

THE MAGIC OF OPERA. APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES FOR FAMILIARIZING CHILDREN WITH THE OPERATIC GENRE

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SUMMARY. Over the past decades, an increasing number of opera institutions in various countries have been developing educational programmes aimed at bringing children closer to the opera genre. Although the need for early engagement is recognized, many institutions focus their offerings on adolescents and young people. The educational work of opera houses aimed at children faces greater difficulties than that of orchestras. The need for material resources, work, and energy to put on performances designed specifically for children leads many institutions to offer mainly other types of programmes, such as workshops, guided tours, visits by a singer to schools, creative exploration camps, etc. In terms of repertoire, opera performances offered for children are divided into works composed for children and adaptations for children of famous works from the universal opera repertoire. The present study will examine different approaches and strategies that can contribute to the goal of helping children enter the world of opera. These will be accompanied by examples of programmes presented by several opera houses in Europe, USA, and Canada. We will then present two programmes of our very own design meant for children and offered in Cluj, conceived as a combination of an introduction to the opera genre with excerpts from masterpieces belonging to the opera genre, namely Rossini's *Cenerentola* (2014, 2015) at the Romanian National Opera and *The Magic Flute* (2022) at the Hungarian Opera House.

Keywords: children, opera houses, educational programmes

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Introduction

For a long time, the opera performance has represented a more or less elitist event dedicated to adult audiences. “By the end of the 1980s a paradigm shift touches the Opera houses: the pluralization of the audience, one including children”.² More and more opera houses around the world have been developing educational programs in recent decades aimed at bringing young audiences closer to the opera genre. However, the educational work of opera houses faces greater challenges than that of orchestras.

Staging an opera performance suitable for young audiences faces different problems than performing a symphonic concert for the same audience. These are easier to solve for teenage and youth audiences than for children. A theatre also has the opportunity to offer educational activities that do not involve producing a performance for young audiences, such as back-stage visits, workshops in several areas, a singer’s visits to schools, creative exploration camps. Our study focuses on opera performances for children’s audiences, examining the challenges of creating such performances, recognizing the need to overcome these problems as well as strategies for addressing them in different approaches to creating and presenting performances. We will also present two of our own performances and analyzing the chosen approach.

The Problem with “children’s operas”

Some children’s operas, such as Engelbert Humperdinck’s *Hänsel und Gretel* (premiere, 1893), have long enjoyed success with audiences. However, arguments abound against presenting opera performances created for children. While some of these are rather prejudiced, many are objective and based on research findings in child psychology, psychomusicology, and education.

The works pertaining to the traditional operatic repertoire are of a length that far exceeds children’s ability to concentrate. The complex themes and plot of many opera librettos are not age-appropriate; in many countries the original text is in a language that children do not understand. Add to this today’s children’s attitudes towards classical vocal music in general and the operatic genre in particular. Studies of children’s musical preferences according to different parameters of music show that among the forms of

² Theresa Schmitz, “The discovery of children as a worthy audience for operas”, in Mark MacLeod, Wendy Turgeon, Lucy Hopkins (eds.) *Negotiating childhoods*, pp. 211-219, Interdisciplinary Press, Oxford, 2011, p. 211.

popular music, instrumental music is preferred to vocal music, which ranks last in preference.³ Children react negatively to the bel canto⁴ voice, which is “foreign” and fundamentally different from the familiar world of pop music. Children’s attitudes to the opera genre are generally negative, although they have never attended a live, on-stage performance.⁵ These attitudes, which may be based on opera music listened to on record, or on stereotypes perpetuated by the media, peers or adults,⁶ become more pronounced with age, when rock/pop preferences become dominant. A study of elementary school children’s music preferences showed a drop in positive ratings for the aria *Voi che sapete* from Mozart’s opera *The Marriage of Figaro* from 52% among 5–6-year-olds to almost zero from age 10 upward.⁷

Not to be overlooked is the issue of costs either, which are much higher for producing a new opera performance than for designing and performing an instrumental concert.

An opera house wishing to bring the opera genre closer to children must be aware of all these arguments and seek solutions to the problems involved in achieving this desire.

The Necessity of Problem Solving

The arguments against presenting opera performances for children can be countered by as many arguments that not only support the presentation of such events but also point to their importance. The need to find solutions to the various problems is all the more pressing.

