

# Gustav Jacobsthal's Mozart Reception

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*This article is dedicated to Marianne Keren, Jerusalem, Gustav Jacobsthal's great niece.*

In a review article from 1935, Jacques Handschin called Gustav Jacobsthal (1845-1912) “one of the two founders of the new German musicology (the second, of course, was Philipp Spitta)” (Handschin 1935). From 1872 to 1905, Jacobsthal taught music history and theory at the Reich- and Prussian Reform University in Strasbourg. In 1897 he was nominated professor of musicology—the only person at the time to hold this position at a German university (Alsace was then part of the German Reich). The unusual promotion of a Jewish scholar to the rank of *Ordinarius*, full professor, can be ascribed both to his extraordinary scholarly reputation, and to the strict policy of observing qualitative criteria in academic appointments maintained by the religiously liberal Royal Prussian administrator for university affairs, Friedrich Althoff.

Jacobsthal is considered to be the founder of medieval music studies at university level largely because of the comprehensive scope of his research in that field. But his activities, both as scholar and as lecturer, reached far beyond the Middle Ages. His written legacy, including his notebooks with complete outlines of his lectures, was stored for many decades in the basement of the Music Department of the Berlin *Staatsbibliothek*, until discovered by the present writer, who catalogued them and studied them closely. They evidence pioneering work in the areas of opera history and Mozart scholarship. On the basis of the reconstructed chronology of his lecture series, and the lecture outlines included in his posthumous papers in Berlin (their content far surpasses that of mere scripts for reading aloud), it is apparent that he conducted seminars on the early history of opera, with an emphasis on Monteverdi, and the operas and string quartets of Mozart.

Our sources show that even before the first Complete Mozart Edition (ed. Johannes Brahms et al., the so-called *Alte Mozart Ausgabe* [Old Mozart Edition], *AMA*), the publication of which began in the late 1870s—i.e. in 1875, in his lecture series on “Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven: The Operas” (Jacobsthal archive catalogue No. B15)—Jacobsthal had already lectured on *La finta giardiniera* (14 manuscript pages) and on *Idomeneo* (24 pages). His source for *La finta giardiniera* was Fritz Haas's piano vocal score with a German translation of the text (Mannheim: Heckel, 1829), and, for *Idomeneo*, a Breitkopf and Haertel score plus two piano vocal scores from Peters (ed. Kogel) and Litolf.

In the summer of 1888, after the completion of series V (Operas) of *AMA*, in which the earliest operas were published for the first time, Jacobsthal lectured on Mozart's operas (B13, 357 single-sided manuscript pages). As far as one can judge from the introductory remarks, he had originally intended to present an overview. But he spoke in such detail on Mozart's childhood operas (*Die Schuldigkeit des ersten Gebots* [K. 35], *Apollo et Hyacinthus* [K. 38], *Bastien und Bastienne* [K. 50] and *La finta semplice* [K. 51]) that, despite omitting the operas of Mozart's youth (from *Mitridate* [K. 87] to *Zaide* [K. 344]) or treating them only summarily, he got no farther than *Idomeneo*—to which, however, he devoted a detailed discussion.

In the summer semester of 1889, in the context of a lecture series he named “The String Quartets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven,” Jacobsthal spoke on the Mozart string quartets published in *AMA* in 1881 and 1882 (B12, including 55 of the 324 pages on Mozart). He traced Haydn's string quartets genealogically to the compositional principles of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, as expanded on in his *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard*

*Instruments* and implemented in his *Württemberg Sonatas* (the analysis of the sonatas covers 70 pages). Of Mozart's works, there is detailed discussion only of the early Milan and Vienna quartets (K. 155-60 and K. 168-73). With regard to their character, a brief digression in a discussion of Haydn and Beethoven's attitude to Romanticism notes the following:

Mozart followed, I believe, an entirely different developmental path. On the whole, from childhood on (through his nature as well as his schooling) he cultivated unity. For him, Romanticism—that is, the emphasis on and devotion to individual aspects without regard for the whole—had run its course in his childhood. Think of the operas: Apollo and Hyacinth, The Obligation of the First Commandment, or even Bastien and Bastienne and several of the subsequent Italian works (see relevant passages in my Mozart's Operas). However, this cannot be called Romanticism as such. Romanticism arises from an impulse toward unilateral attachment to healthy feelings, while, in Mozart's childhood, the tendency was more a pursuit of individual aspects that can be identified with his childish perspective, his childish inability to grasp the whole. In later years, when a man attains the mental, emotional, and physical maturity requisite for Romantic feeling, Mozart was already so highly developed as an artist, so saturated with organic artistic unity, that in the Romantic years he had already left Romanticism behind him. Does he really display the same one-sided reliance on and reverie for individual aspects as others do? Does it [Romanticism] manifest itself only by an even greater depth of feeling, emotional rapture, emotional intensity, but is kept in check and transcended by artistic unity? Test this on the example of Idomeneo, where he definitely concerns himself quite intensely with the individual and with individual moments (see also my lecture cited above, Mozart's Operas). But test it as well with regard to the instrumental music, especially the quartets. (See also my discussion of the quartet Köchel 173, pp. 267-75.)

