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The Role of Music in Folk Drama: An Investigation Based on Tyrolean Sources

1 Introduction

A brief overview of the secondary literature dealing with folk drama reveals a significant lack of interest in musical aspects. On the part of theater and literary scholars, it is primarily the functional aspects of music, if any, that are taken into consideration. On the part of musicologists, music in folk drama has played a marginal role in research, something that can be said about theater music in general. In the article “Schauspielmusik” (stage music) in the most important German music encyclopedia, *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Detlef Altenburg states: “Demgegenüber gilt in der deutschen Musikwissenschaft Schauspielmusik weithin als unergiebiges Randphänomen der Musikgeschichte.”¹ There are some exceptions: Medieval folk drama, especially liturgical and mystery plays, have attracted music scholars from the nineteenth century to the present. Another example of a quite well-investigated tradition is Viennese folk plays of the nineteenth century. The article “Volkstheater” in the *Österreichisches Musiklexikon*,² for example, is almost completely focused on Vienna. As a special field that cannot be appropriately described as “folk play,” but which was a major source of influence, Jesuit drama also attracted interest quite early.³

1 Detlef Altenburg and Lorenz Jensen. “Schauspielmusik.” *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed., Sachteil, vol. 8. Kassel et al.: Bärenreiter, 1998, pp. 1035–1049, p. 1035. Translation: “In comparison to that [to the state of research regarding stage music in Renaissance and Baroque France, Italy, and Spain], German musicology has considered stage music as an unrewarding, marginal phenomenon.”

2 Otto G. Schindler and Rudolf Flotzinger. “Volkstheater.” *Österreichisches Musiklexikon*, vol. 5. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006, pp. 2556–2558.

3 See Johannes Müller. *Das Jesuitendrama in den Ländern deutscher Zunge: Vom Anfang (1555) bis zum Hochbarock (1665)*. Augsburg: B. Filser, 1930 (Schriften zur deutschen Literatur, vol. 7/8). Relevant for the Tyrol: Ellen Hastaba. “‘Jesuitenspiele’ in Innsbruck (1562–1773).” *Musikgeschichte Tirols*, edited by Kurt Drexel and Monika Fink. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 2004 (Schlern-Schriften, vol. 322), vol. II, pp. 375–413; inspired by the Jesuit tradition, the Benedictines too cultivated school plays, e.g. in the Gymnasium of Meran, run by the monks of Marienberg; see Franz Gratl. “Musik zu Innsbrucker und Meraner Schulspielen: Quellen aus dem Benediktinerstift Marienberg (Südtirol) in Konkordanz zu den gedruckten Periodiken.” *Der frühe Buchdruck in der Region: Neue Kommunikationswege in Tirol und seinen Nachbarländern: Beiträge der wissenschaftlichen Tagung in der Bibliothek des Tiroler Landesmuseums Ferdinandeum am 23. und 24. Oktober 2014 anlässlich der Ausstellung „Druckfrisch:*

From pioneers such as the writers Ignaz Vinzenz Zingerle and Ludwig von Hörmann onwards,⁴ Tyrolean folk drama of the sixteenth to nineteenth century, which will be the focus of this paper, has been collected and researched. The research and publications of the historian and ethnologist Anton Dörrer⁵ are of crucial importance; the leading figures of more recent scientific research on folk drama are Eugen Thurnher, Ekkehard Schönwiese, and Ellen Hastaba.⁶ The substantial publications of these authors can be taken as a valuable guide to research and a tool to locate the sources; Ellen Hastaba has published a complete list of relevant sources preserved in the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum.⁷ Neither Zingerle and Hörmann, nor Dörrer paid much attention to musical aspects; the same can be said of Schönwiese and Hastaba, though the latter at least stresses the importance of musical *intermezzi* in folk drama and mentions some significant sources from the Upper Inn Valley.

Apart from the fact that none of these scholars was a musicologist or had a special interest in music, this neglect can also be explained by the nature of the sources. Usually, folk drama is preserved in the form of handwritten scripts intended for practical use by the performers. The use of music is indicated in different ways, which will be discussed later in this paper. The scripts are not musical sources as such. If genuine musical sources were used in performance, which would mean that notated music would have been played from (presumably handwritten) musical parts, they evidently have not been preserved together with the scripts. In the case of the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, the scripts, as written sources, would have been integrated into the museum library, while the score and parts would have been transferred to the music collection. The biggest problem is the lack of musical sources, if we compare the situation to the scripts. Some recent findings shed a new light on this issue.

Der Innsbrucker Wagner-Verlag und der Buchdruck in Tirol“, edited by Roland Sila. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 2016 (Schlern-Schriften, 366), pp. 283–302.

