

## SUMMARY

Little was known about Weber's early opera *Das Waldmädchen* (1800) when this study began, except that it was an unusual opera with a mute title character, written when Weber was only thirteen years old. Most of the score to *Das Waldmädchen*, like the score to Weber's first juvenile opera *Die Macht der Liebe und des Weins* (1798–99), was believed to have disappeared in the early nineteenth century, possibly by the composer's own hand. Only two score fragments of the music to *Das Waldmädchen*, Weber's first publicly-performed stage work, were known to have survived. There was no indication why the thirteen-year-old boy had composed the score, nor was there reliable information in English sources about Weber's librettist Steinsberg. Little to nothing was known of the caliber of the cast that first performed the opera, including any of their former accomplishments or any subsequent activities. Weber scholars generally referred to *Das Waldmädchen* rather simply as an immature work that inspired *Silva na* (J. 87), Weber's second version of the *Waldmädchen* story.

By all accounts Weber's music to *Das Waldmädchen* was unremarkable. A review written in January 1801 concluded that the score was "no more than a blossom that promises fairer and riper fruit."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Weber's opera was produced at least nine times by theater director Wenzel Müller at Vienna's Leopoldstadt Theater in 1804–05. Weber was not in Vienna at the time, nor is there any record of correspondence between Weber and Müller prior to the Viennese production, so Müller's interest in his opera cannot be attributed the composer's efforts to promote it. Müller must have been drawn to the work for some other reason. This investigation of the performance history of this work was further complicated by a remark in Weber's autobiographical sketch of

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<sup>1</sup> *Freyberger gemeinnützige Nachrichten für das chursächsische Erzgebirge*, No. 2 (January 1801), 11; and Lorenz, "Waldmädchen," VII.

1818, claiming that *Das Waldmädchen* was also performed at St. Petersburg and at Prague, in Czech. Those claims were long regarded with reasonable skepticism, because there was no evidence connecting *Das Waldmädchen* to either St. Petersburg or Prague. Moreover, the autobiographical sketch itself was regarded as an unreliable and incomplete source.

Much of that skepticism disappeared in 2000, however, when Russian musicologist Natalia Gubkina discovered a complete score and set of orchestra parts to *Das Waldmädchen* at St. Petersburg, confirming Weber's claim of a performance at that city. Because those documents have not yet been made accessible to other scholars, and also because a critical edition of the score to *Das Waldmädchen* is forthcoming, this study has focused instead on other unexplored aspects of Weber's early opera, including Weber's collaboration with Steinsberg and his claim that *Das Waldmädchen* was performed at Prague in Czech.

The findings indicate that any perceived unreliability of Weber's autobiographical sketch should be reconsidered. Through the careful study of theater calendars and archival records at Prague and Vienna, along with several nineteenth-century periodicals, lexica, and historical chronicles, Steinsberg's professional stature as a theater director has finally been established, along with his Czech nationality, and his considerable experience as a librettist and playwright. The members of the original cast of *Das Waldmädchen* have also been more precisely identified. Like Steinsberg, they also had strong connections to the theatrical communities of Prague and Vienna, and may have promoted the opera in those cities. Information in previous chapters demonstrates that the performance history of this early opera was directly related to the movements of Steinsberg and the members of his theater company.

The peculiar muteness of the opera's title character was a characteristic stemming from the pantomime-ballet on which Steinsberg's libretto was based. Steinsberg was probably inspired to write his libretto by the success of Wranitzky's popular Viennese ballet *Das Waldmädchen*, a work with which he was familiar. Using incipits from Gubkina's description of the St. Petersburg score to Weber's *Das*

*Waldmädchen*, along with a Violin 1 part to Wranitzky's ballet score, the numbers in Weber's opera could be compared to the numbers in the ballet. A few significant dramatic similarities were found. After establishing that Weber's musical background prior to 1800 was limited by a lack of continuous formal training, but supported by his knowledge of popular German theater, this study reasons that Weber had to rely primarily on his understanding of well-known conventions of the German popular stage, some guidance from Steinsberg, and perhaps even Wranitzky's well-known ballet music, when he hurriedly composed his score to *Das Waldmädchen*. Ongoing public interest in mute characters, coupled with the availability of Weber's score—probably through former members of Steinsberg's troupe, may have resulted in Müller's production of Weber's *Das Waldmädchen* in 1804, as well as the performance at Prague in Czech that Weber mentioned in his autobiographical sketch. These possibilities should be considered further in the future.