Jacobsthal regarded the development sections in the quartets of Haydn and Mozart not only as a textural game involving themes and motives, but also as a “psychological program.” Only the last four hours of the semester were devoted to Beethoven, with analytic discussion only of Op. 18 No. 1. The subtle criticism he brought to bear, particularly on the late quartets and their occasional moments of powerful expression, contrasted significantly with the position he was supposed by Albert Schweitzer, his counterpoint student, to have propounded. Schweitzer wrote in his autobiography that, for Jacobsthal, “only music before Beethoven possessed legitimacy as art” (Schweitzer 1931).

Conditions at the time were not favorable for Mozart studies generally, nor for Jacobsthal's lectures in particular. The first complete Mozart edition found little resonance (the year 1883 saw only 93 subscribers). In fact, there is scant evidence from the last quarter of the nineteenth century of detailed scholarly investigation of individual works. Gernot Gruber (Gruber and Mauser 1999) has confirmed the lapse in analytical work on Mozart in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Silke Leopold (*ibid.*) has found this to be especially true of the operas. The musical-aesthetic and harmonic analytical parameters of the first half of the nineteenth century were developed primarily in conjunction with models taken from J.S. Bach and the instrumental music of Beethoven, with later attention given to the musical dramas of Wagner. Their application to music like that of Mozart, positioned in the gray area between the Baroque and Classical eras (already a well-established distinction at

that time), was limited. Instead, particular, preferred works from Mozart's late Viennese years (the d-minor piano concerto, "Jupiter" symphony, *The Magic Flute*) were ascribed to a so-called Viennese Classicism and its putative compositional models—an approach whose effects are still seen today. Jacobsthal uses Mozart's string quartets as an occasion to emphasize their "Classicistic" potential, their overcoming of the aphoristic, and devotion to individual moments, in favor of uniting the diversity of musical ideas and thoughts into a higher artistic movement or work. However, he does not link this unconditionally to conformity to particular formal schemata, assuming instead aspiration to a historical aesthetic ideal, to a level of concinnity that demands unity of form.

Jacobsthal's attitude toward Mozart and his way of understanding him analytically differed greatly from the organicist-objectivist music philosophy of Adolph Bernhard Marx, which had led to a distancing from, or underestimation of, Mozart's artistic practice. Marx found Mozart's work to be non-objective, lacking in cultural mission, and excessively private (Marx 1829). Jacobsthal's musical-philological approach promoted the notion that the individual quality of a compositional work could be recognized and explained through attention to sources and their formal analysis. As a historically oriented researcher, he was careful to understand each work as an expression of cultural or specifically artistic and technical as well as biographical-historical developmental step.

In the 1880s, this point of view sought support through the philological-historical approach initiated by Otto Jahn, in his exemplary study of Mozart, which was further developed by Ferdinand Pohl (on Haydn), Friedrich Chrysander (on Handel), and Philipp Spitta (on Bach). But Jacobsthal took up the approach and increased its sophistication (especially with regard to artistic technique) at a time when it had begun to fade, and to make room for other, more progressive, methods that could be applied universally. In the field of Mozart studies, decisive influence was enjoyed by Hermann Kretzschmar and Hermann Abert, who believed, for example, that the role of Mozart in the history of opera should be determined with strict division of the operatic genres and their history. In this regard, they were in agreement with Friedrich Chrysander, who had already complained in 1881 that, in the youthful operas, Mozart had proceeded "without critical faculties or taste, or awkwardly if you will, in that he mixed the forms of *opera seria* and *opera buffa* with each other. This is quite understandable, since impressions of both flowed together in him at a time when he was not yet a master of the two forms. Specifically, *opera buffa*, which was at its peak, never lost its power over him" (Chrysander 1881/2). Jacobsthal's lectures, however, show that even in Mozart's first attempts at opera in Salzburg and Vienna in 1767-68, before the composition of *Mitridate*, he knew well how to distinguish elements of *seria* and *buffa* composition, consciously employing shades of minor and emotionally heightened instrumentation at especially dramatic moments in order to display the ambiguity and tragic quality of his characters by musical means, implanting elements of *opera seria* in *buffa* and operetta for the sake of the credibility of his musical dramaturgy.