⁴ Both Zingerle and Hörmann dealt with folk drama in connection with their investigations of Tyrolean rural life and folk customs. Many scripts preserved in the library of the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum Innsbruck came from Hörmann's private collection.

⁵ Dörrer published an impressive corpus of articles dealing with folk drama.

⁶ Eugen Thurnher. *Tiroler Drama und Tiroler Theater*. Innsbruck et al.: Tyrolia, 1969; Ekkehard Schönwiese. *Das Volksschauspiel im nördlichen Tirol. Renaissance und Barock*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1975 (Theatergeschichte Österreichs, vol. II: Tirol, no. 3); Ellen Hastaba. *Das Volksschauspiel im Oberinntal*. Diss. Innsbruck, 1986.

⁷ Ellen Hastaba. “Theater in Tirol. Spielbelege in der Bibliothek des Tiroler Landesmuseums Ferdinandeum.” *Veröffentlichungen des Tiroler Landesmuseums Ferdinandeum*, vols. 75/76, 1995/1996, pp. 233–343.

But let us return to some questions that have already been touched upon: If music was part of a performance of folk drama, what kind of music was it? Was it written down, or perhaps just improvised? Was it real “folk music,” in analogy to folk drama? Was it newly composed or pre-existing music? What was the functional role of music in folk drama?

One can imagine that, given that folk drama is a vast and varied field, the answers cannot be generalized, but it seems useful to start with the last point, the functional role. Theater music is, above all, functional music: It is usually applied to mark and to accompany specific moments in drama – the overall beginning, the end, the beginning and end of the several acts, entries and exits of actors, and so on. But it can also be used to elevate crucial scenes by the way in which spoken words are replaced by sung words. The influence of opera and Jesuit drama can be illustrated by the introduction of a completely musical prologue, and operatic influence further by the insertion of musical *intermezzi*.

2 Indications concerning music in non-musical sources

In the following, I will present some characteristic examples to show how music is indicated in the sources for folk plays from the region.

2.1 The Joseph Play of Axams (1677/78), TLMF Bibliothek FB 32070

In this manuscript, which was written by “Joseph Maurer, und Hanns Döllinger, beede der Zeit wonhafft zu Axams” (i.e. living in Axams, a village some 15 kilometers west of Innsbruck) about 1677/78, music is frequently indicated, but not further specified. “Mussica” accompanies the exit of actors and the end of scenes. The standard formula for the indication of music is: “Mussica / [e.g. Joseph] trit ab”. This information recurs very frequently; therefore it can be assumed that the music was short and merely functional, perhaps even improvised. The script contains no information about the performers or the scoring of the music, which must have been instrumental music because we have no sung texts. Not even the comprehensive and extensive list of persons acting in the Joseph play of Axams, which is attached to the manuscript, mentions musicians.

Fig. 1: Joseph Play of Axams (1677/78), TLMF Bibliothek FB 32070, title page.

Fig. 2: Joseph Play of Axams (1677/78), TLMF Bibliothek FB 32070, detail: reference to "Mussica" accompanying the exit of the "Spielführer".

2.2 The Christmas / Three Kings Play, Matrei, eighteenth century, TLMF Bibliothek FB 32100

This play contains a rather extended musical scene which is dedicated to the episode of Joseph and Mary Asking for Lodging, a recurring theme in Tyrolean folk tradition. The musical episode bears the character of an *intermezzo* – it divides the play into two parts, in just the way comic *intermezzi* divided *opere serie* into two parts in the eighteenth century. The scene has distinct musical sections. Some sections are designated as “Recit.”, an abbreviation for *Recitativo*, a common musical technique of “elevated speaking”: the voice follows the rhythm of spoken language, but has fixed tone pitches, while one or more accompanying instruments mark the harmonic shifts. Recitative is a development by Italian composers active around 1600 (*recitar cantando*, monodic style), and is crucial for all the important genres of vocal music in the baroque period and beyond, above all for opera. Other sections are designated as “Aria” or “Duetto”. The play is written in rhymed verse, but the “Aria” and “Duetto” sections are emphasized by a different layout – the lines ending with the rhymed words are arranged one below the other, as the following example shows:

Maria

Recit:

Ach wie so sehr ist mir das Herz, vor lauter Angst und großen Schmerz, betriebe, weil ich gar allzusehr in Gott, so ist mein Herr verliebet.

Aria

Ey dann Joseph laß uns wagen

Um ein Herbrig umzufragen

Schau! Ob eine findest bald,

Und dich nicht zu lang aufhalt.

Dan es ist bald an der Zeit,

daß der Heyland uns erfreit.