By its very nature “opera is [...] a form of artistic excitement involving many elements especially well-loved by children and natural to them – including music, costumes, acting, dancing, scenery, and, above all, the use of the imagination.”⁸ The fascination of an operatic performance - the “magic of opera” -

³ Albert LeBlanc, “Effects of Style, Tempo, and Performing Medium on Children’s Music Preference”, in *Journal of Research in Music Education*, vol. 29, no. 2, Summer, 1981, p. 154.

⁴ P. Brünger, *Geschmack für Belcanto- und Pop- Stimmen: Eine repräsentative Untersuchung unter Jugendlichen in einer norddeutschen Großstadt*, dissertation paper, Hannover University, 1984, *apud* Heiner Gembris, Gabriele Schellenberg, “Musical preferences of elementary school children”, in Kopiez, R., Lehmann, A., Wolther, I. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 5th Triennial ESCOM Conference*, September 8-13, 2003, Hannover, Germany, pp. 552-553, p. 553.

⁵ Wendy L. Sims, “Effects of Attending an In-School Opera Performance on Attitudes of Fourth-, Fifth- and Sixth-Grade Students”, in *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, nr. 114, Fall, 1992, pp. 47-58, p 48.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Gembris & Schellenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 552.

⁸ Samuel D. Miller, “Opera Made Elementary”, In *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 71, No. 2, 1984 pp. 52-54, p. 52.

is a valuable resource for the success of its presentation, if the show is thoughtfully conceived and performed to a high artistic standard. The director who conceived the children's version of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, presented at the Bayreuth Festival in 2011, points out that "Wagner's world has much more in common with famous fairy tales than one might think".⁹

Another important argument in favor of the early initiation into the opera genre is the so-called "open ear" age. In an article on the development of aesthetic reactions to music, published in 1982, Hargreaves used the concept of "open ears", which has been and is still widely used in the literature in forms such as *open-earedness* (in English) or *Offenohrigkeit* (in German).¹⁰

Empirical research has shown that a more open attitude towards different styles of music can be observed in children;¹¹ children are less likely to reject music in styles that are unfamiliar to them, which (unfortunately) includes classical music. "Results confirm that there is definitely an open-earedness for unfamiliar styles of music with the younger children, declining gradually with increasing age."¹² Negative attitudes towards operatic voices also increase with age, as mentioned in previously. "The younger the children are, the more apt they are to accept the sound of the operatic voice".¹³ Opinions on the exact demarcation of the open-ear period differ slightly, but the end of primary school seems to be the time when music preferences "[...] indicat[e] a convergence of music preference toward popular style".¹⁴

"At the latest at the age of 9, the open-earedness has disappeared in most children."¹⁵ The conclusion is obvious: it's much better to get exposed to opera as early as possible.¹⁶

In recent decades there has also been increasing pressure for opera houses, like orchestras, theatres, and museums, to offer programs for children as part of widening access to culture and cultural education. On the other hand, it is in the interest of opera houses to attract and raise awareness among tomorrow's audiences early on. Moreover, "faced with an ageing audience [...]"

⁹ Anastassia Boutsko, "Opera for the wee ones: Kids have an ear for musical drama" *DW Deutsche Welle online* 11.08.2011.

¹⁰ David J. Hargreaves, "The development of aesthetic reactions to music" in *Psychology of Music*, Special Issue, 1982, pp. 51-54, p. 51.

¹¹ Hargreaves, *op. cit.*

¹² Gembris & Schellenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 553.

¹³ Samuel D. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

¹⁴ William V. May, "Musical style preferences and aural discrimination skills of primary grade school children", *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 33(1), 1985, pp. 7-22, p. 19.

¹⁵ Gembris & Schellenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 553.

¹⁶ Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

operas look to their young audiences not only for the potential audience of tomorrow but also for the audience of today”.¹⁷

Approaches and strategies for creating an opera performance designed for children

An opera performance for children must be designed and presented in such a way as to fascinate the audience, thus bringing them closer to the world of opera. To achieve this goal, many institutions offering opera performances for children today use several strategies in the design of their programs to solve different types of problems that hinder the achievement of their proposed goal.

The choice of repertoire and the way it is presented is the starting point and the most important aspect of creating a successful children’s performance. To meet the age requirements of the target audience, several factors need to be considered, the most important of which are the overall length of the performance and the language in which it is sung or spoken. The complexity of the libretto and the age-appropriateness of the different moments of the plot must also be assessed.

