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Wagner’s *Meistersinger* and the Tradition of Comic Opera

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Music

Faculty of Humanities: Music
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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**
This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

Wagner’s avowed aim in his music-dramas was to create a new type of artwork that had little in common with conventional opera. However, in his only mature comic opera, \textit{Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg}, he engages more extensively with the conventions of the genre. In order to determine the extent of this engagement, the dissertation looks firstly at the nature of comedy, and at comic theatre in Germany, as well as the development of a German type of comic opera in the years preceding Wagner’s opera.

This is followed by an examination of the conventions of comic opera in terms of subject matter, style and form and finally by an investigation of how these were applied in \textit{Meistersinger}.

While it is evident that he discards what is perhaps the most salient stylistic characteristic of comic opera, namely the use of closed song-like numbers with lively accompaniments based on simple rhythmic patterns, he adopts, adapts and re-invents many of the other conventions associated with the genre. This can be seen in his use of conventional aria types, traditional orchestral forms, ensembles, choruses and moral endings. Much of this marks a unique departure from the other works composed at this stage of his career and evinces his debt to the traditions of comic opera. The vocality of his protagonists owe much to the traditions of comic opera and the music is far more diatonic than in his other late works.

Conventions of subject matter that he appropriates include characters derived from the \textit{commedia dell’arte}, a plot involving two pairs of lovers facing various challenges, which are overcome through a certain amount of scheming and the agency of a higher and wiser authority.

While set in remote history, the opera is far more realistic in tone than Wagner’s other music-dramas, and the only one in which the supernatural does not figure prominently. Other comic elements include the use of burlesque, word-play, a degree of emotional detachment, the breaching of the “fourth wall”, parody and satire.
# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The nature of comedy ................................................................. 1
1.2 The comic status of *Meistersinger* .................................................. 3
1.3 Chapter outline ............................................................................... 6

## CHAPTER 2: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF GERMAN COMIC THEATRE AND OPERA BEFORE MEISTERSINGER

2.1 Comedy in German theatre prior to Wagner ........................................ 8
2.2 The evolution of comic opera ........................................................... 11
2.3 The development of national characteristics in German comic opera ...... 14
2.4 Mozart’s *Singspiele* and *opere buffe* ............................................ 21
2.5 Beethoven’s *Fidelio* ........................................................................ 24
2.6 Carl Maria von Weber ......................................................................... 25
2.7 *La muette de Portici* ....................................................................... 29
2.8 Development of the role of the orchestra ........................................... 30
2.9 Summary .......................................................................................... 35

## CHAPTER 3: CONVENTIONS OF COMIC OPERA

3.1 Conventions of subject matter .......................................................... 38
  3.1.1 The stock characters of the *commedia dell’arte* ................................. 39
  3.1.2 Stock characters in comic opera ...................................................... 41
  3.1.3 Botanical symbolism ....................................................................... 42
  3.1.4 Supernatural intervention ............................................................... 43
  3.1.5 Wooing .......................................................................................... 45
  3.1.6 Disguises, scheming and deception .................................................. 45
  3.1.7 The release from a tight spot ........................................................... 47
  3.1.8 Money ............................................................................................ 48

3.2 Stylistic conventions ......................................................................... 49
  3.2.1 A move towards reality ................................................................. 49
  3.2.2 Emotional detachment .................................................................... 51
  3.2.3 Comedy as social commentary ....................................................... 53
  3.2.4 High, medium and low comedic styles ........................................... 55
  3.2.5 Vocality .......................................................................................... 57
  3.2.6 The orchestra ................................................................................. 58

3.3 Formal conventions .......................................................................... 62
  3.3.1 The overture .................................................................................... 62
  3.3.2 Dances and marches ...................................................................... 64
  3.3.3 Mimetic musical action .................................................................... 66
  3.3.4 The chromatic mystery line ............................................................ 67
  3.3.5 The aria .......................................................................................... 68
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Texts on the opera Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg refer to its unique status in Wagner’s œuvre as his only important comic opera. From the very first of Wagner’s utterances on this work, it is clear that he visualized it as a comic opera, and as a counterpart to Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg (1845) in the spirit of the tragedy-comedy pairings of ancient Athens (Matthews, 1983:11). It also enjoys the singular status of being his only mature work based on history rather than mythology, and of being set in a specific time and place.

For an audience with limited experience of Wagner’s music, its claim to be a comic opera may seem rather debatable. One’s first experience of the work reveals few of the characteristics of traditional comic opera such as the preponderance of short, “closed” numbers, with a more through-composed style mostly occurring only at the end of an act, as well as a general rhythmic vitality and lightness of orchestral accompaniment. The seriousness of the underlying issues addressed in the work also seems to lie beyond the bounds of comic entertainment.

This poses several questions with regard to Wagner’s approach to the genre, and the object of this dissertation is to address some of these. But, firstly, it is useful to reflect on what constitutes comedy in broader terms.

1.1 The nature of comedy

The nature of comedy has been probed by a number of writers. Bergson (2003) states that serious consideration has been given to this subject since the time of Aristotle, and makes the point that that which is comic has its own logic and method, and the images and language it uses are socially specific. Zimmer (2006:76) makes a similar point when writing about the use of comedy in dance. Hutchinson (2006:13) also stresses that there is no universal or timeless theory of comedy: “the way we see [time-tested
comedies] will be determined by our upbringing, our cultural and political experiences, and our moral standards”.

Regarding the nature of the comic, Bergson (2003) further observes that

[…] the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly HUMAN. A landscape may be beautiful, charming and sublime, or insignificant and ugly; it will never be laughable. You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression.

The sort of comedy that most clearly illustrates the mechanisms of comic effect is that in which material is employed that might equally well have been used in the context of tragedy. Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), in his novel Ape and Essence (in Yates, 2006:105), writes, “Tragedy is the farce that involves our sympathies; farce, the tragedy that happens to outsiders”, highlighting the principle that no subject matter is of itself inherently tragic or comic. The author’s approach determines form, genre and moral perspective, and, therefore, the audience’s response (Yates, 2006:105). To make comedy out of tragedy requires the creation of an emotional distance between the event and the audience in order to diminish the effects of sentiment and sympathy and allow for some degree of Schadenfreude – gloating over another’s pain – to have its comedic effect. Additionally, the use of fate or chance determines the tragic or comic quality of an event. Fate tends relentlessly to a single outcome, placing events beyond the control of the protagonists and leading, usually, to a tragic outcome. Chance, on the other hand, is multifarious and unexpected, often requiring a suspension of disbelief, and is more easily manipulated towards happy endings and surprise resolutions. As it is often associated with considerable complication of plot, the development of character could become cumbersome, and, in this genre, audiences do not generally expect credibility of character (Yates, 2006:106).

It will be shown in later chapters to what extent these characteristics are evinced in Meistersinger.

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1 Freud believed that, along with parody, disguise, unmasking and travesty were tools to be used to create the necessary distance for comedy to have its effect (Werr, 2002:302).
1.2 The comic status of *Meistersinger*

Opinion on the comic status of *Meistersinger* remains somewhat divided. Many of the reviews that appeared after the first performance in 1868 were favourable and commented on Wagner’s return to melody, diatonicism and clear form. It has been called “a comedy that invites us to contemplate and laugh at the absurdities of human existence, but to do so on the basis of a profound love” (Matthews, 1983:14). Matthews further defines this type of comedy, which he traces back to Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* (1791), as a mix of the philosophical and the farcical. Newman (1949:296) describes it as a “lusty comedy” and for Lee (2007:70-71), the handling of Beckmesser’s eventual demise is typical of the manner in which Shakespeare, Dickens, Mozart and Donizetti deal with their comic villains, who must get their comeuppance in order for the status quo to be fully restored.

The sense of *Gemütlichkeit* pervading the score of *Meistersinger* has led Newman (1974:312) to wish that this work, and not *Parsifal*, was the final message that Wagner had given to the world. This, he surmises, would have earned it a place next to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, with its positive, humanist and congenial nature. In comparison to Wagner’s previous opus, *Tristan*, which shows love as a self-absorbed and all-consuming passion, *Meistersinger* reveals instead the degree to which love can move us to altruism and self-sacrifice. For Newman (1974:319-321), Wagner frees himself in this work from his bondage to man as a symbol or abstraction, and deals with the strengths, shortcomings and the humanity of real people. He adds:

… in *Meistersinger*, one sees] the perfect marriage of music with so much that is beautiful, and wise, and noble in the hearts of men – one feels that had Wagner made all his dramas as “purely human” as the *Meistersinger*, he would have been some steps nearer Shakespeare than he is even now.

Some critics, however, have expressed doubts regarding the work’s claims as a comic opera.
Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), whose affections for, and loyalty to, Wagner had cooled dramatically by the time of *Meistersinger’s* premiere, denigrates the humour by calling it particularly German – not only incomprehensible to other nations, but of a type no longer understood by any contemporary German (Matthews, 1983:14). The pronounced Germanness of the work is a substantial obstacle to its wider appreciation; the general comment on Wagner by Newman (in Carnegy, 2006:278), is particularly applicable to this work:

...a good deal in Wagner that is of the highest importance to the German mind calls forth rather less response in the foreigner. […] It is not to be expected that, […] Wagner’s views on politics, religion, social and racial matters should have quite the significance that they have for the Germans.

Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904), – Jew, respected music critic, and the person whose surname was given to Beckmesser’s character in the early drafts of the libretto2 – after a recital in Vienna credited the composition of “Jerum!” to a cannibal who had burnt his mouth on human flesh (Rayner, 1940:108). After the premiere, Hanslick had more vitriol to pour on the work: he found the overture quite detestable, and the work as a whole “prodigiously inflated and monotonous”, “as backboneless as a mollusk”, and totally lacking in humour and comic force (Rayner, 1940:137).3

Some twentieth-century critics, while not as scathing as Hanslick, have also been negative in their views. Holland (in Wagner, 2000:88), for example, does not find Beckmesser’s demise as entertaining nor handled as lightly as Lee’s comparison would seem to suggest, but calls it *Schadenfreude*. Dahlhaus describes some parts of the opera as “the brainchild of an

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2 The early sketches and libretto give Beckmesser’s name as Veit Hanslich (Matthews, 1983:12). Wagner’s claim that Hanslick knew he was being ridiculed in the character of Beckmesser has not been substantiated (Rayner, 1940:104, Carnegy, 2006:63).

3 His criticism did not extend to the *mise-en-scène*; on another occasion, he wrote, “As a theatrical experience, Die Meistersinger is well worth seeing, the musical presentation excellent, the scenic incomparable. Dazzling scenes of colour and splendour, ensembles full of life and character unfold before the spectator’s eyes, hardly allowing him the leisure to weigh how much and how little of these effects is of musical origin. … [Wagner] has once again proved himself a born operatic producer, and brilliantly vindicates his reputation for genius in the field of *mise-en-scène*. “ (Carnegy, 2006:63)
untrustworthy sense of humour”, citing as an example David’s box on the ears at his promotion from apprentice to journeyman (Matthews, 1983:14). Osborne (1990:177), in some agreement with Dahlhaus, suggests that Wagner lacked artistic discretion by calling it a comedy.

Adorno (1981:20-21) also finds a streak of sadism in Wagner’s humour, which he says equally repelled both Franz Liszt and Nietzsche. He cites two instances from Meistersinger:

- the mocking of Magdalene,⁴ and
- Beckmesser’s miserable attempts to win Eva in an “unbourgeois feudal charade”, in order to gain “bourgeois respectability”.

Adorno (1981:120) equates what he calls the “bestial” humour in Meistersinger with the German folk-tale of the Jew in the bramble-bush who is made to dance more and more vigorously as the worthy lad plays his magic fiddle. This criticism takes no account of the severe treatment often meted out to the “villains” in comic opera, as, for instance, in Mozart’s Zaubernöte.

Deathridge (2008:x) considers Meistersinger to be even more seriously written than Tannhäuser, overly stylized and cohesive to the point of smugness – qualities that make it difficult to produce convincingly for current audiences.

Even during the century of its conception and successful premiere, it was rarely considered to be a traditional comic opera (Potter, 2008:226).⁵ The description of the work by the conductor Reginald Goodall (1901-90) (Magee, 2000:253) sums up well the ambiguity of approach that makes the placing of Meistersinger so problematic:

⁴ The only possible moment in the opera that Adorno could be referring to is at the beginning of Act II. However, it seems that Adorno has misinterpreted this event, as clearly the apprentices are mocking David, as they do elsewhere, and not Magdalene.

⁵ Even those sympathetic to his ideals, like Peter Cornelius (1824-74), Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921) and particularly Hugo Wolf (1860-1903), chose not to model their comic operas on Meistersinger (Fauser, 2008:226).
…it expressed a resignation and sadness that are at the very heart of life – the ultimate fact that for each one of us everything, all of it, has to be given up, is lost, and forever. The ridiculous vanity, foolishness, and petty ill-will of human beings are exposed, so there is plenty of comedy in that sense, but at a deeper level the attitude to these things evinced by the work as a whole is one of heartaching [sic] regret and resigned acceptance.

Nevertheless, Wagner employs many of the conventions of comic opera, and this dissertation will seek to illustrate the ways in which he adopts and adapts these.

1.3 Chapter outline

Wagner himself professed (most notably in Hans Sachs’s famous exhortation) that German art should derive from German models and therefore, in tracing the traditions of comic opera that have influenced Wagner’s composition, the focus of the first part of this dissertation will be primarily on German comic theatre and opera and on comic elements in German Romantic opera.

Chapter 2 traces the development of comedy in Germany, as it was influenced by various writers who recognised the need for a particularly German type of theatre, and the effects of this on the growth of German comic opera. As the genre had few pre-existing models upon which to establish itself, it drew upon conventions found in French and Italian works. While these do not stand out signally in Wagner’s masterpiece, closer examination reveals their influence. One can also not ignore the direct influence on Wagner of works that he knew from the French and Italian repertoire, and reference will be made to such works where appropriate. The most notable of these is Daniel Auber’s La muette de Portici (1828), a work Wagner admired and emulated.

Chapter 3 deals with the conventions in the above traditions that are most pertinent to Meistersinger.

Chapter 4 turns to Meistersinger itself, and traces how Wagner included, extended upon, or sometimes disregarded these conventions in the creation of his only mature comic work.
The findings are summarised in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 2: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF GERMAN COMIC THEATRE AND OPERA BEFORE MEISTERSINGER

2.1 Comedy in German theatre prior to Wagner

Popular theatre in Germany has a long tradition of unsophisticated, knockabout farce beginning in the Middle Ages. It is only in the sixteenth century that tragedy began to find more favour, and even then comedy and farce would function as sub-plots, in which characters familiar from the commedia dell’arte, talking in peasant dialects, brought relief from the drama of the main story. It was at this time that the real Hans Sachs (1494-1576) emerged as a writer of simple carnival plays, among which his Shrovetide farces were particularly popular (Hutchinson, 2006:17). One of the early mastersingers, Wolfhart Spangenberg, provided Strassburg with plays of a strong moralizing character, supplying explanatory notes for the less educated in the audience. School plays in rhyming couplets, of a type not unlike Mozart’s Die Schuldigkeit (1767) and Apollo et Hyacinthus (1767), were a feature in Brunswick, while in Cassel, English comedians were employed, bringing with them Shakespeare, Marlowe, and the literary style of alternating prose and blank verse (Warrack, 2001:13). In their arsenal of skills, buffoonery, grotesquery, ribald humour and mime were popular and important features, influential in establishing the masked stereotypes that typified the commedia dell’arte. Although there was some development towards a German style of theatre, the absence of a capital city with its supportive audience and centralizing influence stifled its attainment. The advent of the Thirty Years War quashed all remaining ambitions. The derisory attitude of Frederick the Great (1712-86) towards the German language and its influence on the aristocracy further hampered the creative poetic spirit (Bates, 2002:28-32).
During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the influence of various philosophers, playwrights, impresarios and composers produced brands of humour based on real-life situations, presented with vulgarity, snobbery and well-crafted, though sometimes grotesque, political satire (Hutchinson, 2006:17).