The musical intermezzo is rather long: It contains seven recitatives and eleven arias. The play ends with another “Aria”. It is not clear whether this final section is intended to be sung by the “Engl”, the role which has spoken the precedent words. It could also be a kind of concluding chorus, perhaps even including the audience, since the final “Aria” has strophic form and resembles a (hitherto unidentified) common Christmas carol. There are eighteenth-century plays beginning, if not ending, with hymn-like songs: Ellen Hastaba mentions a “Hymn to St. Genoveva” to be sung by “all the actors” at the beginning of a folk play from Mieming,⁸ and the Nikolausspiel from Mutters

⁸ Hastaba, *Das Volksschauspiel im Oberinntal*, pp. 46–47.

Fig. 3: Christmas / Three Kings Play, Matri, eighteenth century, TLMF Bibliothek FB 32100, detail: musical intermezzo.

(1745) includes a strophic “Bith Ruef Vor den Spil” (Call for Mercy before the start).⁹

But let us return to the Christmas/Three Kings Play from Matrei. What do we learn about the music? The musical sources connected with the folk play seem to have been lost. We do not know exactly what the music sounded like, who performed, or who composed it. What we do know is that common musical forms were used – recitative, aria, and duetto – and that they were used in quite the same way as in existing compositions belonging to what could be described as “art music” of the eighteenth century. The play obviously does *not* call for genuine folk music. An observation is worth making: recitative, aria, and duet are the forms used in another genre of theater music: in Jesuit drama.

3 A non-musical source – and a supplementary musical one: The Mariahilf Play, eighteenth century, TLMF Bibliothek W 317/4, and a newly discovered music manuscript from Marienberg / South Tyrol

Here we have a situation similar to Jesuit drama: The sung texts and the spoken text are separated. In Jesuit drama, in addition to the “periochs” which are scripts containing the *argomento*, a summary of the plot, and lists of the roles and actors, often also the *Prologus and Chori Musici* was printed, i.e. the sung texts of the musical parts of the drama, which usually stood at the beginning and separated the several acts as *entr’actes*. The handwritten script of the Mariahilf Play preserved in the Ferdinandeum has a typically baroque, extensive title page, which includes the specification: “Die music hat componirt. der kunstreiche Herr Blasius Nezer, organist zu ampas”. Here we have an indication of the composer. Sacred works by this Blasius Ne(t)zer can be found in the music archive of the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum. Recently Annemarie Bösch-Niederer found new documents concerning this composer and his family.¹⁰ She found out that Blasius Netzer (1728–1785) was the grandfather of

⁹ Ibid., pp. 8–49.

¹⁰ Annemarie Bösch-Niederer. “Vergessene Talente: Die Musikerfamilie Nezer (Netzer) in Bludenz.” *Montfort: Zeitschrift für Geschichte Vorarlbergs*, vol. 64, no. 2, 2012, pp. 77–86.

His music to the Mariahilf Play has not come down to us, and Blasius Netzer's sacred music preserved in the Ferdinandeum and also in the Swiss Benedictine monastery of Münstair does not allow us to say anything about the style of his theater music, but there is another source which could give an impression: In the Benedictine monastery of Marienberg in the Upper Vinschgau (South Tyrol / Italy), I was lucky to find a treasury of music manuscripts of the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century which contains sacred music, occasional music for festivities such as New Year and the name-day of the abbot, music to school plays for the Benedictine gymnasium in Meran, and other theater music.¹¹ Among the musical sources to plays that cannot be connected to the tradition of school plays in Meran, there is a remarkable, though incomplete set of parts belonging to an unidentified play which contained the roles "Vorsichtigkeit", "Liebe," "Eifer," "Tod," and "Teufel".

The music is by Blasius Ne(t)zer ("composuit Nezer") again, who, after some years in Bludenz, served as an organist in the village of Tschengls not far from Marienberg, an important pilgrimage destination in the eighteenth century. Netzer was in Tschengls from 1775 to 1779. We do not know whether the play and its music were performed in Marienberg, or perhaps in one of the surrounding villages; it is impossible to separate monastic theater tradition and school plays from folk-play tradition, since these three phenomena influenced each other strongly. But we can take this manuscript as a valuable source with regard to the style of Blasius Netzer's theater music. Again, we have recitatives, arias, duets, and one concluding chorus. The scoring includes strings, a pair of french horns, and figured bass (*basso continuo*), a standard scoring for monastic music as well as rural sacred music in the eighteenth century. The arias are in a galant *Singspiel* style, which is also typical of late eighteenth-century music in South Germany and Austria. It can be assumed that this was also the common style for music in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century folk plays. Netzer is representative of the strong tradition of teacher-organists who served as the "general servants" for all musical needs in the rural Tyrol. Many of these teacher-organists were also composers, sometimes of remarkable ability.¹² This leads to the assumption that this group of musicians was primarily responsible for theater music in folk plays. There is some further evidence. Ellen Hastaba mentions the Holofernes *entr'acte* in the

¹¹ See Gratl, "Musik zu Innsbrucker und Meraner Schulspielen."

