

## A WORD ABOUT "WOZZECK"

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I FIND it hard to answer the request to write something about my opera *Wozzeck*, for it is ten years since I started to compose it. Since then so much has been written about it that I can say nothing, especially of a general nature, that has not already been said, and, should I nevertheless do so, I would have to plagiarize my own critics, which of course is not expected, particularly of me.

There is one inducement, however, and that is to correct an error, arising as soon as the opera became known, which has spread widely since. I never entertained the idea of reforming the artistic structure of the opera through *Wozzeck*. Neither when I started nor when I completed this work did I consider it a model for further operatic efforts, whoever the composer might be. I never assumed or expected that *Wozzeck* should in this sense become the basis of a school.

I wanted to compose good music; to develop musically the contents of Büchner's immortal drama; to translate his poetic language into music; but other than that, when I decided to write an opera, my only intention, as related to the technique of composition, was to give the theatre what belongs to the theatre. In other words, the music was to be so formed as to consciously fulfill its duty, at each moment, of serving the action. Even more, the music should be prepared to furnish whatever the action needed for transformation into reality on the stage. It was the function of the composer to solve the problems of an ideal stage director. And at the same time, this intention must not prejudice the development of the music as an entity that was absolute, that was purely musical. There was to be no interference by externals with its individual existence.

That these purposes should be accomplished by a use of musical forms more or less ancient (considered by critics as one of the most important of my ostensible reforms of the opera) was a natural consequence. For the libretto it was necessary to make a selection from twenty-six loosely constructed, partly fragmentary scenes by Buechner. Repetitions not lending themselves to musical variations had to be avoided. Finally, the scenes must be brought together, arranged and grouped in acts. The problem therefore became, utterly apart from my will, more musical than literary, one to be solved by the laws of musical structure rather than by the rules of dramaturgy.

It was impossible to take the fifteen scenes I selected and shape them in different manners so that each would retain its musical coherence and individuality and at the same time follow the customary method of development which is appropriate to the literary content. An absolute music, no matter how rich structurally, no matter how aptly it might fit the dramatic events would, after a number of scenes so composed, inevitably create musical monotony. The effect would become positively boring with a series of a dozen or so formally composed entr'actes which offered nothing but this type of illustrative music. Boredom, of course, is the last thing one should experience in the theatre.

I obeyed the necessity of giving each scene and each accompanying piece of entr'acte music, whether prelude, postlude, connecting link or interlude, an unmistakable aspect, a rounded off and finished character. It was therefore imperative to use everything warranted to create individualizing characteristics on the one hand, and coherence on the other; thus the much discussed utilization of old and new musical forms and their application in an absolute music.



In one sense, the use of these forms in the opera, especially to such an extent, was unusual, even new. But certainly, as conscious intention, it is not at all to my credit as I have already demonstrated, and consequently I can and must reject the claim

that I am a reformer of the opera through such innovations. However, I do not wish to depreciate my work through these explanations. Others who do not know it so well can do it much better. I therefore would like to suggest something which I consider my particular accomplishment.

No matter how cognizant any particular individual may be of the musical forms contained in the framework of this opera, of the precision and logic with which everything is worked out and the skill manifested in every detail, from the moment the curtain parts until it closes for the last time, there is no one in the audience who pays any attention to the various fugues, inventions, suites, sonata movements, variations and passacaglias . . . . no one who heeds anything but the social problems of this opera which by far transcend the personal destiny of Wozzeck. This I believe to be my achievement.