A typical example is the satirist, Berthold Feind (1678-1721), who believed that actors should communicate directly with the audience, in a drama that was motivated by character development rather than convention or theory. When it was objected that the free mix of comic and serious elements in his works pandered to the lowest levels of appeal, he referred to the works of Shakespeare (1564-1616), which freely mix comic, tragic and serious qualities, as well as to the ancient Greeks, for whom such a mix maintained an emotional balance in the use of the four temperaments (Warrack, 2001:51). The style advocated by Feind was the antithesis of the French classical style which favoured the Aristotelian Unities, and in which violence and tragedy were reported, rather than shown on stage.

The writings of the above mentioned philosophers constitute an early expression of the objections to the rationalist ideals of the Enlightenment, objections that were furthered in the 1750s and 1760s by writers like Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-68) and Johann Georg Hamann (1730-88), who argued for more feeling than thinking in dramatic works. Their appeal, like many an early stirring of Romantic thinking, was indebted to the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), and his ideal of a truthfulness to one’s inner nature and feeling (Warrack, 2001:79-81). Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), writing in 1776, further developed these ideas by theorizing that one appreciates nature and art with one’s whole being, not just through reason (Platoff, 1989:195). He coined the term “Volkslied” for his collection of folksongs by unknown authors, defining these as “the expression in songs that welled up instinctively and was not primarily governed by reason”. He argued too that these songs reflected and defined the culture of the community from which they came and were therefore uniquely different in each place and era (Warrack, 2001:83).
A representative figure in mid-nineteenth-century German comic theatre was Johann Nepomuk Nestroy (1801-1862), who was not only a playwright, but also an operatic bass-baritone and actor. He wrote at a time when comedy flourished in the great theatres of Europe and was a contemporary of Eugène Scribe (1781-1861), Dion Boucicault (1820-90) and Eugène Marin Labiche (1815-88). But while the work of these playwrights depended on stock comic plots and characters, Nestroy, whose intention was to expose hypocrisy, deception and injustice, relied on his exceptional gifts with language, using highly stylized registers of speech that ranged from an abrasive and shockingly natural Viennese to an artificial, literary type of High German. In his plays, dramatic reality was less important than arbitrary chance, which could be used to enliven the comedy, leading to a happy ending. Like many of the comedies in the early nineteenth century, his plays have musical items: solo songs and monologues were a convention used to establish the character’s view of himself and the real world. These allowed the author to make a satirical commentary, and the audience, to connect the stage action with real life (Yates, 2006:111). The gifted and popular Adolf Müller (1801-86) composed what were usually comic medleys based on contemporary operas, presented typically as satirical songs that brought topical issues into the fictional world of his plays. Nestroy managed to avoid censorship in the earlier part of his career by aiming his satire very indirectly and generally, but after the 1848 revolution and the end of the repressive reign of Metternich (1773-1859), he tackled political issues more pointedly (Yates, 2009).

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the type of comedy that had been established in Germany was more clearly socially and psychologically subversive, arousing strong audience reactions and sometimes provoking official intervention. They have a corrective, moralistic aim, with the intent of uplifting their audience by exploring the troublesome aspects of the human condition (Hutchinson, 2006:16, 18).
2.2 The evolution of comic opera

Pietro Trapassi Metastasio (1698-1782), who worked in the German Imperial Court in Vienna from 1729 (Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:469, 489), introduced ideas in the writing of libretti that were to play a large part in some of the operatic reforms of Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-87). Chief amongst these was the removal of the comic scenes from opera seria, as Metastasio believed they were irrelevant to the serious or tragic plots. This allowed for the independent development of comic opera, leading to opera buffa in Italy, opéra comique in France, the Singspiel in Germany and the ballad opera in England (Brockway & Weinstock, 1963:21). Nicolo Jommelli (1714-74), Kapellmeister in Duke Carl Eugen’s opera house in Stuttgart from 1753-69, and Tommaso Traëtta (1727-79), who was influential in Mannheim after 1753, incorporated these reforms into their later works, which exhibited many German qualities, such as the richer orchestral treatment, closer co-ordination of music and drama, and less use of recitative in the secco style. Gluck and his favoured librettist, Ranieri Calzabigi (1714-95), developed these reforms further (Warrack, 2001:87, 111).

Metastasio’s scenes were constructed in two parts, in which the first part conveyed the dramatic action in dialogue between the characters (recitative), and the second, the emotional or expressive reaction of one of the characters to the dramatic situation just revealed (aria), resulting in a continuous flow of tension in the recitative building towards a release in the aria (Burkholder, Grout & Palisca, 2010:490). This is called the action-expression cycle by Platoff (1989:191-230), and, according to him, became an essential structural element of opera buffa.

Whereas opera seria maintained its dependence on a strict adherence to tradition – the predominance of the solo voice, the leading role of the castrato, and an elaborately stylized performance – comic opera developed profiles that differed slightly from country to country (Burkholder, Grout & Palisca, 2006:494, 497).
Certain qualities, however, remained common to all the national styles – in particular, the use of a comic bass and light soprano, the absence of castrati, the development of the vocal ensemble, the use of national popular musical idioms, and the parody of *opera seria* (Grout & Williams, 2003:277). They used everyday language and even regional dialects, spoken and/or sung by stereotypical characters, and presented light and farcical situations, broken up into scenes that enabled a build-up towards the end of the act. Due to the purging of comic scenes from the *opera seria*, comic intermezzi were performed in two or three segments between the acts of serious operas (Grout & Williams, 2003:274). The significance of its influence is seen in its demand for a more natural style of singing, which in turn encouraged the development of separate national operatic traditions (Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:486, 493).

Italian opera buffa was sung throughout, alternating recitative and closed numbers, while the other genres mentioned above contained spoken dialogue.

According to Brockway (1963:87), the real origin of *Singspiel* lies in a German translation of the English ballad opera *The Devil to Pay*, translated as *Der Teufel ist los* (1766), set to folk-like music by Johann Adam Hiller (1728-1804). This can be seen in its use of popular tunes (ballads), parodies of operatic arias and spoken dialogue. As it developed along Romantic lines it merged eventually with German Romantic Opera (Grout & Williams, 2003:302, Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:497).

*Opéra comique* easily mixed tragic and comic, historic, mythological and everyday elements, and high and low musical and linguistic styles, especially in the nineteenth century, when many works written in this genre had little in common with earlier concepts of comic opera (Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:497).

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6 He is deservedly known as the father of *Singspiel*, as he wrote many that are probably better described as farces with music, using a touch of French superficiality but with strong German content.

7 A more detailed discussion on this appears in the next chapter under the subheading “High, medium and low comedic styles”.
Gounod’s *Faust* (1859) and Bizet’s *Carmen* (1875), for instance, were both originally performed as *opéras comiques*, that is, with spoken dialogue. The *opéra comique*, a style used for most of the rescue operas, was also identified by Weber as the essential link between the existing *Singspiel* and the desired “new German opera”, and to this end it formed the basis – in German translations – of the repertoire upon which he built the success of his career in Prague (1813-16) and Dresden (1817-26) (Grout & Williams, 2003:301, Meyer, 2003:57-58). Beethoven’s *Fidelio* (1814) and Weber’s *Der Freischütz* (1821), although technically *Singspiele*, are both rescue operas, and reveal the influence of *opéra comique* in their use of serious and lighter characters, and spoken dialogue. Revolutionary opera, rescue opera and *Schreckensoper* (opera of terror) also employed comic elements and happy endings which in no way diminished the effects of tragedy in their plots, as can be seen in Cherubini’s *Les deux journées* (1800), and the above-mentioned operas by Beethoven and Weber. The nationalist qualities found in these operas were common practice at that time with composers from other countries. This was complemented by an interest in exoticism – the use of music from other nations as an exotic colour – again in contrast to the cosmopolitan international style. Both German and French composers showed a common ethos in basing their works on picturesque songs and choruses, descriptive orchestral music, tone painting and the use of colourful timbres (Dahlhaus, 1989:68-69). However, by 1820, elements of tragedy had all but disappeared from most *opéras comiques*, as the genre reverted to its former mixture of comedy and sentiment (Dahlhaus, 1989:65).

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8 Rescue operas can briefly be defined as having a plot in which one of the characters is rescued from a dire situation, often at the last moment. The situation is usually a life threatening one, as in Beethoven’s *Fidelio*, but it could also be more lightly treated, such as a rescue from an unsuitable betrothal, as in Cherubini’s *Les Deux Journées*.

9 The *Singspiel* itself had, of course, also mixed comic and serious elements as far back as Mozart’s *Zauberflöte*.

10 Turkish music, for instance, is evoked in Mozart’s *Zaide* (1779) and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782), and in Weber’s *Abu Hassan* (1811).
2.3 The development of national characteristics in German comic opera

Given the strong plea for German nationalism in the arts, which is one of the themes of *Meistersinger*, it would be fair to assume that Wagner would have based the work primarily on the traditions of German comic opera. However, German comic opera does not have the rich national history of the Italian *opera buffa* or French *opéra comique*. Owing to the numerous political and cultural subdivisions in Germany prior to its unification in 1871, the development of opera here was a complicated and a stop-start affair. From the outset Italian opera had dominated, with a scattering of French influences, and, due to popular demand, *opera seria* was a regular feature, particularly in the courts of southern Germany (Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:401). The works of the Italians Carlo Pallavicino (1630-1688, at the Dresden court from 1666-73) and Agostino Steffani (1654-1728, in Munich from 1674), as well as the many translations of Venetian libretti into German, kept the Italian traditions current in Dresden, Leipzig, Berlin and Hanover (Raeburn, 1998:32-33). The establishment of the first German opera house, the Theater am Gänsemarkt in Hamburg, in 1678, and the employment of German poets and composers in Brunswick in 1690, had little impact on the popularity of Italian opera. The closure of the Hamburg opera house in 1738 effectively stifled the earlier efforts at developing German opera until the advent of Mozart (Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:401).

The composer Reinhard Keiser (1674-1739), appointed to the Hamburg Opera in 1696, and one of the few with talents sufficiently wide-ranging to realize Feind’s theories, composed about 66 operas in which violence and tragedy, intermingled with comedy, were freely depicted on stage. He and his librettists were able to create actions that revealed the psychological attitudes of the characters, and succeeded in integrating the irrationality and unnaturalness of Baroque opera with the current theories of a relevant German drama (Warrack, 2001:73). Their action-driven works caused Keiser to rely more on music of a descriptive recitative style, rather than reflective aria. As a recitative style is, by its nature, less varied melodically, Keiser developed a musical language that relied more on harmony, orchestral
colouring and textures to support the vocal line and provide musical interest (Warrack, 2001:53-54). This tendency would eventually lead to the Melodram and Singspiel of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Millington, 1992b:80).

Opera, because it had no particular moral bias, was seen as the most suitable vehicle for the transformation and unification of the nation (Meyer, 2003:79). Firstly, however, the genre itself needed to undergo revision and theories about the way to do this appeared in writings as far back as 1682, and spanned the whole of the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries (Bukofzer, 1948:306, Warrack, 2001:32, 44-45), led by philosophers and musicians like Johann Matteson (1681-1764), Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766), Francesco Algarotti (1712-1764), Gotthold Ephriam Lessing (1729-1781), Christoph Martin Wieland\textsuperscript{11} (1733-1813) and Wilhelm von Humbolt (1767-1835) (Rayner, 1940:3, Warrack, 2001:79, 94, 101). Pressure to develop forms of opera that were inherently more German arose in part due to the threats of political invasions from outside forces, and gained in urgency at a time when Napoleonic armies were threatening Germany. Many of these writers believed that through the unification of the arts and the use of their national language (i.e. German), a moral, social, psychological and political transformation of their society could be effected (Quinet, :1). Their objective would be partially achieved by Mozart, a composer who, while perfectly at home in the imported operatic forms, created in Zauberflöte the first great German opera.

Their call, in essence, was for a style that achieved a closer unity between its music and text, using forms that were more modern and flexible, eschewing excessive ornamentation, artificiality and shallowness of character and characterisation. Their thoughts about such issues as the Aristotelian Unities and the return to forms of ancient Greek or Roman theatre were indecisive and contradictory. However, they were unanimous in their belief that a form

\textsuperscript{11} Wieland, well-known for his translations of Shakespeare into German, which Wagner knew, criticized the absurdities of Italian opera and the irrational behaviour of its audiences in a satirical novel, \textit{Die Abderiten} (1774-78) (Warrack, 2001:99).
of opera could be found which was edifying and pleasing to an intelligent audience, by inventing a genre in which all the arts\textsuperscript{12} were made to function in a kind of Hegelian sublate,\textsuperscript{13} unified with their moral, cultural, linguistic and ethical ideals. (Warrack, 2001:58, 72ff, Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:498).

While none of the above wrote specifically about comic opera,\textsuperscript{14} their call for a more natural and unified style of opera, based on themes, music and musical forms that are more inherently German, nevertheless has a direct bearing on developments in the genre in the first few decades of the nineteenth century.

The problem of developing a unified form of opera, lay in the absence of an existing German tradition upon which to build. Weber and several others recognised this and in seeking for a solution, realized that for a work to be fully unified, “a single distinctive and unifying spirit” would need to motivate its conception (Meyer, 2003:77, 81, 216). As the ideal in comic opera was a lightness of entertainment, the solutions were first found in a mixture of the Singspiel and the ethos of German Romantic opera, such as one sees in the uses Weber made of key relationships, orchestral timbre and the remembrance motif in Freischütz. The key elements of this solution, and some that also characterize later forms of German comic operas are:

- plots drawn from medieval history, legend or fairy tales
- simple folk-like melodies, based on German national types
- the intertwining of human fate with wild and mysterious Nature and its transforming qualities
- the introduction of supernatural beings and happenings, and contact between the human and the supernatural
- the interaction of dreams and reality

\textsuperscript{12} The list included aspects of music, poetry, acting, dance, architecture, scenic design, painting, machinery and history.
\textsuperscript{13} This is the resolution of opposites into a unity of a higher order.
\textsuperscript{14} Lessing, however, with specific reference to comic theatre wrote, “Farce seeks only to provoke laughter, and lachrymose comedy seeks only to move; true comedy seeks to attain both aims” (Gallarati, 1997:102).
• the development of situations that brought the inner and outer worlds of
  the characters together
• a strong reliance on harmony and orchestral colour for dramatic effect.