¹² See Franz Gratl. "Quellen zur ländlichen 'Schullehrermusik' des 19. Jahrhunderts in der Musiksammlung des Tiroler Landesmuseums Ferdinandeum." *Jahrbuch des RISM-Österreich* (Veröffentlichungen des RISM-Österreich, series A, vol. 14). Wien: Verlag Der Apfel, 2010, pp. 65–86.

Basso Tenore
Recit et
Aria Tacet

Recit. *ganz betäubt* *er ist mir fast*
unerschwin *in der hollen Verzerrung*

Alto molto *Quello* *Ha, wie du*
Glitz *und Funken und Laila*
Ha, wie du Glitz *und Funken und*
Laila *und Funken und Laila*
in der anflutenden bay Jupiter Ring
in der anflutenden bay Jupiter Ring

1^{te} *III* *Vf*

Fig. 5: Music to an unidentified (folk) play, Marienberg Monastery, music archive, vocal Bass part (role: "Teufel"), detail: beginning of an Aria.

Antichrist Play from Silz: the music was composed by Josef Abenthung (1779–1860), teacher, organist, band leader, freedom fighter in the Napoleonic wars, farmer, merchant, and very productive composer.¹³ The music to the passion play of Telfs (1812 and 1814) was composed by Wilhelm Lechleitner (1779–1827), choirmaster of the South Tyrolean Augustine abbey of Neustift up to the closing of the monastery by the Bavarian government, and, by the time he composed the music for Telfs, music teacher at the Royal Bavarian Gymnasium in Innsbruck.¹⁴ Neither Abenthung nor Lechleitner had a strong connection to real folk music – in their works, they followed the models of “elevated” contemporary sacred and secular music, often in its rural form which proved very popular in South Germany and Austria in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Lechleitner’s ideal was the music of the Viennese classics: he was a “fan” of Joseph Haydn.¹⁵

4 Literary and pictorial sources

Finally, I would like to mention two examples of sources other than scripts and music manuscripts. One is the drawing by Jakob Placidus Altmutter, “Bauerntheater in der Höttinger Au,” ca. 1809 (Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Bibliothek, FB 4510/42b). Despite its origin in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the depiction represents folk drama in its typical form, perpetuating a baroque tradition. The clothing of the actors on stage is very baroque, with costumes *all’antica*, common in baroque and classical opera. The audience appears to be mixed in its social composition, with some people looking more like peasants and others with a bourgeois appearance. The musicians are quite prominent. They wear traditional costumes. They form an ensemble of the following instruments: two violins, flute (or *Schwegel*, a traditional type of flute), and double bass. These instruments were used in various musical genres, from

¹³ Hastaba, *Das Volksschauspiel im Oberinntal*, p. 27. With regard to Josef Abenthung, see Franz Gratl, “Josef Abenthungs ‘Practisches Handbuch für Cantor und Organisten’: Eine neu entdeckte Quelle zur kirchenmusikalischen Praxis in Tiroler Dorfkirchen in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts.” *Veröffentlichungen des Tiroler Landesmuseums Ferdinandeum*, vol. 86, 2006, pp. 223–244.

¹⁴ Hastaba, *Das Volksschauspiel im Oberinntal*, p. 27.

¹⁵ In the “Sanctus” of his *Pastoral Mass for Christmastide* (“Pastorell-Messe”), Lechleitner cites Haydn’s popular “*Surprise*” *Symphony* No. 94; two movements in this Mass setting are contrafacta of arias from Haydn’s oratorio *The Seasons*. For a recording of Lechleitner’s Mass, see: CD *Tiroler Weihnachtskonzert 2002*. Innsbruck: Institut für Tiroler Musikforschung, 2003.

church music to folk music. Altmutter's drawing is interesting because he clearly indicates that the musicians played from notated music. Genuine folk music would not have been written down – again, evidence for the assumption that the music in folk drama was composed and preserved in music manuscripts.