Another contrast promoted by the Marxian perspective—that between vocal and instrumental music—here develops, given Jacobsthal's Cecilian origins, a significance that should not be underestimated. Jacobsthal's preference for vocal music prevented him from sharing his contemporaries', particularly A.B. Marx's, Hegelian low opinion of Mozart as a "processually"-composing musical dramatist, who is guided by the opera-plot, as opposed to "structural" composers of instrumental or "absolute" music and the symphonic operatic approach of Richard Wagner. Another contemporary phenomenon in the realm of Mozart reception also came into play—namely, the rejection of Wagner's musical drama and ritualistic stage consecration visions by reference to Mozart. Jacobsthal shares this tendency, and his desire for a historically appropriate understanding of Mozart should be sought within it.

The major distinction to be made between Jacobsthal and the Mozart studies that preceded and followed him stems from his emphasis on the dramatic power of the youthful Mozart as an operatic composer. Jacobsthal maintains that, even as a child, rather than dispersing technically competent pieces of an arbitrary nature among his early operas, Mozart had attempted to portray his characters by musical means. On the musical-dramatic approach of the 11- and 12-year-old Mozart, Jacobsthal told his listeners in 1888, in connection with his analyses of *Apollo et Hyacinthus*: “I believe it teaches us...that we should not look at Mozart’s development as if he were unaffected by the dramatic-poetic elements of opera as a child and youth, as if he had merely written melodies for texts [at that time], while his poetic-dramatic capacity was first awakened in later years. Admittedly, that capacity grows immensely over time, and, when compared to his later works, it is like any other student’s work when compared to that of a master.” Conversely, Jacobsthal emphasizes that Mozart’s years of mastery could not have begun so early, in his teens, had he not already displayed a particular musical-theatrical self-reliance as a precocious 11-year-old student.

Jacobsthal believed that it was the dramatic impetus of the young Mozart that led him to produce several passages that were technically dubious with respect to rhythm and harmony—for example, the argument-duet No. 6 between Melia and Apollo, in which Melia gets ahead of herself, rushes through a semicolon and falls into a tonic trance before leaping suddenly into the key of the subdominant. Of course, one could just as easily see these “flaws,” as Jacobsthal calls them, as the contextually justified faltering of the enraged princess in the face of the god Apollo, whom she believes to be her brother’s murderer.

For his analyses, Jacobsthal relied exclusively on the scores printed in *AMA* and their inadequate critical reports, as well as the four-volume first edition of Otto Jahn’s monumental Mozart monograph. Beyond that, however, on the strength of the inconsistencies in the printed editions, he was able to raise valuable and significant questions regarding original texts and manuscripts unknown to him. Many of his questions have not yet been addressed in the editing of *NMA* or in its critical reports. For example, the *Da capo* in the aforementioned duet No. 6, *Discede crudelis*, between Melia and Apollo only makes dramatic sense in view of Mozart’s earlier deletion of Melia’s exit during the duet in favor of repeating her cries of *Discede crudelis* in the *Da capo*.

To this end, Mozart significantly alters the dramaturgy. The librettist had intended for Melia to exit in the middle of the duet, after its two-voiced *A* section. See the following text from Rufinus Widl’s *Clemetia Croesi*, published in Salzburg in 1767 (now in the special collections department of the Salzburg University Library):

MELIA.	Discede,	Away,
	Crudelis!	You cruel one!
	Gaudebo, tyrannus si deserit me!	I shall rejoice when the tyrant deserts me!
	Vah! insolentem,	Oh, you insulter,
	Qui violat iura!	Who violates justice!
	Discede! discede; nam metuo te.	Away, away, for I am afraid of you.
APOLLO:	Est crede!	Believe me,
	Fidelis,	The faithful,
	Est mitis Apollo, qui deperit te.	It is gentle Apollo, who loves you.
	Quid? Innocentem	What?
	Sic abicis dura!	Thus you, the cruel,
		drive away the innocent!
	Sic perdis amicum, si reicis me.*	So you lose a friend, if you reject me.*

\* Abit Melia.

APOLLO Quem coeli premunt inopem,  
SOLVS: An terris agat exsulem?  
Manebo!  
Quousque resederit dira,  
Quae pectora fauciat ira,  
Latebo.

\* Exit Melia

The helpless one, expelled by heaven,  
Will he maintain exile upon earth?  
I shall stay!  
As long as cruelty endures,  
That hurts the heart,  
I shall hide.