The link between Steinsberg and Prague has been firmly established, in large part by consulting the extensive bibliographic and archival work of Czech scholar Adolf Scherl. When Steinsberg arrived at Freiberg in 1800, he was not merely a local theater director, as he is described in most twentieth-century German and English sources. Rather, he was an influential member of Prague's vibrant theatrical community. For decades he had earned his living as a popular playwright, an expert in German theater and stage direction, a capable company manager, and a talented comedian, actor, and singer. (A list of his stage works and publications is found in Table 3.1.) Steinsberg was born in Bohemia. From 1796 to 1798 he had been the director of the German company at Prague's important Nostitz Theater. This was the same post that Wenzel Müller later occupied in 1807–13 and that Weber held from 1813 to 1816. From 1797 to 1798 Steinsberg had also been the director of an important Czech theater company, the *vaterländische Gesellschaft*. For many years members of that company had worked at the city's two most important theaters. One of these was the Hibernium Theater, where they had been established as the *vaterländisches Theater* since 1789. At that venue they usually produced Czech-language stage works for Czech-born audiences in a city that

had been subjugated by Hapsburg rule since 1526. This was the talented company that presented the first Czech-language productions of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and *Don Giovanni*. Although members of the company had been performing Czech-language plays and operas in Prague since the 1760s, political shifts during the reign of Francis I (1793–1806), directly related to the ongoing Napoleonic wars, had caused some members of the Bohemian Estates to regard the presentation of Czech-language stage works as a threat to political control of the city.

The *vaterländische Gesellschaft* members, like Steinsberg, had also recently been displaced from Prague. Steinsberg lost both of his directing positions when the Bohemian Estates collectively purchased the Nostitz Theater and established a powerful commission to manage their new enterprise. Given authority for all theatrical work in the city, the commission opted not to renew his contract when it expired on Easter Sunday 1798. The commission also revoked the lease to the Hibernium Theater, the venue of the *vaterländische Gesellschaft*. Suddenly at liberty, Steinsberg and his Czech-born colleagues responded by organizing a touring company of about 36 actors, singers, and dancers. In 1799 they traveled to Vienna. Steinsberg managed their business affairs and organized additional residencies at other cities, including Karlsbad (a city they had regularly visited in the summers for many years), Augsburg, and Freiberg. This was the company for whom Weber's score to *Das Waldmädchen* was composed, an important detail not previously established in Weber scholarship.

As stated above, Weber's opera *Das Waldmädchen* was based on Wranitzky's popular Viennese ballet *Das Waldmädchen*. Steinsberg's company typically presented many different kinds of stage works, including spoken plays, German opera, and ballet. Steinsberg himself also programmed many of his own stage works. The link to Wranitzky's ballet was found by examining a chronicle of Steinsberg's residency at Augsburg from September to December 1799. Among the works he produced was a "new version" of a ballet called *Das Waldmädchen*, by a dancer in his company named Uhlich. This was a version of Wranitzky's pantomime-ballet *Das Waldmädchen*, which had premiered at Vienna's Kärntnerthortheater on 23 September 1796. Paul Wranitzky

(Paul Wranitzky) was a prominent composer and violinist at Vienna's Imperial Court theaters. The original ballet plot had been conceived and choreographed by Joseph Traferi, an Italian-born solo dancer in the Viennese court ballet company. *Das Waldmädchen* had become Wranitzky's most popular stage work, due in part to its provocative title character, a mute forest maiden. Indeed, it seems likely that the many versions of the ballet, the many performances of Weber's early opera, and even Weber's second setting of the *Waldmädchen* story as *Silvana*, should all be attributed to considerable and ongoing public interest in such a character.

An extant playbill from the first performance of Wranitzky's original ballet alludes to this by stating that the ballet was inspired by reports of feral children. The playbill also cites three particularly well-known cases. Upon further study, it became clear that the topic had drawn the interest of the general public for decades. Table 2.1 is an extensive list of journalistic reports, poetry, and scientific, religious, moralistic, fictional, dramatic, and philosophical writings that deal with this same topic, demonstrating that toward the end of the eighteenth century the European public had an intense interest in feral children.