The educational value of performances can be enhanced by preparing the audience in advance. Some opera houses offer concrete help to teachers and parents (workshops for teachers, teaching material and musical examples available online, etc.). Participatory activities for the whole audience are part of the musical mediation elements included in some performances, which we will address separately. Segments where a specifically trained group of children participate on stage may also be included in the performance. In the following pages we will present different ways of approaching the creation and presentation of an opera performance for children, detailing the different strategies adopted to deal with the issues of duration, language and content of the operatic work presented.

¹⁷ Sylvie Saint-Cyr, *Les jeunes et l’opéra : le développement des actions en direction de la jeunesse dans les théâtres lyriques de France de 1980 à 2000*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 2005, *apud* Theresa Schmitz, “«Nous sommes allés à l’Opéra pour donner un spectacle». Les productions participatives pour et avec le jeune public en Europe”, in *Observatoire des politiques culturelles*. 2012/1 No. 40, pp 58-61, p 58.

Works from the current opera repertoire that are considered suitable for children

The easiest way to offer an opera performance for children is to program a matinee performance from the repertoire with content that is deemed appropriate for such an audience. Although neither Mozart's *The Magic Flute* nor Rossini's *Cenerentola* or Massenet's *Cendrillon* were explicitly composed for children, they are frequently presented to children. In the case of a full performance, the length of these works can represent a problem. Since the original language is not understood everywhere, a full translation of the vocal parts and dialogues is used, producing a combination of vocal parts sung in the original language and translated dialogues (where appropriate), alternatively surtitles can be used, which would assume that the young audience can read fluently, however, it does not address the real problem of the need for distributed attention. This type of children's programme presents no problems in terms of the production of the show, which would be a repetition of the performance that is already in the opera house's current repertoire.

Operas composed for children

Since the late 19th century, several composers have created operas for children. Humperdinck's opera *Hänsel und Gretel* based on the fairy tale of the Brothers Grimm, which premiered under the baton of Richard Strauss more than a century ago to resounding success, has remained in the repertoire of opera houses to this day. We will now mention just a few of the great works that followed suit: Maurice Ravel (*L'enfant et les sortilèges*, 1925), Benjamin Britten (*The Little Sweep*, 1949) Hans Werner Henze (*Pollicino*, 1980). In the 20th century several Romanian composers wrote operas for children borrowing themes from fairy-tales.¹⁸ Some have fallen into oblivion, such as Alexandru Zirra's *Capra cu trei iezi* [The Goat with Three Kids] (1938), praised by George Enescu, who considered the composer the Humperdinck of Romanians.¹⁹ The most frequent appearances on posters are Corneliu Trăilescu's *Motanul încălțat* [Puss in Boots] (1961) and Laurențiu Profeta's *Povestea micului Pan* [The Story of Little Pan] (1985).

¹⁸ For additional information, see also Consuela Radu-Țaga, "About the Romanian opera for children and the choral moments". *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brașov. Series VIII: Performing Arts*, Vol. 13 (62) No. 1, 2020, pp. 163-172.

¹⁹ Vasile Vasile, *Alexandru Zirra*, Musical Publishing House., București, 2005, apud Radu-Țaga, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

In recent decades, more and more composers have composed operas for children commissioned by various opera houses that want new performances for their repertoire meant for this new type of audience.²⁰ Among the renowned composers, Jonathan Dove (born 1959), in whose creation the opera genre plays an important role, has also written several operas for children. *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (2007) has been performed to great acclaim at numerous opera houses in the UK and the US as well as in Germany (in translation). It is a 140-minute two-act opera with many vocal soloists, chorus and symphony orchestra.

Many composers, especially of the younger generation, compose operas for children that also meet the requirements of having a short duration and reduced orchestration. An extreme example of minimalist instrumentation are the operas for children by the young Dutch composer Leonard Evers (born in 1985), which are enjoying great success at several renowned European opera houses, such as the opera *Goud!* after the Brothers Grimm (2012) composed for a singer/actress and a percussionist/actor.

Famous operas arranged for children

As early as the early 1970s, Linda Cabot Black, co-founder of the Opera Company of Boston (1958), had the idea of producing what she called “opera for children, not children’s opera.” She wanted to bring children’s audiences closer to operas belonging to the universal repertoire that they would eventually be listening also as adults. The practical implementation of this idea ran into familiar problems: the subject matter of the opera, the length of the piece and the language. Choosing a few works, she thought appropriate, Cabot Black commissioned hour-long arrangements with English text and an orchestra of about 20 instruments.²¹ Boston Lyric Opera continued this tradition, presenting a production of a famous opera arranged for children each year from 1999-2011 for families and schools as part of its Opera for Young Audiences (OYA) program. The Wallace Foundation commissioned a case study of the family program and published the results in its *Wallace Studies in Building Arts Audiences* series.²²

²⁰ Theresa Schmitz, “L’opéra jeune public. Stratégies compositionnelles pour transformer l’enfant-spectateur en mélomane”, *Transposition* 2, 2012, p. 3.