At the start of the nineteenth century, Paris and Vienna were the operatic
centres of Europe, and Italian and French operatic models still strongly
influenced German composers. By 1810 Vienna functioned mostly as a
gateway for the flow of ideas and trends; the comic operas of Venice found
their way into northern Europe through Vienna (Dent, 1940:60), and the latter
now looked to Paris as the only centre that commissioned new works and
attracted foreign composers. The two operas considered by Beethoven to
have the best libretti – *Les deux journées* (Cherubini)\(^\text{15}\) and *La Vestale* (1807,
by Gasparo Spontini, 1774-1851) – were both French rescue operas (Grout &
Williams, 2003:349). Between 1800 and 1830, nearly all the opera in
Germany was Italian, and even though there was a demand for opera in the
vernacular, most of these were French or Italian originals performed in
German translations\(^\text{16}\) (Dent, 1940:57, Gutman, 1999:593). Despite the
declaration in 1782\(^\text{17}\) by Emperor Joseph II of his intention to establish a
national German opera\(^\text{18}\) (Dent, 1940:48), it remained very much in the
background and began to emerge only in the 1820s.

Gluck’s influence, centred in Paris, was almost universal for the first half of the
nineteenth century. In Germany, the country of his birth, his operas had a
limited success, although his influence can be traced through the *opéras
comiques* of Cherubini and Etienne-Nicolas Méhul (1763-1817). Méhul’s

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\(^\text{15}\) Considering Wagner’s later developments of the leitmotif, one should mention that *Les deux journées*
presents an early use of the remembrance motif. It was also named by Wagner as one of the
operas he would use to train singers in the style needed for his own music-dramas.

\(^\text{16}\) German operas were also being translated into Italian with dialogue turned into recitative. *Das unterbrochene Opferfest* (1796, by Peter von Winter, 1754-1825) is a prime example of this, becoming *Il sacrificio interotto*. In Dresden at one time (no dates available) it could be seen in both its German and Italian versions. Weber produced a “Dresden version” (1820s) that Wagner tried to revive between 1844 and 1849 (Meyer, 2003:34, 48). Mozart’s *Entführung* is another, which is still sometimes performed in its Italian translation as *Il ratto dal seraglio.*

\(^\text{17}\) Between 1783 and 1792 some seventy-five *opere buffe* were performed in Vienna, of which twenty-
two were specifically written for this city (Hunter & Webster, 1997:1).

\(^\text{18}\) The result of this was a commission to Mozart and the composition of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782) (Gutman, 1999:147, 616-617).
Joseph en Egypte (1807), known and conducted by Weber and Wagner, was hugely popular, partly because it was easy to translate into German, easy to stage and – even for the untrained singers of Weber’s company – easy to sing (Meyer, 2003:57).

As an attempt at “reclaiming” Figaro and Don Giovanni for the German repertoire, both were frequently performed in German translations during the first two or three decades of the nineteenth century, with spoken dialogue in place of the recitatives. Also during these first few decades many writers and critics wrote about the intrusiveness of these dialogues, scornfully calling these works Zwittergattung – literally, works in a “hermaphrodite genre”. They proposed instead a new kind of recitative, allowing for a closer unity of textural and musical meaning, and, most importantly, presenting the possibility for greater continuity and therefore also a more unified development of the music. This new type of “declamatory song” would replace the disunity of closed musical forms that resulted from alternating speech/recitative and aria structures, and would also replace the rather mechanical and fairly inexpressive type of melody used by composers such as Rossini (Meyer, 2003:11).

Carnegy (2006:17) attributes the decline of the static, artificial forms that had given opera its structure in part to the evolution of opera from the aristocratically exclusive to the more public, during which the conventions of courtly opera, that were meaningful only to the highly educated, were renounced in favour of subjects that had a more direct, visceral appeal. Those artificial forms associated with the conventions of courtly opera were found to be no longer suitable for stories with historical and natural settings in which human passions and narrative adventures were depicted.

Meyer (2003:8) identifies three “overlapping and interpenetrating impulses” that spurred on the search for a German operatic identity:

the search for a new through-composed German operatic form; the effort to create a new audience and a new social position for German language works; and finally the attempt to articulate a new national ideology through music and drama.
He lists Weber, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Spohr, Schumann and Wagner as some of the influential nineteenth-century figures who made strong calls for a truly German opera in which all the different art forms would be united, and in which the individual musical numbers, that had up to then been separated by recitative or dialogue, would be unified (Meyer, 2003:15-16).

The French Revolution stimulated other changes in comic opera styles. While the stories had already started to change before the revolution, after it the music became more intense and vehement. Sentiment gave way to Romantic drama and out of this the Melodram developed, in which dialogue was spoken in time to atmospheric or descriptive music.\(^{19}\)

Among the characteristics that had become typical of comic operas by this time were:

- everyday scenes and characters
- relatively modest performing forces
- libretti in the vernacular aimed at middle-class audiences
- music accentuating the national idiom
- exploitation of the bass voice in both straight comedic and burlesque comedic styles
- the development of the ensemble finale in which all the characters are gradually brought onto the stage while the action continues and builds to a climactic ending in which all take part (Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:484, 489).

The desire to keep the action moving forward through solo and ensemble numbers led to these becoming extended in length and form, both in comic and serious opera (Dent, 1940:56).

In adapting opéra comique to German tastes, composers attempted to make the transition between music and dialogue as smooth as possible. In order to

\(^{19}\) The German name Melodram is preferable so as to avoid the wider variety of meanings that come with the English word “melodrama”. *Fidelio, Der Freischütz* and *Hans Heiling* all contain superb examples of Melodram.
achieve this, the musical numbers were made to function like incidental music in a play – to be descriptive, picturesque, or something that could conceivably be sung in real life. Ensembles represented a heightened form of dialogue. During the Restoration period (1814-48, also called Biedermeier) action ensembles (abrupt musical changes, song-like sections set against declamatory sections), song forms (ballads, exposition ballad), picturesque choruses (miners, peasants, soldiers) and descriptive orchestral music dominated, to the exclusion of cantabile-cabaletta arias, and ensembles in which the characters contemplate the situation (Dahlhaus, 1989:66). *Zar und Zimmermann* (1837), by Albert Lortzing (1801-51) is a good example of this kind of opera, as it employs all of these features.

While McSpadden (1947:4) credits Louis Spohr (1784-1851) as the composer of the first truly German national operas, the trend towards a unified form is also noticeable in the operas of Weber and Heinrich Marschner (1795-1861), and especially in Schumann’s *Genoveva* (1850). It comes to full fruition in the music dramas of Wagner, who, in his essay *A Communication to my Friends* (1851), mentioned that this goal could only be achieved through abolishing the forms of opera he had inherited. He was reacting in part to the sense that opera had become a hotchpotch form of popular entertainment, accompanied sometimes by social or political subplots. What he sought was a form of music-drama intricately combining the psychology of his characters, and his philosophies of the role music and drama should play (Hartnoll, 1966:98). In reality, however, Wagner maintains a number of the formal conventions of earlier opera in his music-dramas, and especially in *Meistersinger*, as we shall see in Chapter 4.

Wagner’s earlier excursion into comic opera, *Das Liebesverbot* (1836), with its strong French and Italian influences, is not particularly relevant as a precursor to *Meistersinger*. The latter was written some thirty years later, after Wagner had become convinced of the need for German art not to look to foreign models and to stay “true to itself”. In fact, Sachs’s monologue in Act III is essentially a manifesto of Wagner’s own beliefs in this regard. The real precursors to *Meistersinger* are therefore more probably to be found among
the German comic operas that precede it. In order to discover elements that may have influenced the style and content of Meistersinger, it would seem reasonable to limit the investigation to the principal German exponents of the Singspiel and opera buffa, namely Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, Lortzing and Nicolai. However, it will also be necessary at times to refer to lesser-known works by other composers such as Cherubini’s Les deux journées and Auber’s La muette, because of the influence they had on German opera in the first part of the nineteenth century, and because of Wagner’s knowledge of these operas.

2.4 Mozart’s Singspiele and opere buffe

Mozart’s major contribution to opera resides in his later opere buffe, Le nozze di Figaro (1786), Don Giovanni (1787), and Così fan tutte (1790), and German Singspiele, Die Entführung aus dem Serail (1782), and Die Zauberflöte (1791). His music here surpasses that of his predecessors by its spontaneity, variety and richness of invention, in the way it characterizes persons and situations, and in the way he extends the function of traditional forms by means of psychological insight expressed in musical terms (Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:561).

Mozart expressed dissatisfaction with the buffa mould because of its inability to accurately represent reality, especially when compared to the more faithful representation of reality he had found in spoken theatre, particularly in the works of Shakespeare, Lessing, Diderot, Molière20 and Goldoni21 (Gallarati, 1997:99-100, Gutman, 1999:139). In the comic works of these dramatists, Mozart saw that the tragic, the pathetic and the naturally comic could be made to grow reciprocally out of each other (Gallarati, 1997:102, 104).

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20 Mozart knew the works of Shakespeare, Diderot and Molière in German translations (Gallarati, 1997:100, 102).
21 Carlo Goldoni (1707-93) considered opera buffa unable to express all the complexities of life due to its adherence to the rigid conventions of character types, behaviour and plot, and that its only quality of entertainment was escapist. He freed it from being a “theatre of masks” by creating unmasked characters drawn directly from his observations of reality. Diderot proposed a similar change in approach (Gallarati, 1997:99, 104).
The first major attempt at this is found in his opera buffa, *La finta giardiniera* (1775), which failed at its premiere because of the blending of seria and buffa elements. Not only do many of the arias freely mix musical styles from seria, buffa and, in one case (Belfiore’s “Care pupille”), low farce, but the character of Ramiro was written for a castrato, a vocal type not usually employed in opera buffa (Gutman, 1999:75, 337-338).

*Entführung* was not Mozart’s first German opera, but was composed specifically at the command of Emperor Joseph II to found a German national opera. In it, conventional aria-types and the chorus are made to function with more relevance to the plot, noticeable especially in the drinking song (“Vivat Bacchus”), and Pedrillo’s Act III Romanze. However, it represents a peculiar mix of styles, with Italianate arias, elements of German Singspiel and French vaudeville, and a Turkish setting. The Turkish style is only evoked in the overture, the opening and concluding choruses and in Osmin’s aria “O, wie will ich triumphieren”, which, in all other respects, is a typical example of a buffa vengeance aria, a form that will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Apart from the aria “Martern aller Arten”, which evinces the influence of the Mannheim School, the main arias are very Italian in conception. The opera ends with the expected conventional French finale – a vaudeville, in which each character in turn sings a verse of a song, and the chorus joins in the refrain (Dent, 1940:50). Here, it is given meaningful depth by the subtle changes each character makes to the essentially strophic verses, especially in the case of Osmin (Warrack, 2001:155).

It was at this time that Mozart expressed his belief that an opera should function as an organic unit, in which a progressive tension characterized the dramatic flow (Gallarati, 1997:108). These ideas were developed in

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22 Mozart made his own Singspiel version of this opera, which premiered in 1779 (Raeburn, 1998:65).
23 Emperor Joseph II established the National Singspiel in Vienna in 1777, which opened in January 1778 with *Bergknappen* by Umlauf. He wanted to see “how our audiences would accept German singing” (Zelzer, 1976:126).
24 The popularity of the vaudeville ending, which also occurs in Mozart’s *Idomeneo* (1781) and Rossini’s *Barbiere* (1816), lasted well into the nineteenth century (Dent, 1940:50, 103-106),
collaboration with the librettist Lorenzo da Ponte (1749-1838). One of the first big changes emerged through Mozart’s demand for a new type of libretto from Da Ponte, one that resulted in a more tightly honed and dramatically focused poetic style (Gallarati, 1997:108). Mozart’s approach here reveals the conviction of his views that the aria types found in conventional *opere buffe* should be the basic repertoire of tools to be used for characterization of an individual’s situation or state of mind, rather than a rigid template upon which to structure a work (Gallarati, 1997:103, 107). A particular case in point is Figaro’s Act IV aria, “Aprite un po’ quegli’occhi”, in which a buffo rage aria adheres to the convention of breaching the fourth wall. But instead of simply describing the event, as convention would have it, Figaro also reveals the depth of his personal torment and confusion over Susanna’s perceived betrayal. Susanna’s pastoral cavatina in the same act, “Deh vieni non tardar”, similarly is composed with all the conventional characteristics, but is lifted to a higher level of expression by depicting equally the depth and sensuality of her love for Figaro (Gallarati, 1997:103-104). Both of these arias present conventionally low comic characters (such as servants) in an emotional state that elevates them to a high comic status through the depth and quality of their passions, thereby mixing comic conventions and simultaneously removing these from their historical origins, and blurring the musical as well as the comic distinction between *buffa* and *seria* styles (McClymonds, 1997:198). This means that in these compositions, there is a degree to which the terms *buffa* (or *seria*) do not really describe the genre they are meant to represent.

Mozart’s advancement of the traditions of Italian opera was enriched by his experience in instrumental writing in which he helped to establish some of

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25 The theatrical convention of the fourth wall will be discussed in Chapter 3.
26 For further discussion on the extent to which a genre can represent itself, see the reference to Marita P. McClymonds in “Opera Buffa in Mozart’s Vienna” (Hunter & Webster, 1997:19), and her article on “Opera seria? Opera buffa? Genre and style as sign” in the same book.
27 Between the years 1781 and the premiere of *Don Giovanni* (1787), Mozart had completed two full-scale operas (*Entführung* and *Figaro*), while his experience in other genres include three symphonies, fifteen piano concertos, seven string quartets, ten sonatas, six larger chamber pieces and many other instrumental works (Platoff, 1997:386).
the symphonic techniques of musical development that were to play so important a role in Wagner’s works. In Mozart, this cross-pollination of ideas is revealed in the way the instruments and voices interact, the independence given to the woodwinds, the treatment of the orchestral parts and textures, the symphonic overtures (two of which were converted into symphonies in their own right), and the sense of musical continuity over extended sections. Additionally, this influence can be seen in his use of the Mannheim convention of an aria with obbligato instrument, of which Aminta’s “L’amèrò, sarò constante” (Il re pastore) for soprano with solo violin, is a good example (Warrack, 2001:260), as is Konstanze’s “Martern aller Arten” (Entführung), in which the connection between symphonic and operatic thinking begins to emerge more clearly (Brockway & Weinstock, 1963:89).

The attempts to find a more continuous style of music culminated in Die Zauberflöte (Dent, 1940:104). The last section of each act consists of several numbers integrated into one continuous stream of music. Die Zauberflöte is generally regarded as Mozart’s greatest work for the stage (Dent, 1940:54, Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:563). However, the early success of Entführung, with its effective mix of seria and buffa styles and its need for highly trained Italianate singers caused many – Goethe (1749-1832) included – to view it as a threat to the existence of the traditional Singspiel and to accord it the same honour (Dent, 1940:104, Zelzer, 1976:126, Gutman, 1999:613-614, 617).

2.5 Beethoven’s Fidelio

Beethoven’s only completed opera, known and performed in its third revision as Fidelio, is in subject and format a typical rescue opera. The opera’s apparent inconsistency of style places it uniquely as a work that simultaneously is of its time and transcends its time, as, in its musical language and content, it reflects the changes taking place in German opera.

28 Asconio in Alba K.111a and La finta giardiniera K.121/207a (Gutman, 1999:352).
While it has elements of the *Singspiel* such as the use of spoken dialogue, disguise, and contrasting soprano and baritone roles, it incorporates music of both the comic and serious operatic styles. It also shows the influence of Mozart in the use of symphonic techniques that propel the ensembles.