Interestingly, muteness is among the typical characteristics of feral children, a natural result of extreme isolation. Another characteristic is the inability to respond to simple commands. Feral children may display an animal-like gait, often involving all four limbs, and prefer a diet of raw food, including animal flesh. The reports note that if clothed when captured, the children typically wear crude garments fashioned from animal furs and plants. Some children exhibit particularly keen sight and aural skill, and they were delighted by the sound of music. Most tend to react swiftly and unpredictably to even slight movements, sounds, or odors. All of these odd behaviors and characteristics could be entertainingly and silently portrayed on the stage by an actor or a dancer, with the aid of costumes and makeup, choreographed gestures, dances, and music, and the subject was especially well-suited for the pantomime ballet genre. Moreover, the notion of seeing a mute forest maiden depicted on stage clearly

appealed to the theater-going public in Vienna and elsewhere, contributing to the lengthy performance history of Wranitzky's ballet and its various spin-offs.

The relationship of this stage work to public interest in feral children is underscored by the fact that, in addition to the cases cited on the original playbill, several other feral children had been found during the second half of the eighteenth century. Of those, one case was nearly concurrent with the reception of Weber's opera. A "brownish, naked boy" had been captured near Lacaune, France, in spring of 1798 after having been observed in the forests of the region for several years.<sup>2</sup> His escape only days after being captured prompted speculation among those with an awareness of the matter about his condition and whereabouts. The boy was recaptured two years later, on 9 January 1800, near Saint-Sernin (also known as Aveyron), at which time he was named Victor. His name was the same as the title character of a popular fictional story written in 1796 by French author François Guillaume Ducray-Duminil. Notably, Ducray-Duminil's story and Wranitzky's ballet were both written in 1796. In 1797, Ducray-Duminil's *Victor, ou l'enfant de la forêt* was transformed into a melodramatic play by the popular French theater innovator René Guilbert de Pixérécourt. Again, these works, like Wranitzky's ballet and Weber's opera, underscore the public's interest in the topic of feral children, establishing that topic as one suitable for treatment in a theatrical work.

Steinsberg's opera version, like the other versions of the ballet, reflects the then common practice of basing new stage works on previously successful stage works. Steinsberg knew Wranitzky's popular ballet, having produced Uhlich's version of *Das Waldmädchen* in 1799. By 1800, when he presented his new libretto to Weber at Freiberg, Wranitzky's ballet had been drawing Viennese audiences for more than four years. Beethoven had published a set of variations on a dance melody from that score. Transcriptions of music from the ballet were widely available for purchase, and new versions of *Das Waldmädchen* (the ballet) had been presented at theaters outside of

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<sup>2</sup> Shattuck, *Victor*, 64.

Vienna (Prague, Augsburg, Mannheim). A chronology of ballet productions related to Wranitzky's *Das Waldmädchen* is found in Appendix B of this document.

In addition to establishing the cultural context from which Weber's early opera was derived, this study also explored the opera's performance history. The name of Weber's opera was modified repeatedly, a practice that might reflect attempts by local producers to engage local audiences. Steinsberg modified the opera's title in 1800, describing the title character as *stumme* for the performance at Chemnitz. German stage works with mute characters seem to have been fashionable in 1800, for at least three *stumme* plays were written that year by leading authors of the German stage (Tieck and Kotzebue). Steinsberg even produced Kotzebue's *Die kluge Frau im Walde, oder der stumme Ritter* (published 1801) at Freiberg in 1800. (See Table 3.5).

When Wenzel Müller produced a version of Weber's opera at the Leopoldstadt Theater in 1804–05, it was called *Das Mädchen im Spessarterwald*, referencing a well-known German forest that would have been familiar to Viennese audiences. As for Weber's claim of a performance at Prague in Czech, records from the Estates Theater show that on 9 March 1806 and 13 April 1806 a Czech theater company presented a Singspiel called *Nemá dívka*. The composer's name is not recorded. The German translation of that title is *Stummes Mädchen*, however, quite similar to Steinsberg's *Das stumme Waldmädchen*, which also emphasized the muteness of the title character. One can be relatively certain that *Nemá dívka* was a Czech translation of Weber's early opera and not a translation of Tieck's spoken play *Epicoene oder Das Stumme Mädchen*, for the stage work in question was a Singspiel, not a spoken play.