²¹ Bob Harlow, Thomas Alfieri, Aaron Dalton, Anne Fied, “Cultivating the next generation of art lovers – How Boston Lyric Opera sought to create greater opportunities for families to attend opera. Wallace Studies in Building arts audiences” The Wallace Foundation New York, 2011, pp. 9-10.

²² *Ibidem*.

This approach to repertoire is widespread. Before giving a few examples from well-known institutions, it is important to remember that there are also many smaller, mostly private, companies that have set out to help bring children's audiences closer to the opera genre by presenting adapted versions of famous operas. Many of them do this mainly through touring, giving opera performances for children in towns that do not have an opera house, often in schools and public libraries. As well as shortening the duration and translating the piece into the national language, they also resort to reducing the number of singers, by using the same singer in two different roles or reducing the number of characters. Often the instrumental accompaniment is also reduced, more or less drastically, from a small orchestra to a chamber ensemble or just piano. This is, of course, also due to the space available, but mostly due to financial considerations. It is worth noting, however, that most of the performances do not seem to make great savings in staging: costumes and sets are generally elaborate, as are the direction and stage movement.

The big opera houses that allocate an appropriate budget and programs for young audiences, produce brilliant performances of famous operas adapted for children. For *The Magic Flute*, The Metropolitan Opera (New York) decided to create a children's version shortened to 100 minutes and translated into English (premiere 2006) from the lavish 2004 production, sung entirely in the original language (German). The Magic Flute is in fact one of the most frequently adapted operas for children, from the glittering New York production to multiple versions featuring smaller ensembles of singers and instrumentalists, often with only piano accompaniment.

Other renowned theatres (Vienna State Opera, La Scala Theatre in Milan, and Maggio Musicale Fiorentino as well as the famous Bayreuth and Salzburg Festivals) offer arranged versions of famous operas, shortened to 60-75 minutes, translated into the national language and with a simplified libretto and revamped instrumentations meant for a reduced orchestra.

Also worth mentioning are various children's versions of Wagner operas presented on several opera stages in Europe. The opera *Siegfried et l'anneau maudit* [Siegfried and the Cursed Ring], a "miniature" version of Wagner's monumental tetralogy *Der Ring des Niebelungen* was a great success in France as a co-production of several institutions (2013-2014). Siegfried's epic for children aged 7 and up, lasting an hour and three quarters, staged at the highest professional level, was sung in German with French surtitles, and accompanied by an orchestra of 16 instrumentalists. Every year since 2009, the Bayreuth Festival has presented a Wagner opera adapted for children to a resounding success. The language of the Bayreuth performances is obviously not a problem, with performances lasting 70-90 minutes. Depending on the opera presented, the age group for which the

production is intended is indicated, ranging from 6-10 to 8-12 years old. The libretto is obviously simplified, and the various problematic moments for children are evaluated and a choice is made to either omit or modify them. For example, the death of the hero Siegfried is kept, but neither the incest from which he was born nor the killing of the two giants appear. Remarkably, these performances feature renowned soloists who also appear in festival productions.

In the children's versions of famous operas conceived by the *Associazione Lirica e Concertistica (AsLiCo)* in Como and successfully presented by several opera houses in Italy and France, the problem of brutal moments in the action is sidestepped by transferring the action to a setting that is by definition unrealistic. In the children's production based on Bizet's work, entitled *Carmen, La stella del circo di Siviglia* the action takes place in the circus and the heroine is not killed but disappears through the trick of an illusionist,²³ while the production of *Rigoletto. I misteri del teatro* ingeniously presents Verdi's opera as 'theatre-in-theatre', in which all the characters become members of the 'Duke's troupe' again at the end and continue their journey to the next performance.²⁴

Pasticcio

Several children's opera performances use a different approach in their choice of repertoire, combining arias and ensembles from different operas. This continues the tradition of *pasticcio* operas, which enjoyed great popularity in the 18th century. These operas were made up of famous arias from different operas by the same or different composers, with the original text replaced by a new one, possibly with the addition of new musical fragments. Händel, Gluck and Johann Christian Bach wrote *pasticcio* operas.²⁵ In recent years several new (adult) operas have been arranged in this tradition, such as *Enchanted Island* based on two plays by Shakespeare (The Metropolitan Opera New York 2011) and *Voyage to the moon* based on Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (Victorian Opera Melbourne, 2016), both with music from different Baroque operas.