Other characteristics that it shares with *Singspiel* are

- the extensive use of repeated words in the vocal line
- the number of ensembles which carry the action forward
- the effective use of *Melodram* (in Act II)
- the role of everyday characters in its story (Marcelline and Jaquino represent, in many respects, the servant lovers of the eighteenth-century comic opera, and Rocco, the fatherly comic bass)
- characters that remain essentially as we meet them at the start of the drama, despite the intensity of their experiences through the course of the work
- an adherence to the Aristotelian Unities of time and place
- the release from evil (at the last minute) by a beneficent lord
- a happy ending with a universal moral.

Even the more serious character, Pizarro, retains some aspects of the stock villain of comic opera. His aria “Ha, welch’ ein Augenblick” is a fine example of the rage aria (see Chapter 3) (Meyer, 2003:87).

### 2.6 Carl Maria von Weber

Weber’s *Freischütz* is widely regarded as the real progenitor of nineteenth-century German opera, and the first to realize fully his ideal of eschewing the influence of Italian opera, drawing rather on the *Singspiel* and *opéra comique*.

Weber had written at least five operas prior to *Der Freischütz*, two of which are comic *Singspiele*. The first of the two, *Peter Schmoll und seine Nachbarn* (1803) reveals his early desire to find his own musical language, and to that end harmonic inventiveness, key associations, an emphasis on the orchestra and original use of instruments connected closely to the drama, set examples
of the direction his more mature works would take, especially in the way he brings rustic life and the old world of chivalry together. The other, the one-act *Abu Hassan*, is characterized by comic lightness and sparkle, and by inventive use of harmony and instrumentation. For example, the mention of love and death are lightened by subtly exaggerated harmonies and orchestrations (bassoon with guitars and violas). The soubrette’s liveliness and tenderness are presented in a conventional *polacca*, and a mock lament eloquently parodies *opera seria* (Warrack, 2001:251-255).

None of the five, however, rises to the heights of *Der Freischütz*, which became the model for German Romantic opera and effectively ended the hold Italian opera had over German audiences. The opera was written as a *Singspiel* with dialogue carrying the action forward. Much of its initial success and enduring popularity has been attributed to the folk-like simplicity of numbers such as the Hunters’ Chorus from Act III. These melodies are based on Weber’s study of folksong, although such music is never quoted exactly, and represent an artistic integration of the vernacular. Other elements that contributed to the success of this opera are its rustic humour, based on a rural social order that was entirely familiar to the audience of the day, and the ghostly terrors of the famous “Wolf’s Glen Scene” in Act II, in which Weber uses song, chorus, aria and *Melodram*, pulled together by an overwhelming and powerfully descriptive orchestra (Warrack, 2001:304-306).

It is in fact Weber’s evocative and atmospheric use of the orchestra, which plays a major role in the scene-setting and narrative of this opera, that constitutes one of his greatest contributions to Romantic opera (Dent, 1940:65-68). Timbre, specific instruments and melody are used to identify characters in a technique called remembrance motifs or guiding themes. Weber was not the first to use this technique, but he uses it more comprehensively than earlier composers, such as Mozart (in *Idomeneo*, 1780), Méhul (in *Ariodant*, 1799) and Cherubini (in *Les deux journées*), had done.

His association of characters and events with specific motifs, instruments, keys and orchestral timbre, gives the whole work one of its outstanding
features, its feeling of unity (Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:679). Pierre Alexandre Monsigny (1729-1817) had tried tentatively in 1769 with Le Déserteur to make key structure a part of the dramatic expression, and through the works of André Grétry (1714-1813), Méhul and Cherubini it became part of the drive to make the orchestra’s role more descriptive and dramatically functional, ideas that Weber developed more fully (Warrack, 2001:196, 198-199). The key scheme of the Wolf’s Glen scene is, for example, built around the notes of the diminished quartad, which is associated with the evil powers.

Drawing on his German heritage and Méhul’s Ariodant, Weber’s use of the primary colours of individual instruments turned the orchestra into the main expressive vehicle of the drama. Some of his orchestral colours were pioneering examples of their use. In the words of Warrack (2001:305):

The clarinet which sings blithely of Max’s lost woodland happiness is the same instrument whose sinister low thirds introduce the Wolf’s Glen; the horns softly intoning woodland purity at the start of the overture or chorusing the huntsman’s joy in the chase are the same instruments that, […] blaspheme this innocence with their vicious blare in the demoniacal Wild Hunt. As with the vile ritual in a Wolf’s Glen adjacent to the sunlit forest clearing, darkness is close to the serene tone on one and the same instrument.

While Der Freischütz is predominantly a serious work with strong Schreckensopera features, it also contains elements drawn from the comic Singspiel and buffa models:

- The story is told in singing, dialogue, and Melodram with some use of a vernacular dialect, particularly by the peasants.
- Musical forms like the polacca, cavatina, rondò, a vengeance (or rage) aria, village dances and marches are used.
- Conventional character types appear, such as a pure heroine, a lively soubrette, a misled hero who intends well and a grim villain caught in a trap of his own making.
- The magnanimous prince becomes the righteous judge (together with the Holy Hermit in this case) (Warrack, 2001:304-306).
There is a degree to which the characterization in *Freischütz* is two-dimensional. This is because the characters in this opera are not in the first place actors in a human drama, but embodiments of metaphysical qualities. As such, they represent the interaction of supernatural and human forces, man and nature, barbarism and German Christianity, and the overcoming of evil forces by man’s inherent goodness. However, on a musical level, Weber characterizes his people with many of the conventions appropriate to the roles they fulfill.

The overture is a sonata-form patchwork with slow introduction and coda. Its musical narrative, based on melodies taken entirely from the opera, outlines the hero’s despair, the struggle between good and evil, and the redemptive power of love.

Weber’s aria forms reflect both French and Singspiel types. The French types (Max’s “Durch die Wälder” and Agathe’s “Leise, leise”) are complex structures, which show how deeply he had absorbed French influences (especially that of Méhul) during his ten years of conducting in Prague and Dresden (Warrack, 2001:304, 364). Meyer (2003:102), notes also the influence of the four-part pezzo concertante of contemporary Italian opera. Ännchen’s “Kommt ein schlanker Bursch gegangen”, is a polacca, a form typically found in eighteenth-century comic operas and Singspiele, which use a different style and form of music for characters of a different class. The music of the people – the Hunters’ Chorus and the Bridesmaids’ Chorus, the marches and waltzes in popular form – are at once typical comic opera items embodying “local colour” and glorifications of the “Volk”.

Weber’s legacy of new orchestral effects in timbre and instrumental idiom, a broader understanding of music for the stage, and a new atmosphere of musical Romanticism can be discerned in the operas of Meyerbeer and Wagner, and, to a lesser extent, in Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* (1829).
2.7 La muette de Portici

Wagner’s attendance in 1829 of a performance in German of *La muette de Portici* by Auber (1782-1871) left a deep impression, and he is known to have conducted several performances of the work between 1833 and 1839 (Klein, 1933:242). It has clearly had an influence on almost all of his works from *Rienzi* (1842) onwards (Grey, 2003: 321, 340ff). While Wagner later wrote derogatorily\(^{29}\) about Auber’s music, its effect was still palpable in 1871 when he listed the following attributes of the score, which coincide with aspects of *Meistersinger* (Lacombe, 2001:238-239, Weiss, 2002:179-181):

- He was carried away by the interconnectedness of its structure, finding that specific moments such as arias and duets were scarcely to be detected, this, in spite of the “numbered” structure of the work. He used the term “theatrical sculpture” (*plastique théâtrale*) to describe the manner in which stage and musical movement were fused.
- Those forms that were detectable were concise and highly compact.
- The music reflected the dramatic contrasts clearly, to the degree that Wagner equated them to music-paintings.
- Auber presented the chorus as real people with a functional purpose in the drama.
- He used the preludes and postludes as suggestive musical pictures.

This was one of the first operas to awaken his imagination to the possibilities inherent in the genre (Grey, 2003:321). In this work he first saw the use of mime, gesture and dance as integral elements in the plot, along with a historic setting, liberal politics, the use of popular melodies, spectacular stage effects and the handling of a large orchestra and chorus. Grey (2003:324) credits the development of Wagner’s leitmotif technique largely to the impression the orchestrally accompanied mime had on him.

\(^{29}\) Wagner is reputed to have called him a “barber who lathers, but does not shave” (Boyden, 2002:130).
While *La muette* is not a comic opera, it evinces some of the elements of the genre, such as:

- Italianate and/or folk-like melodies
- the interaction of rustic, middle-class and noble characters
- a bass-baritone who is, or seems to be, the driver of the action
- ensembles that carry the action forward or suspend the action momentarily
- effective use of *Melodram*, which in the case of this opera involves the use of mimed dancing, rather than speech, over orchestra
- disguises and mistaken identity
- release from a tight spot at the last moment
- contrasting soprano voices of a serious and light-hearted nature
- contrasting bass-baritone roles of a serious and comic nature
- an obstacle preventing betrothal
- an adherence to the Aristotelian Unities.

2.8 Development of the role of the orchestra

In an article entitled *Orchestra and voice in eighteenth-century opera*, Spitzer (2009:112-139) describes the role of the orchestra in the operas of this time. He considers orchestral usage standard for all types of opera, citing mainly the works of Italian masters, although he does mention Gluck. He does not mention Mozart, but as it will be shown, his analysis is consistent with the use Mozart makes of the orchestra in his *opere buffe* and *Singspiele*.

During the eighteenth century, use of the orchestra as an accompaniment of the voice gradually increased. At the start of the century it was used only to mark certain special moments in the drama, such as overtures, entrances and exits (sometimes in the form of marches), dances, or to hold interest during moments of stage business. The continuo group, and occasionally the strings, accompanied the singers in a style known as continuo arias. According to Spitzer (2009:112), the strings were considered to be the neutral accompaniment, and the use of a solo instrument, special playing techniques
like pizzicato, and the winds in groups or as a solo obbligato, were used for special effects. However, towards the latter half of the century, composer-theorists, other than those mentioned above, were also actively seeking ways of integrating the role of the orchestra with the drama.

By the end of this century three changes had occurred, all of which led to a more fully developed role for the orchestra as a participant in the drama (Spitzer, 2009:112-113). These changes were:

- Wind instruments were freed from doubling the strings and increasingly played their own, individual, idiomatic parts, and their numbers were expanded from the customary double flutes and oboes, to a full choir of flutes, oboes, clarinets, horns and bassoons.
- Traditionally, an accompaniment pattern established in the introduction was continued throughout the aria, or at least the A section of it. By the end of the century, composers had developed a variety of accompaniment figures and used these freely, but meaningfully, over the course of the aria.
- The orchestra was given a greater role, and with more frequency, in the accompaniment of recitatives, until Gluck finally abandoned the use of the continuo group in his *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762). This innovation was not universally adopted until much later, especially in comic opera, and the continuo still features in the operas of Mozart and many of his contemporaries.

One can distinguish between the roles of the orchestra in accompanying aria and recitative respectively. Its role as an accompaniment of the aria can be broken down into four functions (Spitzer, 2009:113-115):

- As a frame it played the opening ritornello or introduction, confirmed the final cadence, and played “tags” or snippets of melody between phrases, either in imitation of a part or the whole of the singer’s phrase, or of a figure of its own. Generally, and especially in operas from the earlier part of the eighteenth-century, the instruments used in the ritornello were the only ones engaged in the aria.
• As a line and/or a series of chords that double or reproduce the rhythm of the vocal part, adding thickness or colour to the vocal line. This type of accompaniment is also called *colla parte*.

• As independent melodic material it was given melody that interacts complementally or contrapuntally with the vocal part.

• As independent figuration it was given a basic accompaniment figure, such as an arpeggio or rhythmic pulse that provides harmonic support and continuity.

Rousseau identified two different types of recitative, which he called *recitatif accompagné* and *recitatif obligé* (Spitzer, 2009:130). These are more commonly known respectively by the Italian terms, *recitativo secco* and *recitativo accompagnato*, in which the *secco* (or Rousseau’s *accompagné*) style uses only the continuo group to punctuate a free vocal patter at moments when the harmony needs to be established or changed, and to confirm the final cadence. In the *accompagnato* style (Rousseau’s *obligé*), the voice is accompanied by a fuller orchestration, which brings an increased intensity to the style and usually requires a stricter rhythmic adherence. By the end of the eighteenth century composers had found ways of mixing these two styles easily and fluently.

By 1820 *recitativo secco* had all but disappeared in serious opera, but was still used in *opera buffa* by composers such as Rossini. Spoken dialogue still occurred in *opéra comique* much later, as evinced by the original versions of Gounod’s *Faust* (1859) and Bizet’s *Carmen* (1875).30 The trend towards continuous singing and orchestral accompaniment is evident however, in the fact that both these works had their original dialogue replaced by orchestrally accompanied recitative within a year of their premieres.

In Germany, use of the keyboard in the *recitativo secco* style is replaced by a lighter, chordal orchestral accompaniment in works composed after about 1800. However, much discussion during the latter half of the eighteenth

30 Both these works are today considered examples of *opéra lyrique*.
century on the virtues of spoken dialogue versus *recitativo secco* in comic opera (Bauman, 1981:119-131), ultimately resulted in the disappearance of the former, although it is still used in alternation with *recitativo accompagnato* in Beethoven’s *Fidelio*. The move towards continuous, through-composed, music began with Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864) around 1816, and became more common in Germany after the appearance of Spohr’s *Jessonda* and Weber’s *Euryanthe* in 1823. Lortzing’s *Zar und Zimmermann* (1837), which has spoken dialogue, uses *recitativo secco* and *accompagnato* to mark moments of higher drama and uses *accompagnato* to maintain musical continuity through the finales. Flotow’s *Martha* (1847), which has no dialogue, also uses both styles of *recitative* in an easy mix, although the continuity of the finales is broken up at times by the use of the *secco* style, particularly in Act I. In Nicolai’s *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (1849) the comic characters use speech and *recitativo secco*, but Anna, who is not a comic character, has *recitativo accompagnato* as well as a passage marked “quasi recitative”, which, by virtue of a richer accompaniment, is developed into an elevated form of speech that approaches a type of arioso. It is only after Wagner’s *Lohengrin* (1850) that the term is no longer used as a means of distinguishing between the lyrical and declamatory elements of expression (Monson, D. E. et al.). *Der Barbier von Bagdad* (1858), by the Wagner disciple Peter Cornelius (1824-1874) is probably the first comic opera without any spoken dialogue or *recitativo secco*. Although divided into numbers, it is essentially through-composed, and points the way to *Meistersinger*.

Méhul made an important contribution to the role of the orchestra in his operas through his use of instrumental colour as a motif and dramatic element, and orchestral links between separate numbers (Warrack, 2001:200, 282). German composers were influenced by French innovations in orchestral usage from about 1790 onwards, and the idea gradually evolved of using an integrated overture, recurrent motifs and the orchestra to create a web of symphonically developed music as a means of building scenes and bringing unity to their works (Warrack, 2001:208).
Abbé Georg Joseph Vogler (1749-1814) impressed the early Romantics with his harmonic system and use of the orchestra to point the drama. His opera *Samori* (1804), for which his pupil Carl Maria von Weber prepared the vocal score, reveals a mix of comic and serious elements, Romantic and spectacular as in French opera, contrast of soprano types, harmony that progresses by thirds, key associations which are specific to elements in the drama such as the use of flat keys for negative emotions and sharp keys for more positive emotions, a sense of exoticism, instruments that paint a scene or character, a drinking song, and a final moral presented by the chorus (Warrack, 2001:240-244).