This study has also investigated Weber's musical training and knowledge of German music for the stage prior to 1800. Although he had no formal music lessons until 1796, Weber had been raised in the company of composers, instrumentalists, and singers as they engaged in theatrical music making and the various practical tasks associated with professional theater production. From his numerous tours with his family's theater company, he had become familiar with the popular theater works of the late eighteenth century, including spoken plays by Kotzebue and Iffland, Singspiels by

Mozart, Haydn, Dittersdorf, Müller, Umlauff, Neefe, and others, and German translations of popular French or Italian comic operas. Consequently, Weber was thoroughly familiar with the theatrical and musical conventions of contemporary German theater in the late eighteenth century. Naturally, his knowledge of these conventions would have informed the music he wrote for *Das Waldmädchen* in 1800. A list of German operas that may have been produced by the Weber Family Theater Company is found in Table 1.1. A lengthier list of German operas that premiered between 1786 and 1796 is found in Appendix A. Collectively, these types of stage works represented to Weber the dramatic and musical norms of the genre. The conventions of this repertoire provided him with the basis for his developing concept of German opera. Notably, the German theater repertoire known to Weber was comparable to the works typically programmed by Steinsberg, for Steinsberg was regarded as an expert on the stage works of Kotzebue and Iffland, as well as other popular German stage works.

Weber's familiarity with the musical conventions of the German popular stage probably helped him more than any other aspect of his musical background as he composed the score to *Das Waldmädchen*. He had to produce his score quickly, within approximately three month's time, resulting in a situation that was not conducive to experimentation or originality, especially for an inexperienced composer. Consequently, Weber likely drew from his already broad knowledge of the conventions of the popular German stage, assimilating into his score whatever characteristic typologies best supported the characters and events in Steinsberg's libretto. That practice was not unusual at the time and is reflected by the variety of hybridized designations now associated with German stage works from this time: *Schauspiel mit Gesang*, *Oper*, *Operetta*, *romantische-komische Oper*, *Melodrama*, *romantische-heroisch-komische Oper*, *grosse romantische Oper*, *grosse militärische Oper*, *Zauberoper*, *Singspiel*, *komische Singspiel*, *Liederspiel*, *Feenmärchen*, and *Märchenspiel*, to name only a few. *Das Waldmädchen*, designated by Weber as a *romantisch-komische Oper*, stems directly from this milieu.

Weber was indeed a novice opera composer in 1800. He had not begun his formal musical studies until 1796, when his mother's illness forced his family to stop

touring. Consequently, he had only four years of lessons in theory and composition from an assortment of different teachers when he began composing his score to *Das Waldmädchen*. At Hildburghausen, he had studied piano and composition with Johann Heuschkel. After his family moved to Salzburg in 1798 he took music lessons from Michael Haydn, Salzburg's court composer and organist. Weber's first published music dates from this period, attesting to his budding talents as a composer; it was merely a set of six fughettas published in open score, however. Toward the end of 1798 Weber and his father moved to Munich. In that city he took singing lessons with the excellent opera singer and vocal pedagogue Giovanni Valesi (Johann Walleshauser), since his father believed it essential to learn sound vocal technique if one aspired to compose operas. He also continued taking piano and composition lessons with Johann Kalcher, a pupil of Munich theorist Joseph Grätz, who had himself been a pupil of Joseph Haydn. Weber's father clearly intended for his youngest son to be trained in the same musical lineage as his older sons, and both Fridolin and Edmund Weber had studied composition with Joseph Haydn, Michael Haydn's older brother. Weber developed well in this environment. Under Kalcher's guidance he composed piano sonatas, sets of variations, string trios, and songs, along with several more ambitious compositions for voice and orchestra. These included a Mass and his first dramatic work, a Singspiel called *Die Macht der Liebe und des Weins* (1798–99, lost). Weber's compositions written before August 1800 are listed in Table 1.2.

While at Munich, Weber was also apprenticed to Czech-born actor and playwright Alois Senefelder, an acquaintance of his father. Franz Anton was eager for his son to learn Senefelder's new printing method. In May 1799 Weber and his father left Munich temporarily for a summer tour featuring Carl Maria as a pianist and composer. The pair visited Stuttgart, Bamberg, Hildburghausen (their former home), Freiberg, Prague, and Karlsbad, where Karl Franz Guolfinger, Ritter von Steinsberg and his troupe were in residence. The Webers returned to Munich early in 1800, briefly resuming their affiliation with Senefelder. While the Webers had been touring, Senefelder and his partner, Franz Geissner, were awarded a fifteen-year patent for

lithographic printing (in September 1799). The Webers quietly developed a plan to establish their own lithography firm beyond the reach of Senefelder's patent. Three months later, the Webers moved to Freiberg, arriving in August 1800.

