

## INTRODUCTION

This study investigates Carl Maria von Weber's (1786–1826) early opera *Das Waldmädchen* (J. Anh. 1, 1800), establishing the composer's musical background and knowledge of popular German opera at the time of his collaboration with librettist and theater company director Karl Franz Guolfinger, Ritter von Steinsberg (c. 1757–1806).<sup>1</sup> Weber's affiliation with Steinsberg has been generally acknowledged as an artistically important experience in his development as a composer of German opera, primarily because it culminated with his first professionally produced stage work, and also because the score was completed when he was only thirteen years old. Beyond those qualifiers, however, little else has been established.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document Weber's *Das Waldmädchen* (J. Anh. 1) will be designated as an opera. Weber himself called it a "komische Oper." In an extant playbill from the second performance of *Das Waldmädchen* the stage work is described as a "romantische-komische Oper." Notably, both of these designations reflect the findings of Thomas Bauman, i.e., "komische Oper" was the single most frequently used term used to describe such works from 1767 to 1799. Thomas Bauman, *North German Opera in the Age of Goethe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 9–11. Hereafter, Baumann. Although Baumann's work focuses on northern German repertoire, Marissa Anne Solomon St. Laurent correctly notes that Viennese practices during this same period followed many of the northern German trends. Marissa Anne Solomon St. Laurent, "The Life and Operatic Works of a 'Divine Philistine': Paul Wranitzky," Ph.D. dissertation (University of California, Los Angeles, 2000), 132, f. n. 24. Hereafter, Solomon St. Laurent. As will be shown, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Viennese theater practices, including designations of repertoire, were closely followed in many parts of central and Eastern Europe, including Bohemia, Saxony, and elsewhere.

The absence of a complete score to Weber's early opera, compounded by a lack of information about Steinsberg's career prior to 1800 and scant information about the company members for whom the score was composed, made it difficult to assess more precisely the significance of Weber's early collaborative experience with the considerably older author and theater company director. What has always been evident, however, was that some aspect of Weber's collaboration with Steinsberg held a special significance, for Weber composed a second opera based on the same settings, characters, and events of *Das Waldmädchen* several years later. The opera *Silvana*, (J. 87, c. 1808–1810) is Weber's second operatic version of the *Waldmädchen* story. *Silvana* was Weber's most frequently performed stage work until the premiere of *Der Freischütz* (J. 277) at Berlin in 1821.

In addition to the lack of an explanation for Weber's long-standing interest in the *Waldmädchen* story as the basis for an opera, several other aspects of the Weber-Steinsberg collaboration have long remained unclear. A review of the premiere of *Das Waldmädchen* indicates that Weber's music was not well received. However, the opera was later produced at several notable venues. In December 1804, for example, a substantially revised version of the opera, re-titled *Das Mädchen aus Spessartwald*, was performed nine times at Vienna's Leopoldstadt Theater under the direction of Wenzel Müller, who may have composed the additional music needed to expand the opera into three acts.<sup>2</sup> Weber was living in Breslau at the time of the Viennese performances, and there is no evidence that he had actively promoted his opera in that city. Consequently, one wonders why *Das Waldmädchen* interested Müller. In an autobiographical sketch written in 1818, Weber claimed that *Das Waldmädchen* had also been performed at St.

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<sup>2</sup> Weber's opera is in two acts. However, an extant playbill from Müller's production indicates that the opera was presented in three acts at the Leopoldstadt Theater. *Weberiana* V, 5. 129, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz. The Viennese playbill is reprinted in *Carl Maria von Weber: musikalische Werke, erste kritische Gesamtausgabe*, H. J. Moser, ed., ii/1: *Jugendopern*, Alfred Lorenz, ed. (Augsberg: Dr. Benno Filser, 1926), IX. Hereafter, Lorenz, "Waldmädchen."

Petersburg and at Prague in Czech.<sup>3</sup> Until very recently, however, there was no evidence to substantiate either of those claims.

In 2000 Russian musicologist Natalia Gubkina announced the discovery of a complete score and a full set of orchestra parts to *Das Waldmädchen*.<sup>4</sup> The long-lost documents, which she describes as performance copies, were stored in the central archives of the Mariinsky State Theater at St. Petersburg. They had not surfaced for nearly two hundred years. Previously, only two fragments of Weber's early opera were known to be extant: the middle section and end of a soprano aria, and the beginning and middle section of a trio for soprano, tenor, and bass.<sup>5</sup> Those fragments were published in 1926 as part of an unfinished critical edition of Weber's music.<sup>6</sup> Gubkina's discovery is of tremendous importance to Weber scholars, for the St. Petersburg score to *Das Waldmädchen* represents the earliest complete example of Weber's music for the German opera stage.