E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) contributed more to German opera through his theoretical and critical writings than his actual musical compositions, particularly in the years leading up to 1816, the year in which his opera *Undine* appeared. His early operas draw much from the traditions of Singspiel and Mozart, using ensembles, some coloratura in the arias, choruses, *commedia dell’arte* based characters, farce and a moral, but include orchestrations that lead the drama and communicate directly to the audience. His orchestrations show an imaginative use of woodwind, and the use of tremolo strings against ordinary bowing at moments of tension. His love of fables, especially those of the Venetian, Carlo Gozzi (1722-1806), reveals itself in the way many of his stories involve education through an illusion (Warrack, 2001:249-251).

The main contribution by Spohr lies in orchestrations that give eloquent meaning to his characters and the glimpses some of his work gives to the direction that a through-composed Romantic opera might take. Conventions that appear in his works include *Melodram*, the use of polacca- and cavatina-type arias, vengeance arias, and an adventurous use of motif as a means of recall and musical development (Warrack, 2001:246-249).

Meyerbeer, another of Vogler’s students, also links his drama with motif and harmony, especially by thirds. In his early, and less successful, German operas these skills produce vivid colourings and comic effects, and are able to sustain the dramatic momentum during the finales. He, like Weber, exceeded
his teacher’s skills in the use of individual instruments, sometimes in unusual combinations, and in getting the orchestra as a whole to function motivically and graphically (Warrack, 2001:255-257). His mature works show an important move away from pattern-based accompaniments to more fluid, sustained and evocative textures that would serve as a model to Wagner.

2.9 Summary

We have seen that comedy is generally regarded as being socially specific, that virtually any event can be given a comedic turn by the manner of its use and the emotional distance the author can create between his protagonists and the audience, and that it is the dramatic element of chance rather than fate, which is most easily manipulated towards a happy and resolved conclusion. The old Metastasian principle of the separation of comic and tragic elements had been dissolved in the works of Lessing, Diderot, Goldoni, and particularly in the operas of Kaiser, which freely mixed these elements. Kaiser’s development of a new musical style based on descriptive recitative that depended on greater variety in harmonic and orchestral colouring for its dramatic expression opened the way for the “invention” of Melodram. Additionally, Winckelmann, Hamann and Herder used principles extrapolated from studies of the natural world to press for a style of music governed by instinct and feeling rather than reason, artifice and planning.

By the start of the nineteenth century calls for a more German style of opera had intensified. Subjects for plots that more closely reflected real life, and the parodies and satires of Nestroy, and his unique linguistic skills with the German language, gave added emphasis to these. While French and Italian models continued to dominate the first three decades of the nineteenth century, German opera was beginning to find its own voice through the influence of Mozart, whose works evinced several trends that later German composers would build on, such as:

- musical continuity extended over many sections
- the use of a symphonic style of instrumentation and textures
• some early use of remembrance motifs
• a free mix of Italian, French and German musical styles
• use of conventional aria types, developed through libretto and music into deep psychological portraits of the character who sings them, a continuation of the theories of Berthold Feind, and in this process
• a mix of seria and buffa styles which elevated low comic characters to a higher comic status due the emotional level of their expression.

In addition to these contributions by Mozart, Beethoven’s only opera presented Wagner with a style that unselfconsciously blended moments of farce, conventional aria styles, heroic and grandly philosophical elements, Melodram, recitative, dialogue, solos and ensembles in which the music held up the action or projected it forward as was needed.

Weber’s two major contributions were his evocative and atmospheric use of the orchestra and his over-arching tonal plan. Both had the unique effect of bringing a sense of unity to the whole work, and of giving the orchestra a central role in the telling of the story. Additionally, his use of German mythology, fairy-tale, legend and folk music styles gave his most successful opera the wide national appeal it still enjoys. While his complex aria forms were the cause of some criticism of this work at its premiere, they clearly anticipated the through-composed styles that later composers would come to use.

Auber’s La muette is interesting in that it is a French, not a German opera, which reveals its influence most directly in Wagner’s earlier work, but it nevertheless captured his imagination and revealed new potentialities for opera that emerged in his later works. Wagner was most taken by the interconnectedness of its drama, mime, dance and various styles of music, as well as Auber’s treatment of form, the pictographic and innovative nature of his orchestrations and harmony, and the chorus’s inclusiveness in the drama. While this opera is not specifically a comic opera, it evinces many of the conventions of comic opera, and shares some of these with Meistersinger.
Lastly, we traced the development, liberation and integration of the role of the orchestra, as composers gradually revealed its potential for creating unity of form and colour through its use of texture, motif, harmony, and blended and solo orchestral timbres. Additionally, with the disappearance of recitativo secco, it now accompanied all the recitative, and was increasingly used to link the separate numbers.

Several times in the course of this chapter the notion of “convention” has been raised. The specifics of these conventions will be the main focus of the next chapter, and their relevance to Wagner’s only mature comic opera will be shown in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3: CONVENTIONS OF COMIC OPERA

In order to investigate how Wagner used, adapted or ignored the traditions of comic opera, it is necessary to look first at the conventions that characterised that tradition. For reasons mentioned previously, the main focus will be on the works of German composers, with occasional references to Italian and French works, especially those known to Wagner. Occasionally, where relevant, works other than opera will also be referred to.

The chapter is divided into three sections, dealing respectively with conventions of subject matter, of style, and of form. The first section deals with the historical roots of the subject matter, and with the characters, situations and motivations that are typical of the genre. The second looks at stylistic characteristics of the texts and music, as well as at the vocal types most commonly employed. The third regards recurrent formal conventions in the text and the music of comic operas.

3.1 Conventions of subject matter

In Opera Buffa in Mozart’s Vienna (Hunter & Webster, 1997:5) the point is made that a work in this genre is defined by the time and place of its conception and that this precludes any canonic categorisation of its story-type. Rather, each work is a testimony to its moment of conception, while simultaneously revealing its reliance on the traditions of improvised comedy and contemporary trends. Popular features in German comic operas included the use of stage magic wrought by machinery; characters led by magic or spirits to change their ways; libretti that incorporated local dialects; parodies of established works; and rustic love, frustrated at first and then fulfilled. Warrack (2001:125-131) notes the large variety of sub-groups with names like Zauberstück, Maschinenkomödie, Lokalstück, Besserungsstück and Parodiestück. In his opinion, the influence of the commedia dell’arte on Singspiel via opera buffa, opéra comique and a form called Stegreifkomödie
(extemporised comedy), and even the comedies of Plautus\textsuperscript{31} and Menander, is indisputable. Of Mozart’s last few operas, \textit{Cosi}, \textit{Figaro} and especially \textit{Zauberflöte}\textsuperscript{32} embody in parts some aspects of these sub-groups. Nevertheless, basic archetypes of character and plot recur frequently within these stories, and may be regarded as typical of the genre.

Despite the convoluted influences of the Italian and French genres in Germany at the time, it is the \textit{commedia dell’arte} that served as the most direct source for the characters of comic opera in general (Donington, 1978:68, Warrack, 2001:130, 168, Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:484).\textsuperscript{33}

\subsection*{3.1.1 The stock characters of the \textit{commedia dell’arte}}

The main \textit{commedia} characters are divided into three groups: those who have money – the masters; those who have no money – the servants or \textit{zanni}; and a third group – the lovers, also known as the \textit{innamorati} (Shane, 2002, U. S. Q. 2009).

The masters are usually one or more of the following:

- Pantalone: A silly and lecherous old man, often wearing spectacles, slippers and three-quarter pants. He is usually the parent or guardian that is to be bested by the young lovers, and hoards money with which he controls, but rarely pays, the \textit{zanni}.
- Dottore Graziano: Also a parent/guardian type and usually played as an amorous, but gullible burlesque of the legal, medical or academic profession, much given to malapropism and an inappropriate use of Latin or quasi-Latin.
- Capitano (Scaramouch): A braggart, buffoon and a ne’er-do-well who pretends to be a “Don” or a soldier and is usually beaten by Harlequin.

\textsuperscript{31} Plautus (ca.254-184 BC) is the originator of the term “tragicomoedia”, applied to his play \textit{Amphitryon} due to the co-mingling of gods and middle-class Romans (Nicholl, 2008:29).
\textsuperscript{32} Warrack (2001:183) attributes the composition, between the years 1796-98, of seven different German operas based on Shakespeare’s \textit{The Tempest} to the success of \textit{Zauberflöte} and its use of spectacular stage effects and magic.
\textsuperscript{33} Cicali (2009:88ff) provides a clear analysis of the heritage of \textit{commedia dell’arte} as found in the \textit{opere buffe} of the eighteenth century.
because of his inherent cowardice, tendency to boast and/or attempts to seduce Columbine.

The zanni are servants, or other representatives of the lower classes. They are impudent, shrewd and witty and responsible for a lot of the comic action. Some of the latter is usually of a low type, designed purely as a distraction, and has little relevance to the plot. Some of the regulars in this group are:

- Arlecchino (Harlequin): A jester whose witticisms usually have a barbed edge; often a valet to Pantalone.
- Colombina (Columbine): Usually a lady’s maid. As Arlecchino’s love interest she furnishes the reason for his antipathy towards Capitano.
- Pierino (Pierrot): A valet to one of the upper-class characters, usually presented as a pathetic figure forever pining for Colombina, who is more interested in Arlecchino.
- Pulcinella: Either a master or a servant, and usually unscrupulous and pugnacious. He often picks fights, but then refuses to fight, and pays his debts with his cudgel, called his “staff of credit”. He can be stupid or clever, but is always pretending to be that which he is not. In the 1780s, a German equivalent of this character emerged, called Kasperl (Warrack, 2001:126).

The lovers comprise various characters who find themselves in between the other two groups, usually as relations of the moneyed group. The intricacies of the play usually turn on love intrigue and on how the zanni plot to further or to prevent such plans.

Most often only one pair of lovers would be presented, but on the occasions when another pair was introduced they were differentiated from each other by being called the first pair and the second pair, with the second pair often from a lower social level. Mozart’s Entführung, Figaro and Zauberflöte, as well as Beethoven’s Fidelio, present two pairs of lovers in the manner of the first and second pair that is found in the commedia dell’arte. Mozart’s La finta giardiniera has three pairs, graded in this manner. Così also presents two pairs of lovers, but in this opera they are treated as equals. Even in the
complicated amorous relations of *Don Giovanni* one can identify Donna Anna/Don Ottavio as the first pair and Zerlina/Masetto as second pair.

### 3.1.2 Stock characters in comic opera

Donington (1990:7-8) believes that clear and identifiable archetypes are of paramount importance to the success of comic opera. Confrontation with an artistic presentation of these, he claims, leads to a sense of familiarity that in turn enables the sort of catharsis that is the very heart of opera. Recognition of these archetypes need not be fully conscious or even fully rationalised, but due to the combined influences of libretto, music and stagecraft, “our heads are contented, so too our hearts are warmed”.

We therefore find comic operas peopled with characters familiar from the *commedia dell’arte*, such as sentimental lovers, crusty old men (father or guardian), braggart soldiers, pompous and bungling doctors, crabby and pedantic lawyers, miserly old men, wily and awkward servants (Warrack, 2001:168). All of them have counterparts in the comedies of Mozart as characters in their own right, or in disguises taken on for a particular dramatic moment. While those listed above represent mainly male character roles, one also finds vain ladies, deceitful wives and pert wenches. Examples of several of these character types are particularly abundant in *Figaro*.

These characters are used to parody the foibles of aristocrats and commoners alike, in plots that usually revolve around developing amorous intrigues, another reflection of their origins in the *commedia dell’arte* (Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:484). The kinds of situations in which characters are embroiled are often those they have created themselves. In line with Bergson’s principles of maintaining the audiences’ lack of emotional involvement, librettists attempted to reveal the innate qualities of the characters through these situations so as to enable humour that is at the character’s expense as much as in the situation (Hutchinson, 2006:12).

Typical of the comic convention is the close interaction of rustic, middle-class and noble types during the course of the story. Such interactions are evident in *La finta giardiniera*, *Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Zauberflöte*, as well as in
Lortzing’s *Zar und Zimmermann* and Nicolai’s *Die lustigen Weiber* (1849), amongst others.\(^3^4\)

One of the wonders of *Figaro* is the humanness and fully rounded qualities of its musical characterization, qualities that lift most of its protagonists above their *commedia* origins. It was this element of Mozart’s maturing genius that began the process of humanising the archetypical stereotypes that usually people eighteenth-century comic operas. Brockway (1963:88-93) cites the differences between *Entführung* and *Figaro* as evidence of this maturation. In the former, he finds the characters two-dimensional and, in the case of the spoken role of Selim, poorly judged, while the work as a whole suffers from a lack of unity. *Figaro*, in his opinion, suffers from none of these faults, being perfectly sustained in terms of its characterisation, wholeness and the level of its musical realization.

However, it is interesting that in the post-Mozartian *Singspiele* of *Fidelio* and *Freischütz*, we find comic characters that seem largely to have reverted back to the archetypes of the *commedia*. The reason is probably because these are predominantly serious operas in which these characters play a subsidiary role. Musical characterization also seems of lesser importance in *Zar und Zimmermann* and *Die lustigen Weiber*, as here again we find protagonists who are more archetypical than three-dimensional.

### 3.1.3 Botanical symbolism

It was during the eighteenth century that Carolus Linnaeus (1707-78), in dividing nature into the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, concluded that the only thing plants had in common with humans was sexuality. The dissemination of his views meant that, by Mozart’s time, sex was viewed as

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\(^3^4\) In *Fidelio* and *Freischütz*, the interaction between the social groups is less intimate, and less central to the plot, as the comic elements in these two works are designed as a counterfoil to the main drama.
the very essence of vegetable life, and botany was described in terms of human sexuality.\footnote{These terms included words such as \textit{andria} and \textit{gynia} (husband and wife), while the calyx was compared to both the \textit{labia majora} and the foreskin, and the corolla, or petals, to the \textit{labia minora} (DeNora, 1997:148-153).}

In this eighteenth-century atmosphere of intense interest in the sexuality of flowers, the pre-eighteenth century association that existed between women and flowers took on anthropomorphic qualities that gave art, literature and music new and graphic symbols to explore. Some authors used these analogies to promote a type of “free love” morality, and in this climate, \textit{opera buffa} became part of a culture in which metaphors taken from plants had relevant, sexual semiotic meanings (DeNora, 1997:156). Several of the female characters in Mozart’s operas have flowers names (DeNora, 1997:159), such as Violante, Giacinta, Fiordiligi and Rosina. The association between women and flowers caught on to such a degree that all sorts of medical and psychological parallels were drawn between them, with women being viewed as more natural than men, as well as wilder, darker, more dangerous and less predictable (DeNora, 1997:157-158). Gardens were viewed as sexual playgrounds in which social barriers were dissolved, or became irrelevant. Mozart used them frequently, as can be seen in \textit{La finta giardiniera} and \textit{Così} and perhaps most memorably in the finale of \textit{Figaro}\footnote{In \textit{Così fan tutte}, an opera all about seduction, two gardens provide the settings for the seduction of the women. Fiordiligi, whose name represents a lily, a symbol of purity, proves to be the more difficult of the girls to seduce, and is called \textit{fior de diavolo} (flower of the devil) by Guglielmo when Ferrando finally seduces her. \textit{Figaro} too is rife with flower/garden references. Apart from the use of the name Rosina, Barbarina and Susanna are respectively daughter and niece to Antonio, the gardener; the Countess and Susanna arrange their assignation with the Count in his garden, where the resolution to the story takes place.} (DeNora, 1997:159-161, Hunter, 1997:186).