On 24 August 1800 Steinsberg and his troupe also arrived at Freiberg to begin a three-month residency. About a month later Franz Anton advertised that he would be opening his own lithography works at Freiberg, but the business never opened. Instead, Carl Maria devoted his time busily composing a score for Steinsberg's new libretto. Through his collaboration with Steinsberg, Weber probably hoped to strengthen his professional profile to a greater extent than he might have achieved by opening a lithography business.

Clearly, Weber's encounter with Steinsberg in 1800 influenced much of his subsequent career. Steinsberg provided the ambitious boy with a chance to have his new score performed by an important and highly respected company. He brought critical attention to Weber's music by producing the opera himself at Freiberg and Chemnitz. Steinsberg also performed the leading tenor role of Prinz Sigmund von Mathusien on those occasions. As the opera's producer, librettist, and leading male actor/singer, Steinsberg may have prompted, or at least requested, some aspects of Weber's score. Surely he would have helped to guide his young partner.

After their collaboration in 1800 Steinsberg and the Webers parted ways. Steinsberg went on to direct important German theater companies at St. Petersburg (1802–03) and Moscow (1803–05). He died in Moscow in 1806. This more detailed knowledge about Steinsberg's career helps to reframe the relationship between Weber and his librettist. The thirteen-year-old composer had indeed been fortunate to work with an internationally respected author, stage director, and actor/singer/comic. Through Steinsberg, Weber entered the world of professional theater, composing his score to *Das Waldmädchen* with the assurance that it would be performed by an experienced and talented cast at a prestigious venue, with Steinsberg performing the leading male role himself. That experience subsequently influenced Weber's career for several years, partly because Steinsberg was so well known, widely traveled, and highly

respected by other theater professionals. After Steinsberg's death, Weber revisited the *Waldmädchen* story, asking poet Franz Karl Hiemer to rewrite Steinsberg's libretto, which became the opera *Silvana* in 1810. Notably, Weber reused some of the music from the score to *Das Waldmädchen*, relying again on established conventions.

German opera was a rather loosely defined genre in the early nineteenth century, not limited to a specific set of elements or definitions. Weber's subsequent music for the theater reflects the evolving nature of German opera as he understood it, for when Franz Danzi encouraged him to write more music for the stage in 1807, Weber responded with three very different types of stage works, only one of which was an opera. The first was the melodrama-cantata *Der erste Ton* (J. 58), written in 1807. The second was incidental music for a production of Schiller's *Turandot* (J. 75), that was to be presented at the court theater of Stuttgart. The third was Weber's self-described "romantische heroisch-komische Oper" *Silvana*, composed between July 1808 and February 1810. He revised *Silvana* for productions in 1810, 1812, and 1817. A list of all of his operatic works is found in Table 4.2.

Steinsberg's libretto challenged Weber to write descriptive music for the orchestra. The genre of pantomime ballet that was frequently produced by the same companies that produced popular German operas on the stages of Europe at the dawn of the nineteenth century may have provided Weber with some helpful ideas.<sup>3</sup> Weber might have consulted Wranitzky's score for examples of the music that had accompanied the mute title character in Uhlich's 1799 version of the ballet, for example. *Silvana*'s scenes required dramatically expressive orchestral music that could help convey her feelings to the audience. Her orchestra-accompanied scenes had to be woven into Weber's score to fit with the usual conventions of Singspiel, alternating spoken

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding the relationship between Wranitzky's pantomime-ballet and Weber's opera, an important precedent had been established prior to 1800. The vividly dramatic music of Gluck's pantomime-ballet *Don Juan, ou Le festin de pierre* (Vienna, 1761) strongly influenced Mozart's score to *Il dissoluto punito, ossia Il Don Giovanni* (K. 527, 1787). Jeremy Hayes, Bruce Alan Brown, Max Loppert, and Winton Dean, "Gluck, Christoph Willibald Ritter von," in *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 3 April 2005), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

dialogue, with arias, ensemble numbers, and occasional instrumental numbers. Although his score was only modestly successful, Weber fulfilled his Chemnitz critic's promise of "better and riper fruit" nearly ten years later when he completed *Silvana*. Opting to face again the challenges posed by Steinsberg's original libretto, Weber forced himself to refine his use of orchestral music to enhance the dramatic effectiveness of his score, a characteristic he convincingly achieved in his mature operas, *Der Freischütz* (J. 277, c. 1817–21) and *Euryanthe* (J. 291, 1822–23), and *Oberon* (J. 306, 1825–26).