An interesting literary source on Tyrolean folk drama is the autobiography of the Italian musician and composer Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari (Rovereto 1763 – London 1842).¹⁶ Ferrari attended the gymnasium in Meran and lived in the Benedictine abbey of Marienberg in the 1780s; his autobiography offers lively descriptions of Tyrolean everyday life and customs. Ferrari describes a performance of a folk play on the Biblical theme of Noah's Ark in a village near Marienberg, which he calls "Slaunders"; Toni Bernhart suggests that Ferrari is referring to Schluderns.¹⁷ Bernhart describes the performance at length, so I will concentrate on the musical aspects. The abbot of Marienberg and five monks attended the play; the performance started with the actors on stage singing "melodie nazionali, ma molto bene e con gusto naturale."¹⁸ In this folk play, folk music – or music that Ferrari identified as local folk music – played a vital role. A very dramatic theatrical scene, the War in Heaven between Lucifer and Michael and Lucifer's final Fall, was concluded with the entry of two musicians, "ciascuno con una tromba, lunga dieci piedi, fatta di scorza d'albero, e che produce un suono simigliante al così chiamato Corno Inglese, o

16 Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari. *Aneddoti piacevoli e interessanti occorsi nella vita di Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari da Rovereto: Operetta scritta da Lui medesimo e dedicata a sua Maestà Giorgio IV, Re della Gran Bretagna*. London: Autor/A. Seguin, 1830. New editions: *Aneddoti piacevoli e interessanti occorsi nella vita di Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari da Rovereto*, edited by Salvatore di Giacomo. Palermo et al.: Remo Sandron, 1920 (Collezione Settecentesca); Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari. *Aneddoti piacevoli e interessanti: Le avventure di un musicista italiano tra Rivoluzione Francese e Restaurazione 1763–1830*, edited by Mariasilvia Tatti. Bergamo: Lubrina, 1998. See also Georges de Saint-Foix and Arthur Mendel. "A Musical Traveler: Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari (1759–1842)." *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1939, pp. 455–465; Sergio Durante. "Die Memoiren des ehemaligen Klosterschülers Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari." *Musikgeschichte Tirols*, vol. 2, edited by Kurt Drexel and Monika Fink. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 2004 (Schlern-Schriften, 322), pp. 161–172 (with a poor German translation of the original Italian text of Ferrari's *Aneddoti*); Toni Bernhart. "Das implizite Publikum im Laaser Spiel vom Eigenen Gericht (vor 1805)." *Das Theater gleich einem Irrenhause: Das Publikum im Theater des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Hermann Korte and Hans-Joachim Jakob. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012 (Proszenium: Beiträge zur Theaterpublikumsforschung, 1), pp. 179–191, pp. 188–190.

17 Bernhart, "Das implizite Publikum im Laaser Spiel vom Eigenen Gericht," p. 189.

18 Ferrari, *Aneddoti piacevoli e interessanti*, p. 64. Translation: "singing national melodies, but very beautifully and with natural taste."

Voce umana, sonarono ammirabilmente una melodia patetica ed un valtzer vivace per esprimere, che essendo già il Diavolo nell'Inferno vi sarebbe tutto pace ed allegria su questa terra, e per annunziar nello stesso tempo il ritorno dei celesti viaggiatori.”¹⁹ Again, the music must have been folk-like: the long “trumpets” described by Ferrari must have been alphorns, typical Alpine folk instruments. If we take into consideration all the observations on music in folk drama, we have to class Ferrari’s account as a testimonial to a non-mainstream tradition – or perhaps a tradition not equally well-documented because it does not depend on written sources.

5 Conclusions

The Tyrolean sources offer some valuable insights concerning the music in folk drama. Ellen Hastaba has stressed the crucial influence of Jesuit plays on folk drama.²⁰ Therefore, it is not surprising that the way music was integrated into Tyrolean folk plays shows remarkable similarities to Jesuit drama, with musical prologues, *intermezzi*, and epilogues, all consisting of recitatives, arias, and choruses. These musical forms are essential also for baroque opera and the German *Singspiel* of the late eighteenth century. We can assume that music in folk drama was usually composed and written down, except for some short acclamations which could have been improvised. Most of the identifiable composers were school teachers, the leading representatives of rural music-making in the Tyrol up to the twentieth century. Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari’s autobiography is the only source that describes the integration of real folk music into folk drama. Further research in the field should be guided by an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together the research results of theater scholars and musicologists. Up to now, musical sources have been neglected and slumber in the archives. Their systematic registration is a desideratum.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 67. Translation: “both with a trumpet, ten feet long, made of tree bark, producing a sound that resembles the so called ‘Corno inglese,’ or the human voice. They played a pathetic melody and a merry, lively Waltz to express the complete joy on earth after the Fall to Hell of the Devil, and to announce the heavenly travelers.”

²⁰ Hastaba, *Das Volksschauspiel im Oberinntal*, pp. 23–30.