarantee numerous promissory notes of the manager. As might be expected, he soon found himself in serious financial straits.

The money problems were resolved long enough for a trip back to Italy, in which DaPonte was supposed to hire new singers, but he was a poor talent scout. On his return to London with some physically attractive but vocally disappointing sopranos, the fortunes of King's Theatre and of DaPonte sank fast. By this time, the DaPonte's had four children, and financial stability was becoming ever more necessary.

One day, by chance, DaPonte happened onto a book store in London with a large unsold stock of Italian books. After brief negotiations, DaPonte became a book dealer, specializing in the Italian classics, and this brought him a brief period of prosperity. Before long, the many guarantees of notes that he had given in his career at King's Theatre came back to haunt him, and the

prospect of going to debtor's prison became all too real.

In August, 1804, DaPonte decided that the most practical course was to send Nancy and the children to America to stay with her relatives there. He originally planned to send for them when he recovered financially, but this was beyond his capabilities. By April, 1805, DaPonte recognized that he would wind up in debtor's prison if he did not leave London. He made his decision quickly, prompted by a tip from a friendly process server, and slipped out of London a few steps ahead of his creditors.

DaPonte suffered through a 57 day voyage in the steerage of a ship called the Columbia. The trip was so bad that, in his memoirs, he recalls it as lasting 86 days.

When he arrived in New York, he learned that there was very little demand for poets in general and Italian poets in particular. New York had at that time no opera house at all. His father-in-law persuaded him to set up shop as a green-grocer in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, which he did with no success at all. After two years, he and the family returned to New York where he hoped to support himself by giving Italian lessons. Fate intervened again. DaPonte met a young man named Clement Clarke Moore. If the name is familiar, it should be. He wrote *The Night Before Christmas*. The two men became fast friends, and Moore persuaded many of the proper New York families to send their children to DaPonte's Italian school, which became the "Manhattan Academy for Young Gentlemen." After brief success, the Manhattan Academy came on hard times, and in 1811, DaPonte took his family to Sunbury, Pennsylvania to try his hand at commerce again. For seven years he tried being a grocer, a milliner and finally, a distiller. Success, as always was sporadic in these ventures. Clement Moore kept

urging him to return to New York and this finally persuaded him to try again to bring culture to that city.

He established himself as an Italian teacher with sufficient success to incur the envy of other more recent Italian immigrants, who especially resented his close relationship with a man as prominent as Clement Moore. This envy led to the issuance of scurrilous pamphlets attacking his character, to which he responded in kind. Fortunately, for DaPonte, none of his New York enemies knew very much of the truth about his life, and he found it easy to reply to their slanders. These episodes had the beneficial result of prompting him to write his memoirs, which, as I have mentioned, are disappointing at times, and inaccurate frequently, but are still of great value to anyone interested in Mozart and his operas.

In 1825, DaPonte applied to Columbia College for permission to teach Italian there. Through the good influence again of Clement Moore, DaPonte was appointed Professor of Italian Literature, a post which was created for him. It was, however, unsalaried, and DaPonte's revenue depended on what he could collect from his students. Until the end of his life, DaPonte remained a teacher of Italian in New York City. He was, in fact, the founder of Italian studies in America. He was also one of the most active sponsors of the first Italian opera performances in the United States, and wrote in his memoirs of his great pleasure at seeing *Don Giovanni* performed for the first time in this country.

In his ninetieth year, in 1838, DaPonte died. Shortly before his death, he summoned a priest to his bedside and was reconciled with the Church he had joined seventy-six years before. Unlike the great hero he created, he took his opportunity to repent.

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