\subsection{3.1.4 Supernatural intervention}

During the eighteenth century, man, nature and the supernatural were seen as distinct from each other. This changed during the nineteenth century where nature and the supernatural were used to depict man’s moods and his subconscious motivations – man was seen as intricately linked to the spirit
and natural world and so these forces were used in art and drama to symbolise man’s condition. The works of the brothers Grimm and Hoffmann were highly influential in promoting the idea that fantasy, night-time, distant lands, the heroic past, the infinite, the imagination and irrationality could all influence man in some way (Warrack, 2001:265-270). Hoffmann was particularly taken by the use of spirits, the supernatural and the *commedia dell’arte* in Gozzi’s fables, well known in their German translations and admired also by Lessing, Goethe and Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805). Hoffmann believed that Gozzi’s stories offered rich pickings for opera libretti, and there is cause to believe that Wagner based his first completed opera, *Die Feen* (1834, premiered posthumously, 1888), on Gozzi’s *La donna serpente* (Warrack, 2001:238, 250, 382).

Warrack (2001:129) makes the point that one of the most successful forms of Singspiel was the *Zauberstück*, in part because of the comic contrasts it created between everyday normality and its magical effects. The early nineteenth-century critic A. B. Marx identified a similar genre, calling it *Zauberspiel* and setting it at the low end of his spectrum of *Singspiele* and vaudevilles (Meyer, 2003:31).

It is notable that the two Mozart comic operas that contained supernatural elements, namely *Don Giovanni* and *Zauberflöte*, were also the most popular of his operatic works during the nineteenth century.

The influence of Mozart’s *Zauberflöte* on the Romantics was especially far-reaching, with Branscombe (in Warrack, 2001:157) suggesting that it is the “supreme product” of the whole tradition of Viennese theatre. Warrack (2001:158, 162, 180) states that it elevated Viennese magic opera to greatness, and resulted in a number of imitations, the most noteworthy of which is probably *Das Labyrinth* (1798), a continuation of the *Zauberflöte* story with libretto by Schikaneder and music by Peter Winter.

The final scene of *Die lustigen Weiber*, although derived from Shakespeare, can also be seen as a parody of the Romantic preoccupation with the supernatural. The villagers dress up as ghosts and spirits with the intention of
tormenting Falstaff, who is under the impression that he has been brought to Windsor Forest for a romantic assignation with the two women he hopes to seduce.

3.1.5 Wooing

In all of the operas mentioned so far, the plot includes at least one pair of lovers. Some are shown as unshakeably committed, others vacillate in their commitment, and some collapse under pressure. Few are presented as entirely ridiculous, although examples such as Marcellina/Doctor Bartolo and Papagena/Papageno come to mind.

Some works contrast a serious pair with a comic pair, as can be seen in Figaro with Almaviva/Rosina and Figaro/Susanna.37

A typical situation involves the wooing of one of a pair of lovers by an unwanted third party, as in Don Giovanni, Barbiere, Don Pasquale and Die lustigen Weiber. Figaro contains several variations of this theme, with Almaviva wooing Susanna, Marcellina “wooing” Figaro, and Cherubino wooing Rosina.

Wooing often involves the use of disguises and deception.

3.1.6 Disguises, scheming and deception

Dressing up in a disguise for the sole purpose of wooing is seen most clearly in Barbiere, as the young Almaviva attempts to get close to his beloved Rosina. He disguises himself three times, as Lindoro, a poor student, as a drunken soldier seeking accommodation, and as a music teacher.

Other reasons for these disguises include the intention to:

• assist in the reunion of lovers (La finta giardiniera)

37 The even more comic pairing of Cherubino and Barbarina emerges only at the very end.
• enable the lovers to escape the bonds of unwanted commitment (*Les deux journées*)
• test fidelity (*Cosi, Zauberflöte*)
• reveal infidelity (*Figaro*)
• bring one party to a more sensible view of a situation (*Don Pasquale, Die lustigen Weiber*)
• free oneself from the restrictions imposed by a social position (*Zar und Zimmermann*)
• expose wrong-doing (*Don Giovanni*).

The above deceptions are employed towards a good end, but comic opera also often features wily characters who are “too clever for their own good” and whose malicious schemes come unstuck. In Johann Ludwig Deinhardstein’s *Salvator Rosa* (1823), a work well-known to Wagner, Calmari tries to woo his ward by presenting her with an unsigned painting he claims as his own work, but which is really that of an artist who just happens to be the real lover of his ward (Warrack, 1994:21-22). The efforts of Giovanni also reflect this, as none of the seductions he attempts during the course of the opera actually succeed. The Count in *Figaro* suffers a similar frustration due to the efforts of his wife, Susanna and Figaro. In *Barbiere*, Bartolo’s plans to wed Rosina come to naught due to the smarter scheming and co-operation of Figaro and Almaviva. Falstaff in *Die lustigen Weiber* finds himself equally stymied, this time by the actions of the very women he intends to seduce. They not only catch him out each time, but also succeed in humiliating him through further schemes of their own.

An interesting aspect of these last four examples is that they are not achieved through the wily actions of the servants alone. In all, members of the nobility are directly involved. Typically, it is the *zanni* who design the schemes by which the complications are disentangled, as, being of a lower class, they are held to less account if they act with questionable means in order to achieve a higher goal or even their own base end. Examples can be found in *Entführung* (Pedrillo), *Figaro* (Marcellina, Bartolo, Basilio and Figaro) and *Cosi* (Despina).
This aspect of comedy – lying: usually little “white” lies or half-truths – often forms part of the scheming, but also reveals the frailty of mankind in failing to deal honestly and fully with situations. Every one of the main characters in Figaro does this at some point.

In Fidelio, deception is given the status of honour and bravery through Leonora’s pretence at being a man, the only possible way that she can pursue the higher goal of the release of her husband from injustice. At the same time it presents opportunity for comic interaction with the working-class characters of Marzelline and Rocco who here appear as the deceived.

### 3.1.7 The release from a tight spot

The dramatic device of release from a tight spot can be found in stories as divergent as those of the commedia dell’arte and the plays and operas leading up to and succeeding the events of the French Revolution. The general trend of this ploy is that the hero, usually from the middle or lower class, is rescued by a lover or by the benevolent act of a person in a position of power and/or authority, such as a nobleman, prince or priest (Ulrich & Pisk, 1963:345, Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:570). This aspect was so integral to the plot that some of them were called “rescue operas” as a result. However, this term was not applied to all operas in which this type of event occurs, due to the wide range of situations from which the victim could be rescued, some of which were so dire that they require the intervention of a supernatural force, as in Don Giovanni, where Leporello’s release is brought about by the supernatural intervention of the Commendatore, who removes Giovanni from the scene, leaving Leporello free to find another, hopefully kinder, master.

Many opere buffe and Singspiele deal rather with disentanglement from a complicated situation, usually with the aid of zanni-type characters. These situations could be created through scheming (Figaro, Così), deceit (Zauberflöte, Barbiere), misunderstanding (La finta giardiniera, Figaro), lust – for sex and/or power – (La finta giardiniera, Figaro, Don Giovanni, Zauberflöte), jealousy (La finta giardiniera, Entführung, Così, Figaro) and
greed (*Don Pasquale*). In some of the works mentioned the situation may also be self-imposed, as in the case of the two men in *Così* and Leporello, Zerlina and ultimately the Don himself in *Don Giovanni*.

It is also possible to find the *zanni*-type character aiding in the plot’s entanglement as well as its disentanglement. In *Così*, Despina, the only *zanni*-type, is bribed to help Alfonso in his scheme, and in *Don Giovanni*, Leporello finds himself aiding Giovanni’s schemes despite his better judgment. Most of the time, however, these characters are in the position that Susanna and Figaro find themselves in, of plotting to reveal the shenanigans of a master, thus bringing the story to a moral and satisfactory close. The scene in Act IV with Figaro and Susanna develops the added complication of the *zanni* entangling each other, as Susanna believes her disguise has fooled Figaro, and he, having seen through it, plays along with her charade.

In *Die lustigen Weiber* it is the wives – or the lovers in terms of the *commedia* – who resolve the difficulties that arise as a result of Falstaff’s attempts to woo them.

### 3.1.8 Money

As mentioned in the description of the *commedia dell’arte*, the moneyed person uses his wealth to control those with less or none of it. The moneyed person – often also a person of noble birth – has all the power due to their standing in society. One sees in *Figaro*, *Barbiere*, *Don Pasquale* and *Die lustigen Weiber*, that money plays a part in the control of some aspect of the marriage contracts that form part of the plot.

In *opera buffa*, money is generally associated with corruption, vice, avarice and ambition, and is used to reveal the frailty of human morality, rather than for generous or altruistic ends (Hunter, 1997:172-173). Pleading poverty is a constant theme in Neapolitan *opera buffa* (Werr, 2002:303). A brief survey of some of the comic characters in opera shows that money plays a role in many of the operas under discussion;
• In *Cosi,* Despina and Alfonso have a short, mimetic scene in which Alfonso bribes Despina in order to get her on his side.
• In *Figaro,* Marcellina tries to use the money owed to her by Figaro as leverage to prevent his marriage to Susanna.
• In *Fidelio,* Rocco presents money as the only means to real happiness, but later, when Pizarro uses gold as a bribe for the murder of Florestan, he comes to realize that it will not buy a clear conscience.
• In *Barbiere* (performances of which Wagner conducted in Magdeburg and Riga), the meagre fee Almaviva offers the street musicians who accompany his Act I serenade leads to a noisy brawl, reminiscent of the brawl in *Meistersinger.*
• The love of money motivates Don Pasquale to find himself a wife, rather than make his nephew his heir.
• In *Die lustigen Weiber,* Falstaff used to have a high social standing, but his present impoverishment drives him to attempt the seduction of ladies with wealthy husbands.

3.2 Stylistic conventions

This section will examine some of the conventions in comic opera with regard to treatment of subject matter, mixture of styles, vocality and orchestral usage.

In much the same way as one can identify archetypes of character in comic opera, one finds conventions of form and style. Use of these conventions enabled the expression of “the essence of a type of human nature” which simultaneously entertained and instructed (Rabin, 1997:259-260).

3.2.1 A move towards reality

As early as 1750, Rousseau, in his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences,* made strong charges that the arts had in fact obscured truth by the way reality was

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38 It is interesting to note Webster’s claim (2009:29) that the identification of these conventions grew out of their use in *opera seria,* as a theoretical approach to *opera buffa* was essentially absent during the eighteenth century.
depicted, presenting a social order that was debased and encouraged inequality, and showing man as a false and fictitious creation, without reality and truth. His call was for the arts to distinguish reality from appearance, to reveal the decay beneath the surface, and to improve the lot of mankind\textsuperscript{39} (Gutman, 1999:122, Warrack, 2001:79-81, 135, 297).

The ideal of a simple naturalism that is a characteristic of the Italian \textit{opere buffe} and German \textit{Singspiele}, and which added much to their popularity, is one in which the vices and moral duplicities of the rich and powerful are revealed. Using parody and satire, the peasant and the working classes were glorified, simple virtues were shown to triumph over the wickedness of the nobility, and the King was presented as the protector of the innocent.

Additionally, the style of music in the \textit{Singspiel} was initially a type of simple and catchy melody based firmly on, if not drawn directly from, German folk music (Donington, 1978:68, Grout & Williams, 2003:300-302). This increased the audience’s sense of the relevance of the work to their everyday existence.

\textit{Entführung} shows a slightly different type of \textit{Singspiel}, that had greater popularity in southern Germany, where the works were generally more influenced by the gaiety and farce of \textit{opera buffa} and featured melodies enlivened with vocal display (Grout & Williams, 2003:302-304).

\textit{Figaro, Don Giovanni} and \textit{Così} evince a shift towards realism, moving away from one-dimensional characters to people made up of strengths, weaknesses and inconsistencies (Gutman, 1999:122). Partly through the influence of these works, the remnants of knockabout humour, social and political satire, and the vulgarities that characterised the comedy of the previous three centuries, had, by the nineteenth century, evolved into forms

\textsuperscript{39} Rousseau who was a central figure in the War of the Buffoons, in which he sided with the Italians, and made valuable and lasting contributions to the \textit{Dictionnaire de Musique} (1768) and the \textit{Grande Encyclopédie} (Anderson, 1989:496), was also a composer. His two most important musical works are \textit{Le Devin du village} (1752) and \textit{Pygmalion} (1770). The former of these two works which originated as a French intermezzo, and became the inspiration via a French parody and a Viennese comedy for Mozart’s \textit{Bastien und Bastienne} (1768) (Warrack, 2001:146), embodies the philosophy of natural man as espoused in his novel \textit{Emile} (1762), while the latter is said to have influenced German opera through its use of \textit{Melodram}. 
that were more obviously subversive of the types of things people did and believed (Hutchinson, 2006:17-18). Comedy that was purely comedic began giving way to forms that not only elicited laughter as an initial reaction, but also became tragicomic as secondary thoughts of shock, disgust or horror emerged. This reveals a side of German comedy that, through the use of caricature, aimed at corrective and moralistic instruction of its audience in order to bring about their improvement (Warrack, 2001:4-5, Hutchinson, 2006:13, Burkholder, Grout & Paliska, 2010:484).

3.2.2 Emotional detachment

Parody, which is essentially a form of exaggeration or distortion, has been shown to be a tool that effectively limits the audience’s emotional involvement in comedy. It not only reduces sensitivity to the situation, but further enables suspension of the moral and cultural norms that form part of the value system normally applied to the actions portrayed (Hutchinson, 2006:11).

For this type of suspension of moral and social norms, Bergson (2003:1:II) has suggested that comedy should be designed to appeal to the intellect and not the heart of the spectator. As such it invites one to keep an emotional distance from the protagonist, whose grasp of his situation is shown to be incomplete due either to an inadequacy of mind or actions. Antonio in Figaro represents one such type. This drunken gardener does not attract much sympathy from the audience; consequently, Figaro’s manipulation of Antonio’s statements is seen as humorous, and no umbrage is taken at his abrupt dismissal by the full ensemble. The manner in which Mozart’s Almaviva and Cherubino, Nicolai’s Falstaff and Donizetti’s Don Pasquale act out their lascivious desires are further examples that invite humour in a situation in which a character finds himself due to his own actions.

However, Hutchinson (2006:13) makes the point that it is also possible to feel some degree of understanding or compassion, without a sentimental attachment forming, should the event have elements of tragedy about it, giving the dramatic moment a tragicomic turn. We can see this in the unfolding of the stories in La finta giardiniera and Cosi as the quandaries in
which the protagonists find themselves are often of their own making, either through an obsessive love (Giardiniera) or a willingness to accept a challenge (Così). This can also be seen in the events that unfold in Act IV of Figaro, in which we can empathise with Figaro, but not with too much concern, in his aria “Aprite un po’ quegl’ occhi”, in which he berates all women as a reaction to Susanna’s perceived betrayal, which we know to be fictitious.