²³ Julia Vergely, "«Carmen, une étoile du cirque», pour faire chanter les enfants" *Télérama* 22.03.2019.

²⁴ Thierry Chion, "Rigoletto ou les mystères du théâtre : un opéra participatif à Rouen à destination des enfants", *Actu76 Normandie*, 12.01.2022.

²⁵ William Smyth Rockstro, "Pasticcio". In Grove, George (ed.) *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 2, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1900.

The Oldenburg State Theatre has created the children's performance *Orpheus und die Zauberharfe - Ein Opern-Pasticcio (nicht nur) für Kinder*²⁶ (2020) with music from five operas based on the myth of Orpheus from Monteverdi to Gluck. The Salzburg Festival used music from Purcell's opera *Fairy Queen* and other works by the composer for the children's performance entitled *Die Feenkönigin*²⁷ (2016).

Many children's opera performances use excerpts from famous operas with the text of an entirely different story designed to captivate audiences. One extreme approach is taken by baritone John Davies, whose operas for children are successfully performed by over 150 organizations in the US and Canada.²⁸ Davies uses well-known fairy tales with a modern pedagogical element. A limited number of singers (4-5) accompanied by a pianist perform arias and ensembles from famous operas (by a single composer or several different composers) with texts interspersed in a Singspiel-like performance. Performances last 40 minutes and are aimed at children from pre-school to fifth grade. An opera lover might wonder if the piglets in *The Three Little Pigs* (1991, with music from various Mozart operas) should be called *Despina, Cherubino and Don Giovanni*. Little sister Despina, who builds the brick house, loves books, and goes to the library to read about building a wolf-proof house named Wolfgang Bigband.

Performances that include elements of cultural mediation

In the approaches outlined above, children approach the genre of opera intuitively. However, it is possible to design performances in which children approach opera in an exploratory way, introducing elements of cultural mediation. "We call 'cultural mediation' a set of actions aiming, through an intermediary - the mediator, [...] - to put an individual or a group in touch with a cultural or artistic proposal (a singular work of art, an exhibition, a concert, a show, etc.), to promote its apprehension, its knowledge, and its appreciation."²⁹

²⁶ *Orpheus and the Magic Harp - an opera pasticcio (not only) for children*

²⁷ *The Fairy Princess*

²⁸ Opera tales, *Operas for children by John Davies*, Manlius, NY

²⁹ Bruno Nassim Abouddar, François Mairesse, *La médiation culturelle*, Presses Universitaire de France, Paris, 2018, p. 3. "On appelle « médiation culturelle » un ensemble d'actions visant, par le biais d'un intermédiaire – le médiateur, [...] –, à mettre en relation un individu ou un groupe avec une proposition culturelle ou artistique (œuvre d'art singulière, exposition, concert, spectacle, etc.), afin de favoriser son appréhension, sa connaissance et son appréciation."

By its nature opera lends itself to both musical and theatrical mediation. The conception of the children's performance *Rigoletto. I misteri del teatro* mentioned above is rooted in theatrical mediation, presenting the various facets of the process of creating and performing an opera performance on stage.

Musical mediation can be introduced with the help of a mediator-moderator, a role that can be fulfilled by an added character or by one (or more) of the performers. In the children's version of *The Magic Flute* by baritone Christian Boesch (premiered at the 1982 Salzburg Festival under the baton of James Levine), Boesch played the role of Papageno and acted as the mediator alongside the famous director Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, combining elements of musical and theatrical mediation in the dialogue.³⁰ In addition to verbal explanation, moments of dialogue with the audience can also be used.

An important contribution to bringing children closer to opera is the introduction of participatory activities for the audience: choral singing, *body-percussion* sequences, pantomime, or simple choreographic movements that can be performed on the spot. Participatory activities can be spontaneous or prepared in advance with parents (in performances for families) and especially with teachers (in performances for school groups), with the help of supporting (written, audio, video) materials provided by the organizers of the performance (through *online* publication, electronic distribution, or a workshop for teachers). Such participatory elements are integrated in all opera performances designed by the *Associazione Lirica e Concertistica*.