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Maria von Weber, "Autobiographische Skizze," in Georg Kaiser, *Sämtliche Schriften von Carl Maria von Weber; kritische Ausgabe* (Berlin, n. p, 1908), 127. Weber never visited St. Petersburg. An English version of Weber's autobiographical sketch is published in *Carl Maria von Weber: Writings on Music*, ed. John Warrack, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 250–54. Hereafter, Warrack, *Weber: Writings*.

<sup>4</sup> RF-Sprob, Sign. I, 1. W.373, Gosudarstvenny akademicheskyy Mariinsky teatr Central'naya muzykal'naya biblioteka. This discovery was formally announced in Natalia Gubkina, "Carl Maria von Webers 'Waldmädchen': Ein wiedergefundenes Jugendwerk," *Die Musikforschung* 53 (2000), 57–59. Hereafter, Gubkina, "Webers Waldmädchen." I am especially grateful to Frank Heidlberger for informing me of this important discovery during the preliminary phase of my research.

<sup>5</sup> *Mus. Ms. autogr. C. M. v. Weber WFN 5 (3)*, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Jähns identified these fragments as Weberiana I:1 in Friedrich Wilhelm Jähns, *Weberiana*, his manuscript catalog in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

<sup>6</sup> Lorenz, "Waldmädchen," 2–12.

Gubkina was conducting extensive archival research on the history of German opera in St. Petersburg, where she located a newspaper notice about a performance of *Das Waldmädchen* by a German company at St. Petersburg in February 1804.<sup>7</sup> Based on that evidence she conducted her successful search for the score.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Gubkina subsequently learned that Steinsberg had been at St. Petersburg in 1802, where he was the director of a German theater company. Her findings support Weber's claim that his early opera was performed at that location.

Steinsberg's participation in the German theater community of St. Petersburg in 1802 leaves open the possibility that he brought Weber's score to that city and underscores the need to learn more about his professional life, particularly his status at the time he collaborated with Weber in 1800. The present study addresses that topic directly, simultaneously contributing new information about the historical and cultural milieu from which Weber's early opera originated and its subsequent performance history.

The first chapter outlines Weber's musical activities prior to 1800, especially his training and experience as a composer and his knowledge of contemporary German theater repertoire and stagecraft. Most of Weber's childhood was spent traveling with his family's touring theater company. His parents and half-siblings were all established theater musicians. It is therefore important to consider the aggregate influence of those experiences when Weber composed the score to *Das Waldmädchen*. The compositions Weber produced with guidance from his first music teachers are identified, as are the

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<sup>7</sup> Natalia Gubkina, "Deutsches Musiktheater in St. Petersburg am Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Musikgeschichte in Mittel- und Osteuropa, Mitteilungen der internationalen Arbeitsgemeinschaft an der Technischen Universität Chemnitz* 4 (1999), 95 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Gubkina cites a casual announcement in the *Nordisches Archiv*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1804), 62. Apparently, the opera was presented on the stage of the Kuševschesen House as part of a benefit performance for the singer Johann Hübsch. Gubkina, "Webers Waldmädchen," 53, 58. It is possible that the recently discovered score and parts were used for that performance.

circumstances of his childhood, including the plan he devised with his father to open a lithography firm at Freiberg (Saxony) in 1800. Appendix A, which lists many of the German operas that premiered from 1786 to 1796, supports a broader understanding of the theatrical, musical, and social surroundings of Weber's youth.

The second chapter establishes the inspiration for and performance history of a Viennese pantomime ballet called *Das Waldmädchen* (1796). That popular stage work, written by Italian-born dancer Joseph Trafieri and Moravian-born composer Paul Wranitzky, was exceptionally well received. Playbills preserved in the theater collection of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek record frequent performances of this stage work in Vienna's court theaters between 1796 and 1801 (compiled in Appendix B) and help to connect that stage work to Prague's Nostitz Theater, where a new version of the ballet premiered in 1798. The playbills from the first and second performances of *Das Waldmädchen* state that the ballet was inspired by reports of actual feral children, listing three cases that were well known at the time. This significant detail is perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this study, for it demonstrates a strong connection between societal interests and the Viennese stage, while also demonstrating another important link between the genres of pantomime ballet and German popular opera. The conventions of Viennese pantomime ballet, as well as the organization of Wranitzky's score, are also described in Chapter 2.

Steinsberg was an individual of considerable importance to Prague's German and Czech theater communities, a fact not previously reflected in Weber scholarship.<sup>9</sup> The course of his career is described in the first section of Chapter 3, followed by information about his long-standing allegiance to the *vaterländische Gesellschaft* (*Vlastenského divadle U Hybernů* in Czech sources), an important group of Czech-born actors, singers, and dancers. Members of the *vaterländische Gesellschaft* performed German-language stage works, but they also produced many stage works in Czech.