Protagonists plunged into situations that are unexpected, inappropriate or even improper, and which depend on degrees of ignorance, gullibility or even sheer stupidity, recalling Bergson’s mechanical inelasticity as they reveal their inability to make informed decisions (Antonio in Figaro), or their willingness to be deluded (Almaviva in Figaro, Gulielmo and Ferrando in Così, Falstaff in Die lustigen Weiber, and Pasquale in Don Pasquale), or to delude themselves by selecting which facts to act upon (Van Bett in Zimmermann). Many of the stock characters of comedy – the foolish, the pompous, the vain and the hypocrite – fall into this category. In “reading” these characters, the audience’s ability to predict their actions or the outcome of a situation contributes towards its detachment from the character, and therefore the emotional distance which allows for comedy to be effective (Hutchinson, 2006:9-10).

The comedy into which Figaro is plunged, for example, depends on his ignorance of certain events, but also on a human weakness, jealousy, which causes him to distrust Susanna and to leap to the wrong conclusions. He is initially unaware of Almaviva’s designs on Susanna. He is also ignorant, and must remain so, of Susanna’s and the Countess’ plans to swop identities and meet Almaviva in order to expose his infidelities. Figaro’s ignorance, leading to his emotional outburst in “Aprite un po’ quegl’ occhi”, enables Susanna to test and be reassured of his love for her, while providing an opportunity for humour by exploiting his ignorance without belittling him in any way.

40 Bergson (2003:1:II) uses this term to describe ones’ inability to make appropriate decisions in a particular set of circumstances, or to adapt naturally and pliably to circumstances that have changed from what they were at one’s first evaluation of them.
Leporello’s inadequacy resides in his inability to leave Giovanni while realising that it would be the expedient thing to do, a fact he makes clear in the very first scene of the opera. Giovanni retains his hold by threats that Leporello is unable or unwilling to neutralise, preferring to sulk or succumb to bribery.

In Fidelio, it is the other characters’ ignorance of Leonora’s disguise that gives rise to the comic situation which develops between her, Marzelline and Rocco, a situation left unresolved (although some producers invent their own mimetic resolution) in the last act of the opera, which focuses on the larger moral issues the opera examines.

Lortzing’s Zar und Zimmermann plays with Van Bett’s ignorance and confusion, as he fails to reveal the identity of the correct Tsar Peter, and despite evidence of his error, persists in the belief that he has made the correct decision, repeating often:

O, ich bin klug und weise
Und mich betrügt man nicht.
O, I am cunning and wise
And no one can deceive me.

His buffo aria is a catalogue of what he supposes his abilities to be, while his persistence in holding to his incorrect decision (another instance of Bergson’s mechanical inelasticity) gives rise to much hilarity and confusion in the last act.

Die lustigen Weiber weaves a web of ignorance and disinformation between most of its characters, as each uses the situation caused by Falstaff’s foibles to achieve their individual goals.

3.2.3 Comedy as social commentary

Figaro’s “Aprite un po’ quegl’ occhi” also highlights Mozart’s abandonment of satire as the main vehicle of social commentary in favour of irony, which is a factor that possibly places his comedies ahead of their time (Moberly, 1967:25, Gallarati, 1997:109-110). It must be admitted that much of this derives from Beaumarchais’ play, which incorporates a great deal of social
commentary, especially in its depiction of the baseness of a nobleman, and the noble aims of servants.

Bergson (2003:1:I) makes the point that comedy can only exist if the humour exposes evidence of some human qualities. Comedy achieves this when developed out of the weaknesses, inconsistencies and accidents of the humanity of its protagonists, as in this aria in which Figaro’s ranting reveals not only his pain and misunderstanding, but also, in the excesses of his rage, a degree of misogyny\textsuperscript{41} that is uncharacteristic of him. This humanising element reveals in him both good and bad qualities. The character of Giovanni, it might be argued, seems to embody only immoral and selfish ideals, yet the irony of his situation is revealed through the consistent failure of his attempted conquests, brought about by the interventions of the other protagonists. In \textit{Così} the two men do not rise to Alfonso’s challenge because of their own cynicism, but rather in the hope of proving that such an attitude is unfounded, however, once committed to the “game”, their complicity results in a credible disappointment for both of them. A more subtle type of irony is found in what appears to be the lack of parody in Dorabella’s and Fiordiligi’s arias that are unquestionably cast in the high, \textit{seria}, style (Rabin, 1997:234). It is only their context that makes them appear somewhat comic.

Mozart’s last operas all leave one with serious questions, or perhaps even a sense that the cycle has not been closed, but will repeat itself again. While each ends with the conclusion of its particular story, there is always the idea of the next day and the troubles it might bring: Will the men ever fully trust the women after their fickleness in Don Alfonso’s test? Will the Countess’ forgiveness be needed again soon? Will Leporello find (in a tavern!) a master who is any better than Giovanni? Will Tamino maintain his purity and devotion, and will the responsibility of children bring Papageno greater maturity?

\textsuperscript{41} Misogyny is a frequent topic in buffo arias, according to Rabin (1997:235).
3.2.4 High, medium and low comedic styles

It has been shown in Chapter 2 that upon Mozart’s arrival in Vienna, opera was still governed by the contradiction that form and music had little relevance to the drama.

Opera attempted to reflect the three levels of society in three levels of music, high, middle and low. This, and the other conventions mentioned in this chapter had implications of social status and projected levels of aesthetic sensitivity recognised and understood by the eighteenth-century audience, who used them as indicators of genre and as pointers towards their understanding of the musical rhetoric (Spitzer, 2009:136). According to this idea, high music was found only in opera seria and low music only in opera buffa, which left the middle level as a kind of cross-over between the two. McClymonds (1997:198, 205, 231) makes the point, however, that in fact, the three levels are to be found in both genres, that various factors including the considerations of chiaroscuro determined which was used, and the balance between them became a factor in the overall perception of the work.42 Rabin (1997:237) adds further that in opera buffa arias as much is revealed about the characters through the manner of their expression, as through the subject matter and the words used to communicate their ideas.

The high style represented the clergy and the nobility in musical expressions of exalted and violent passions, capturing their sense of power, magnificence, majesty and pride and portrayed emotions like anger, fear, astonishment, doubt, or their desire for revenge or descent into madness. These styles are typically cast in clear forms with well-defined harmonic regions, and use their thematic material in a manner that is distinctively associated with content. One finds that the da capo aria is typically reserved for characters in the high style, due to its clear formal structures. Additionally, chromaticism, coloratura, inventiveness and virtuosity often characterise the music (McClymonds,

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42 This is certainly the case in Mozart’s work from La finta giardiniera onwards. Ensembles, for purposes of characterization and independence of vocal lines, often offer a mixture of musical styles.
Mozart's music for the Queen of the Night fits into this style, while Sarastro's music reflects the solemn, dignified aspect of this style.

The middle style was represented in music of a milder type, reflecting calmness, satisfaction and joy, as well as emotions like love and cheerfulness. Music of this type should not excite one, nor bring on a sense of reflection, but should be designed to please. It is in this category that we find the music for Tamino and Pamina, and love arias or duets are often in this style.

The low style tends to be of a merrier and more superficial type, aiming at caricature and comedy. The harmony is simple and diatonic, while the melodies tend to be syllabic and unrestrained, and often incorporate popular elements. The arias use forms that are simple, strophic, loosely organised or even deliberately unclear, reflecting the structure of the text, which could be confused and/or repetitive (Rabin, 1997:244-246). Much of Papageno's music falls into these two categories.

The need for a degree of detachment from the characters and their situations in order for comedy to work has already been discussed. It has also been shown that a convincing mix of comic, serious and tragic elements need not detract from the overall comicality of a work, but that its ultimate impression depended upon the balance between these elements. Mozart achieved such a balance by revealing to his audience the emotional lives of his heroes and lovers with music that is deeply moving and expressive within an overall context of comedy. Moberly (1967:28) suggests this balance is inherently a part of Mozart's style, because he enjoyed the challenge of portraying vividly and truthfully the contrasts he found in characters and situations. An example can be seen in Dorabella's low-comedy fit of pique (knocking the chocolate onto the floor) before the start of her high-style “Smanie implacabili” (Durante, 1997:319).

Beethoven's Fidelio reveals a less easily blended mix, using techniques of Singspiel in association with its comic characters but leaving these story-lines
unresolved, while its rescue opera elements are treated seriously, and resolved satisfactorily. This tends to put a firm focus on its essential message, one that has deep political and social ramifications, stimulating perhaps more searching questions than those that arise from the comedies of Mozart, and certainly from the comedies of Rossini whose main intention seems to be joyous and brilliant entertainment.

The Singspiele of Nicolai and Lortzing that have been referred to already, are similar in emotional value to those of Rossini, as they too are characterised by a lightness of spirit in which their protagonists’ emotional wave never dips too deeply or for too long into distress.

3.2.5 Vocality

In operas from the Baroque period, sopranos and castrati usually took the role of the hero, and occasionally that of the villain (Donington, 1978:60). The tenor was rarely the hero in seventeenth-century comic operas, but was used instead to characterise old men and occasionally old women, and even more occasionally, a villain. Villainous roles were usually given to basses, although they could also be cast as wise old men. The focus on solo singing in the opera seria of this century glorified the higher voices, an important factor that led to the abundant use of soprano and castrati in these operas, and precluded the development of the ensemble over the full vocal range.

By the end of the eighteenth century, use of the androgynous castrati was in decline in opera seria, in which they had ruled supreme. Due to the “unnaturalness” of their vocal range, they never found a firm foothold in opera buffa or the Singspiel. Their demise had two outcomes in eighteenth-century opera: the emergence of the romantic lead tenor (Dent, 1940:110), and the use of female singers playing the part of males, usually boys or young men, in what came to be known as hosenrollen, known in English as either

43 This aspect of the opera includes the use of Melodram, which could be viewed as a mix of Singspiel and seria styles due to the use of speech against the orchestra.
44 Mozart made unconventional use of the castrato voice for Ramiro in La finta giardiniera, a role sung nowadays as a trouser role by a mezzo-soprano.
trouser, pants or breeches roles. Mozart, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Gounod, even Wagner (as will be shown in the next chapter), and, later, Richard Strauss, created trouser roles for minor and major characters in some of their works. In *Figaro*, the device is parodied when Cherubino, sung by a mezzo-soprano, is required to disguise “himself” as a girl. The device is, of course, echoed in Strauss’ *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911).

*Figaro* offers some examples of a mixture of Baroque and later vocal conventions. The tenor role is given to Basilio, a comic villain, while the three basses, Almaviva, Figaro and Bartolo represent villain, wily servant and buffo respectively. Additionally, as Figaro is supposed to be an older man than Almaviva, he is traditionally played by a singer with a darker and heavier baritone voice. Use of the bass voice is much more extensive in *opera buffa* than in *opera seria*, and this enabled the development of the full range of the vocal ensemble. This style of musical interaction between the protagonists, which will be dealt with later in this chapter, is noticeably absent from eighteenth-century *opera seria* (Grout & Williams, 2003:277).

In most comic operas of the nineteenth century, with the important exception of those by Rossini, it is fair to expect the first pair of lovers to be sung by the soprano and tenor leads, while their parents or guardians will usually be given to singers with lower voice-types. Characters with darker intentions are also usually assigned to darker voices. (Moberly, 1967:23-24, Rushton, 1997:406-425, Webster, 2009:26).

3.2.6 The orchestra

Mozart’s orchestra comprised of a standard-sized ensemble of strings with doubled flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons and horns. The strings form the backbone of Mozart’s orchestra and accompaniments are never without them. Occasionally he introduced other instruments for special effects, such as the

45 The same situation was exploited much earlier in comic theatre. In Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (1599-1600), for instance, Rosalind, who would have been played by a boy, disguises herself as Ganymede.
basset horns, glockenspiel, trombones and sundry bells and whistles in *Zauberflöte*. Obbligato instrumental solos add specific emotive qualities to arias (Webster, 2009:33), as in Fiordiligi’s “Per piétà” (the horn), Zerlina’s “Batti, batti” (the cello), and Giovanni’s serenade “Deh vieni alla finestra” which unusually uses the mandolin as an independent obbligato instrument. The use of an orchestral accompaniment with independent melodic material gives special poignancy to high-style emotional outpourings such as the Countess’ “Porgi amor” and Donna Anna’s “Non mi dir”.

Mozart’s motivic figurations are seldom used purely for harmonic support (Webster, 2009:32) – they tell us something of the physical and/or emotional state of his protagonists. A look at two of the arias from *Figaro* will illustrate this and show some aspects of his orchestral accompaniments pertinent to comic arias.

*Figaro’s* buffo cavatina “Se vuol ballare” begins with the strings playing pizzicato *colla parte* chords, in imitation of the guitar he will use to foil the Count’s amorous intentions for Susanna. As the aria progresses we find the orchestra interacting independently with his line, without contributing any new melody, but by repeating on occasion the melody he sings. Most of the time, however, it maintains the character of an elaborate kind of guitar.

Throughout Cherubino’s “Non so più cosa son” the strings essentially maintain the agitated, arpeggiated figuration that is the backbone of the accompaniment to this aria. Winds frame his phrases with bursts of sound, crescendo leads into his phrases and imitative tags on the ends of his phrases. They also give his line intensity with *colla parte* textures in unison and thickened with harmony, and an occasional delicate motif that interacts independently with his melody, all of which depicts Cherubino’s rushing heartbeat, shortness of breath and amorous excitement at the thought of women.

In the recitatives, the continuo dominates the *secco* styles, but where more intensity is needed, the orchestra is fully involved, as can be seen in “Hai già
vinta la causa!

Early in the nineteenth century the continuo had been dispensed with; consequently, the full orchestra now accompanies all styles of recitative, but elements of secco style survive.

Beethoven and Weber increased the size of the orchestra in their Singspiele by adding to the woodwind and increasing the number of horns to four. However, when writing for their comic characters the orchestral accompaniment is, in essence, not markedly different from that established by Mozart.

The symphonic approach to the role of the orchestra that begins to emerge in Mozart's operas from Entführung onwards served as Beethoven's model, as can be seen in the opening duet ("Jetzt, Schätzchen jetzt sind wir allein") between the two comic characters, Marzelline and Jacquino. The opening ritornello supplies the main orchestral figure for the A section, which is otherwise accompanied by a plain or occasionally ornamented colla parte. The B section is a solo passage for Marzelline, accompanied by strings using a slightly different figuration with motifs that relate to the opening ritornello figure, while the winds provide a harmonically thickened colla parte texture with inter-phrasal tags. This leads back to a varied return of the A section that reveals Beethoven's symphonic approach to his material while keeping the orchestral textures essentially the same. It closes with a slightly faster parlando version of the A section with cadenza-like runs for the soubrette, and concludes with seven bars of presto on cadential figurations over tonic harmony. The orchestra does not have any melodic material different to that which is sung. This is followed by Marzelline's aria "O wär' ich schon mit dir vereint", which, although quite different in mood, has the same type of orchestral contributions, although the woodwinds make short obbligato appearances linking the strophes and the two sections of each strophe. In Rocco's "Hat man nicht auch Gold beineben" the first violins provide similar links. The overall orchestral effect gives a feeling of comic overstatement at times.
Weber added much to the genre of *Singspiel* in the way of instrumental colour, which he uses as a type of remembrance motif, signifying people and character. His careful choice of instruments brings humanness to his protagonists, and although they remain types rather than individuals, they are no longer the stereotypical *commedia* characters.