As part of the project called *All'Opera... Le scuole al Maggio!* (Held in Florence every year since 2006), a special role is given to the participation on stage of many classes from schools in and around the city, which are trained by professionals for several months.

Whatever the approach, the choice of repertoire is essential. "The work must have music of quality and taste, thus serving as an 'entrance' to the wonderful, magic world of opera for them".³¹ The standard of presentation is also particularly important. All members of RESEO (European Network for Opera, Music, and Dance Education) who responded to the questionnaire on productions for young audiences indicated artistic quality as the top criterion for a good production, just ahead of relevance to the specific age group and content of the production and originality.³²

³⁰ The production was released as a (live) DVD by Arthaus Musik

³¹ Nick Rossi. "Children and Opera, Florentine Style", in *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 72, No. 4, 1985, pp. 50-52, p. 52.

³² Aurélia Gaudio, "Overview: Productions for young audiences in Europe", Survey conducted by RESEO in September 2009, pp. 55-56.

Cinderella and The Magic Flute for children in Cluj

The author has designed and performed two opera performances for children with elements of mediation, both at in Cluj: at the Romanian National Opera (based on Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, 2015) and at the Hungarian Opera House (based on Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, 2022).

Both performances were designed for children aged 6-11 (open ear period). Two famous works from the opera repertoire (Rossini's *La Cenerentola* and Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*) were chosen and adapted, and the approach chosen was that of a performance with elements of both musical and theatrical mediation.

To meet the age requirements of the target audience, the performances were designed to last approximately 50 minutes and were sung and spoken in the audience's native language. For *Cinderella* the sung texts were translated into Romanian specifically for the children's performance, while for *The Magic Flute* it was possible to use the Hungarian translation used in the performance from the theatre's current repertoire. The number of characters was reduced (*Cinderella* - five characters, *The Magic Flute* - six characters) and for Rossini's opera the lost shoe, as it is known to the children in the fairy tale, was used instead of the bracelet that was in the original libretto of the work.

The mediating elements in the *Cinderella* performance were introduced by the author as the conductor-moderator, assisted by the interpreter of the title role, while in *The Magic Flute* the interpreter of the role of Papageno also took on the role of narrator, while the conductor-moderator presented the musical explanations.

In *Cinderella*, the specifics of the opera performance as a theatre with music, with orchestra in the pit and singer-actors on stage, the meaning of the curtain, the role of the overture were all explained. In the production of *The Magic Flute*, the orchestra was placed on the stage, which allowed the children's attention to be focused on the instruments. By showing the specifics of the props, the children understood that they were used to creating an illusion of reality: they were shown the prop flute used in a pretend way simultaneously with the flute player from the orchestra who was playing the melody. A moment of theatrical surprise was used to introduce Cinderella's stepfather. As the audience waited for the appearance of the stepmother from the fairy tale, the baritone appeared on stage and explained to the children that the composer's need to use more male voices led to the creation of the stepfather character.

One of the goals of the musical mediation elements introduced in both performances was to foster an understanding of the music's character. Cinderella's song is "sad" (*Una volta c'era un Re*), the grumpy sisters argue in duet, the music of the Queen of the Night's aria (*Der Hölle Rache*) expresses hatred already from its orchestral introduction while the music of Sarastro's aria (*In diesen heil'gen Hallen*) is put forth in an obvious emotional contrast to the former fragment.

In both performances a participatory activity with the audience was also introduced: making a thunderstorm with body-percussion sounds and whistling by voice, being otherwise one of the most beloved activities by the children. In *Cinderella* the audience created a storm when the clock struck midnight and Cinderella ran away losing a shoe, after which the orchestra played the storm composed by Rossini. This element of musical mediation has been called "simulation"³³ or "modelling", as the audience creates a moment of sound like the music they are about to hear, with the children's storm being followed by the orchestra's interpretation of the musical storm from the opera's score. In *The Magic Flute* the storm heralded the appearance of the Queen of the Night. The participation of a group of trained children on stage (the Hungarian Opera House's Children's Choir) was introduced in the performance of *The Magic Flute* by arranging the slave choir (*Das Klinget so herrlich*) for a children's choir.

The success of both productions, which were repeated due to the high demand for tickets from teachers, clearly indicates the need to present such opera performances for children and motivates their organizers and creators to continue the path of introducing children to the magic of opera.

Translated from Romanian by Juliánna Köpeczi

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