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<sup>9</sup> Constant von Wurzbach, "Steinsberg, Karl Franz Ritter von," in *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Österreich*, 60 vols. (Vienna: K. K. Hof-und Staatsdruckerei, 1879), 38: 152–59, hereafter Wurzbach, "Steinsberg."

Bibliographic and archival research undertaken at Prague and Vienna in May, June, and July 2004 yielded substantial information about Steinsberg's activities with that troupe, helping to identify the original cast members from the premiere of Weber's opera *Das Waldmädchen* in 1800. A conflict of interests with the Germanized nobility of Prague, known as the Bohemian Estates, had forced members of the *vaterländische Gesellschaft* to leave their city in 1799, under Steinsberg's direction. The troupe's earlier history in Prague, their touring performances between Vienna and Freiberg in 1799–1800, and the various roles several company members played in the first production of Weber's early opera, are all described in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 outlines the performance history of Weber's *Das Waldmädchen*, leaving open the possibility that the opera was performed at Prague in Czech, as Weber claimed. This chapter also addresses Weber's subsequent interest in returning to Steinsberg's story of the mute forest maiden in 1807 as the basis for his new opera, *Silvana*. A chronological list of all of Weber's stage works is provided to illustrate the significance of *Das Waldmädchen* and *Silvana* in his development as an opera composer.

Chapter 5 provides a synopsis of Weber's *Das Waldmädchen*. Because the spoken text to Weber's opera has not survived and the full score has not yet been available for examination by this author, the synopsis was derived in part by consulting the critical edition of Weber's score to *Silvana*, with the understanding that Hiemer's libretto to *Silvana* was based on Steinsberg's libretto to *Das Waldmädchen*. Weber's opera depicts a mute forest maiden, whose identity becomes a critical aspect of the story's dénouement. It is set in a hereditary forest, and the opening scene takes place near the entrance to Silwana's home, a cave. The names of several of the characters from *Das Waldmädchen* were changed in *Silvana*, including the name of the title character, which was originally spelled "Silwana." Weber or Hiemer changed her name to "Silvana" for the second setting of the *Waldmädchen* story in 1808–10, a distinction that is used throughout this document with regard to the earlier and later version, respectively. Otherwise, the stories of the two operas are essentially the same.

Chapter 6 describes the extant primary sources for Weber's *Das Waldmädchen* and compares the musical organization of his score to Wranitzky's pantomime ballet. Gubkina's description of the St. Petersburg score and orchestra parts to *Das Waldmädchen* is an informative and thorough treatment of the subject.<sup>10</sup> That score was not available for examination when this study was undertaken, so Gubkina's careful description must suffice until a critical edition of those documents is published, or until the score can be personally examined. Incipits to each of the musical numbers of Weber's opera are included in Chapter 6. Because the expressive conventions generally associated with German Romantic opera may have evolved from the conventions of pantomime ballet and popular German theater at the end of the eighteenth century, a comparison of the dramatic elements of Wranitzky's ballet score with comparable elements of Weber's opera score has also been made.

Chapter 7 considers the stature of several cast members from *Das Waldmädchen* and identifies some who eventually returned to Prague, where Weber's opera was eventually performed in Czech in 1806. The circumstances surrounding the production of Czech-language stage works between 1800 and 1806 are described, and the role of Prague's powerful theater commission is again considered.<sup>11</sup> Weber's claim of a performance at Prague is also corroborated.

In the end, this investigation brings into clearer focus both the broad and particular conditions that contributed to Weber's first professionally produced opera, especially the previously unrecognized roles of Steinsberg and his talented company members. Their connections to the vibrant theatrical communities of Vienna and

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<sup>10</sup> Natalia Gubkina, "Das Waldmädchen von Carl Maria von Weber: Notizen zum Petersburger Aufführungsmaterial," *Weberiana* 11 (2001), 33–51; hereafter, Gubkina, "Notizen."

<sup>11</sup> Both Müller and Weber were later employed by Prague's theater commission. Müller directed the German company of the Theater of the Estates from 1807–1813. He was replaced in 1813 by Weber, who remained in that post until 1816, when he resigned to become the new director of the German National Opera at Dresden.

Prague, coupled with the public's ongoing interest in stage works portraying feral children, are important factors in the performance history of Weber's early opera. Additionally, Weber's score reflects some of the conventions of Viennese pantomime ballet, including several aspects of Wranitzky's score to *Das Waldmädchen*, shining new light on the relationship between pantomime ballet and German opera at the beginning of the nineteenth century.