Believing Apollo to be the murderer of her brother, Hyacinthus, Melia no longer wishes to see him. Having demanded angrily that he depart, she should herself exit, leaving the contrite Apollo alone on the stage. He should then volunteer the information that he had hoped to hide himself from her. Apollo's solitary presence on stage is intended to conclude the second act. Mozart, however, creates a striking dramatic function by inserting here the *Da capo*, in contravention of the textual source. Dispensing with the "Abit Melia," he leaves Melia on stage and has her renew her furious cries of "Discede" (after Apollo, in the *B* section of the aria, expresses his intention of hiding from her), culminating in a renewed argumentative duet with Apollo. One could, with Jacobsthal, see in this move a schematic, obvious, or clumsy misuse of the *Da capo* principle of a *seria* aria in a duet, but that would ignore the dramatically transformative function of the *A* section's repetition. In the *Da capo* of an aria, that function is generally intentional—specifically, in its reinforcement of the original effect under the altered conditions of the sung *B* section. But Mozart modifies the scene by incorporating a return of the *A* section, with Melia's cries of "Discede." Thus Melia maintains her dissenting stance, permitting herself neither to be distracted nor persuaded by Apollo's appeal to Zeus.

**Example 1** Duet No. 6 in "Chorus primus" (second act) of *Apollo et Hyacinthus* (New Mozart Edition [NMA]), Series II, 5, Volume 1, pp. 51-67.

**Follow link:** [http://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/nma/nmapub\\_srch.php?l=1](http://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/nma/nmapub_srch.php?l=1) ; click **SERIE II: Bühnenwerke**

It has only recently been possible to resolve Jacobsthal's additional questions, regarding the internal relationships between different versions of certain arias in the *buffa* opera, *La finta semplice*, by reference to manuscripts in Krakow and Berlin—and they remain controversial to this day.

Jacobsthal's departures from the Mozart studies of his day were to be found in his emphasis on the difference between the young Mozart and the opera production of his time, understanding **it** in a positive sense to have been the starting point for the quiet opera reform that Mozart would later undertake. In his research, Jacobsthal makes lengthy observations on and comparisons with Gluck's programmatic opera reform, particularly detailed in the lecture on *Idomeneo*: "Mozart felt the influence of the French operatic ideal as strongly as had Gluck when he commenced his reform of the opera. And he felt this influence both directly on himself, and indirectly through the medium of Gluck." The difference between Mozart and Gluck, and the consequences of this difference for the history of opera are described as follows:

Meanwhile, Mozart had become a mature man; already in his childhood, we had become acquainted with his drive toward dramatic truth. How else could his development have done nothing other than continue to steer him toward placing music, in opera, understood as drama, increasingly in the service of drama?

But it would be unfair with regard to the influence on him from another direction, [...] to underestimate or deny it. It would be condescending of us toward his genius to perceive it merely as if he needed no one else, neither absorbing nor tolerating the influence of what others had attained before him. No, that precisely is the nature of a universal genius, to absorb different currents no matter from whence their origins—not incorporating them superficially, but making them part of one’s *own* nature. In the 1760s and 1770s, Gluck had created a new mood in opera; that is undeniable: the drive toward dramatic truth, toward energy in expression, toward psychological reproduction, the drive toward greatness and sublimity had found in him a powerful expression; he was not immediately nor everywhere understood, and critics were justified in taking note of his weakness—his musical flaws. Mozart had by then attained sufficient maturity to understand and respect what was great in Gluck; this aspect of Gluck complemented his inner drive; the other—negative side of Gluck—was a temptation to which he was immune, since he was musical from head to toe. And so he did not appropriate Gluck lock, stock, and barrel. Instead, out of his own essential nature, he molded Gluck’s operatic ideal into something entirely different, something higher than Gluck ever could have achieved—into something toward which Gluck had taken only one step, which Gluck had merely promised, and whose fulfillment Mozart now gave to the world: the highest level of unity between drama and music to date. And again, this ideal emerges in *Idomeneo* at every step, if somewhat obscured by entirely different influences that can be summarized in a single slogan: the demands of *opera seria*.

Jacobsthal’s exceptional place in nineteenth-century Mozart studies is primarily a product of his willful anachronism, which makes him an opponent of the Late Romantic *Zeitgeist*. His historical-philological method kept him from placing Mozart in a historiographic model that would have made him merely a herald of later achievements. Instead, he assessed even Mozart’s juvenilia as expressions of artistic experience and creative confrontation with conventions. Thus, Jacobsthal arrived at results that even today cannot be regarded, either analytically or hermeneutically, as obsolete. Instead, they await rediscovery.

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(Translated by Nell Zink)