Ännchen’s “Komm ein schlanker Bursch gegangen” (*Freischütz*, Act I) uses the strings to maintain the *polacca* rhythm in a detached chordal style. The oboe is introduced as the obbligato instrument during the ritornello, a role it relinquishes on only a few occasions to the bassoon and ‘cello. Ännchen’s vocal phrases are accompanied now and then by violins in *colla parte* style. Orchestral tags are infrequent, coming usually at the ends of sections rather than between phrases, thus keeping the effect of the arietta light, transparent and jovial. Even the ornamental vocal cadenza is kept short and free of instrumental fill, allowing the closing orchestration to have the full effect of a rousing conclusion.

We can see from the above that for comic arias, the orchestra serves mainly as an accompaniment to the singers. The overall use of the orchestra in Lortzing’s *Zar und Zimmermann* and Nicolai’s *Die lustigen Weiber* confirms this. The orchestration for these *Singspiele* is colourful, and effectively enhances the emotions of the text, showing, especially in the latter case, the influence of Mendelssohn’s evocative orchestral usage. By such means as rhythm, harmonic support, solo instrumentation and overstatement of texture (see below), it contributes to the general effect of a comic entertainment. It occasionally accompanies the voices with a melody of its own, but more typically doubles the vocal line in unison and harmony while maintaining the rhythmic pulse. It does make occasional use of inter-phrasal tags, and on even fewer occasions, comments on the arias.

Such an occasion is found when Falstaff expresses his intention to cuckold Fluth (Ford). Here, the French horn is used as a symbol of the mocking antlers that were placed on the cuckolded husband’s head (an idea found also in Figaro’s arias “Se vuol ballare” and “Aprite un po’”). Another instance of this is found in the romance Fenton sings to Anna in Act II which is
coloured by harp arpeggios, flute trills, a solo violin, and an excessively lushly scored climax to each of its strophic verses – an example of the kind of orchestral overstatement mentioned earlier.

*Zar und Zimmermann* is more strictly a *Singspiel* and therefore uses more spoken dialogue. However, types of *secco* and *accompagnato* recitative are present, as well as a fully accompanied duet (No.15) between Marie and Iwan which represents heightened speech as well as music.

### 3.3 Formal conventions

Just as certain stylistic conventions became inextricably linked with the nature of comic opera, so formal conventions, both musical and non-musical, came to be characteristic of the genre, and were often used as tools to contextualise or comment on specific persons or situations. Some were common to both serious and comic opera, and some were exclusive to the latter.

#### 3.3.1 The overture

The overture is one of six forms\(^46\) that McClymonds (1997:205) identifies as common to both the *seria* and *buffa* genres.

The typical eighteenth-century overture evolved from two Baroque types: the Italian, popularized by Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725), which had a fast-slow-fast structure; and the French, associated with Lully (1632-87), which usually employed dotted rhythms and had a slow-fast(-slow) format. There was seldom any musical connection between these and the opera that followed. However, as the eighteenth century progressed, the influence of the French, mainly through Rameau (1683-1764), led to the development of greater unity between overture and opera, and use of the symphonic sonata-allegro, particularly in *opéra comique* (Donington, 1978:60). However, many

\(^{46}\) The other five are the march, the second soprano using a middle style, the love aria/duet, an aria in a mixture of styles, and the ensemble characterising a mixture of social ranks.
overtures of this type retained the ability to function as separate items for performance due to their symphonic style and structure (Charlton, 2009:181).

The French use of the overture as an introduction to the music and motifs of the work elicited the admiration of German composers such as Weber and Hoffmann in the first decades of the 1800s. Weber wrote about this as one of the two essential characteristics in the operas of Nicolas Dalayrac (1753-1809), – the other was the use of the reminiscence motif – although both had already been used by Monsigny in Le Déserteur (1769) and by Grétry in Richard, Cœur-de-Lion (1784) (Warrack, 2001:194-196).

The overtures to Mozart’s comic operas reveal a varied approach that seems to have the needs of the parent work as the deciding factor. Styles range from brief 1- or 2-sectional movements (Der Schauspieldirektor (1786), La finta giardiniera) to whole symphonies (K.45 functions as overture to La finta semplice and K.318 possibly to Zaide (1779). Few of his overtures have a direct connection to the work they precede, as they are mostly of the preparatory kind, typified by the Figaro overture, cast in abridged sonata form. However, in most of his other mature operas, a definite link is established:

- The overture to Entführung uses the Scarlatti model, and cites motifs from Belmont’s aria, the first musical event after the overture, in the slow middle section.
- The overture to Cosi is connected to the opera by its motto-like use of the motif to which the words “Cosi fan tutte” will be sung.
- The Don Giovanni overture opens with the musical materials that accompany the arrival of the Commendatore’s statue at the climax of the drama, and leads directly into the first scene.
- The three solemn chords heard thrice in the Zauberflöte overture recur in various forms throughout the opera in connection with Sarastro and his priests.

47 Einstein believed that Symphony K.318 is the missing overture to this incomplete Singspiel.
Both the *Fidelio* and *Freischütz* overtures use sonata form with slow introduction, but both are dramatic and serious, making no reference to comic elements in the work to follow.

The overture to Lortzing’s *Zar und Zimmermann* is a pot-pourri of tunes taken directly from the opera, presented in a somewhat sentimental style of orchestration. Its form appears to be a kind of abridged sonata form with slow introduction, somewhat reminiscent of the *Figaro* overture.

Nicolai’s overture to *Die lustigen Weiber* is also cast in sonata form with a slow introduction, using themes from the opera that are developed in different directions to their usage in the opera itself. It establishes the comic character of the opera by over-statement, sudden and extreme changes in dynamic and timbre, and some unusual instrumental combinations.

### 3.3.2 Dances and marches

From the earliest inception of opera, theorists proposed that dance should have a firm place in all forms of the genre, particularly with reference to the activities of the chorus, linking its function with tragedy, comedy and the pastorale, as in satyric dances. The early Venetian librettists were not slow to see the entertainment value of dances and inserted them, instead of a sung chorus, into their works at the ends of acts. By the end of seventeenth century the inclusion of mimetic and pantomimic dance was firmly established as part of opera, due to its expressive power. The versatile range of subject matter that it encompassed had much to do with this, but a favourite aspect of its inclusion involved its sense of play, and therefore it was often assigned to the comic characters (Alm, 1995:79, 85-89, 92).

Some of the later eighteenth-century composers and librettists found ways of incorporating the dance as an element of the drama, and this is particularly evident in the Mozart-Da Ponte operas. In Act III of *Figaro*, the fandango is incorporated into the working of the plot as Susanna passes a letter to the Count suggesting a meeting in his garden. During the masked ball, in the finale to Act I of *Don Giovanni*, three dances are played simultaneously by on-stage “orchestras”, each of which typifies the social classes who would be
dancing them – a courtly minuet for Donna Anna and Don Ottavio; a contredanse for Zerlina led by Giovanni; and a German peasant dance, the “Teitsch” (which evolved into the nineteenth-century waltz) used by Leporello to distract Masetto (Harris-Warrick, 2009:110-111).

In nineteenth-century German comic operas, dances more typically feature as separate elements, as can be seen in Freischütz, Zar und Zimmermann and Die lustigen Weiber. However, here too, they could be integrated into the plot, as Lortzing does on occasion in Zar und Zimmermann, and Nicolai does in the final act of Die lustigen Weiber.

In the early part of the eighteenth century, dances, as well as marches and instrumental interludes usually heralded the arrival of someone stately, or covered the rearrangement of scenery (Donington, 1978:60).

Marches, which only gained their military connections during the eighteenth century, take their character from ceremonial festivities, most of which reflect the idea of assemblies, proclamations, heroism and victory, and owe something of their orchestral character to the influence of Turkish music evident at this time (Oliver, 1992:39, Monelle, 2006:113ff). Mozart used them in a few of his operas, as we shall see later, but non-singing usages that should be noted here appear under the dialogue “Aah…! Schhh … Keine Angst” in Entführung, and the graceful march for the priests, which opens Act II of Zauberflöte.

Dean (1967-1968:80) notes the surge in the popularity of marches at the start of the nineteenth century, when

[…] operas serious and comic were invaded by male choruses, military rhythms and patriotic and libertarian sentiments. The results appear on many levels all over Europe, in the rattling marches and military-band scoring of Rossini, in Beethoven’s Battle Symphony and the finale of the Ninth Symphony, in Berlioz’ Requiem, Te Deum and Symphonie funèbre et triomphale, and in the spectacular grand operas of Lesueur and Spontini, whence they passed into the mainstream of romantic opera with the works of Meyerbeer, Verdi and Wagner.

Marches are predominantly used in serious opera, but they do play an important part in Act I of Donizetti’s La fille du regiment (1839), and contrast
sharply with the waltz that opens Act II. In both cases, the instrumental forms play a cardinal role in setting the scene, and in establishing the difference in ambience between the two acts.

### 3.3.3 Mimetic musical action

Mozart's first mature Singspiel, *Entführung*, has a short mimetic scene in which a mute servant alerts Osmin to the attempted escape of the two pairs of lovers (Osborne, 1978:186). However, this is not accompanied by any music as it takes place during the dialogue between musical items. A similar situation exists in *Così*. The short mimetic scene in which Despina barters with Alfonso over the size of the bribe he is willing to pay for her complicity in his bet, takes place during a section of secco recitative, but there is no musical description of this activity.

The mimetic scene in *Zauberflöte* during which Tamino and Pamino are tested by fire and water is accompanied by a march that is more likely an indication of their emotional state than of their activity as it remains unchanged during each of the two tests.

However, in the opening scene of *Don Giovanni* there is a sword fight between the Don and the Commendatore that is quite precisely depicted in the music (Moberly, 1967:171). Beginning at the instruction *combattono* (I:i:167-175),

48 it clearly shows, by way of an ascending scalar pattern, three parries each by the sparring pair, and then a feint by Giovanni to which the Commendatore responds too slowly resulting in his being stabbed three times by the Don. The tension of their struggle, its release, and the stabbing and collapse of the Commendatore are all depicted in the motifs, scoring and textures of the orchestra. In the penultimate scene, the Commendatore initiates this scalar pattern once again during his final battle with Giovanni, and here it is apparent that the Commendatore has the upper hand.

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48 Such references indicate act:scene:bar numbers (in musical works) or a line (in poetic/prose works).
Moberly (1967:27) further suggests that the off-beat figure played by the violins in the finale to I:xx accompanying Zerlina’s cries of “Scellerato!”, represent Giovanni’s attempts to seduce her (Mozart, 303ff). He bases this in part on the irony of a similar rhythmic figure sung three times to the words “(Voi sapete) quel che fa” (“you know what he does”) by Leporello at the conclusion of his catalogue aria.

Warrack (2001:156) hints at a connection between Singspiel, mime and Melodram, although no direct link is made to the works of Mozart. While Mozart greatly admired the idea of the spoken word being enhanced by music, as he had experienced through the operas of Georg (Jiri) Benda (1722-95), he did not use the device very much, as, apart from the incomplete Zaide, it is only briefly touched on in Entführung (Warrack, 2001:108).

3.3.4 The chromatic mystery line

According to Warrack (2001:325) the harmonised chromatic scale, descending over the interval of a fifth, became a common symbol of matters mysterious in German Romantic opera from about the third decade of the nineteenth century. Warrack traces it as far back as 1789 to Danzi’s comic Singspiel, Die Mitternachtstunde (1798), and to some convincing examples in Weber’s Der Freischütz, as well as Marschner’s Der Vampyr (1828) and Hans Heiling (1833).

It appears in the opening bars (5-11) of the Don Giovanni overture, and it is played by the oboe and echoed by the bassoon at the moment of the Commendatore’s death. It reappears in the 1st trombone and bassoon during the statue’s second announcement “Ribaldo, audace!” in II:xi. Although the penultimate scene, between the Commendatore and Giovanni, creates much tension by ascending chromaticism (which never exceeds the span of a fifth), the moment of Giovanni’s disappearance is marked by the oboe, clarinet and 2nd violin playing the descending chromatic line.

There are instances of it in Zauberflöte too, as one might expect. The Queen of the Night sings it in her first aria on the words “ihr ängstliches Beben, ihr schüchternes Streben” (“her fearful trembling, her modest struggles”). I:viii
closes with the chromatically descending “auf Wiedersehn” (over the interval of a fifth, although the chromaticism spans only a third) of the three ladies contrasting sharply with the diatonic setting of the same word for Tamino and Papageno. Pamina sings it in II:xxvii, when mystified by Tamino’s silence she tells the three boys “Ha! des Jammers Maß ist voll!” (“Ah, the measure of my pain is full!”). It appears again in the accompaniment to the mysterious chorale of the two armoured men.

3.3.5 The aria

The essential function of an aria is similar to that of the soliloquy in drama – it presents, in dramatic form, the reaction of a protagonist to a particular situation. Many different styles of aria co-existed within one work, and served to define plot-, character- and aria-types as well as social status (Warrack, 2001:130, Webster, 2009:29). While Warrack lists these characteristics in the context of the Viennese Singspiel, they can be applied to most German comic operas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

- Rage, vengeance, or comic blustering was often set as a quick parlando.
- A lovelorn tenor would sing in the style of the opéra comique.
- The heroine would usually resort to vocal display at some point.
- Servants or peasants would be given strophic, simply accompanied folk-like songs.

Heeding the insistence of Goldoni and others for a chiaroscuro of aria types for each character, without repetition of the same types in close succession, composers and librettists used this variety of styles to paint a rounded picture of, and give character and personality to, their protagonists (Donington, 1978:60, McClymonds, 1997:201, Rabin, 1997:260, Warrack, 2001:148).

Analysts have narrowed down this large variety of forms and styles to a group of five or six over-arching categories. As mentioned earlier, analysts considered these in the context of opera seria, but with the rise in popularity of opera buffa in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, the list has grown to include additional types, many of which appear in both genres of opera.
(Heartz, 1997:25, 29-30, Joubert, 2009:189, Burden, 2009:206ff). Only those that have relevance to this dissertation have been included in the discussion that follows.

3.3.5.1 The catalogue aria

This is one of the most easily recognized types of aria for modern audiences, and was one of the most widely used in eighteenth-century opera49 (Platoff, 1996:297). Leporello’s “Madamina, il catalogo è questo” from Act I of Don Giovanni, probably the most familiar example in the repertory today, gives the clue to its type in its opening line. According to Platoff (1996:297-302), an aria can be classed as a catalogue aria, if it contains a list of some sort and conforms roughly to the following musical and literary conventions:

- The text, usually quite lengthy, is designed to build to a comic climax.
- The text changes from a regular to a freer poetic metre, gradually eliminating the non-essential clauses in order to increase the speed at which ideas, descriptions, or concepts are given out.
- The poetry uses asyndeton (omission of a conjunction) and anaphora (repetition of the same word at the start of successive phrases).
- The music should convincingly express the singer’s growing excitement while the melody devolves into a type of comic parlando.
- The orchestral accompaniment is often reduced to a repetition of motivic ideas over an alternating harmonic pattern.
- The humour need not necessarily be an expression of an individual’s feelings, or the hyperbole of the list, but could merely represent one who revels in his own chattering.

It is not necessary for all of these conventions to be present at any one time for an aria to qualify as one of this type, but it is sufficient for it to fit into this scheme in a generalized way. In this sense, Osmin’s rage aria “Solche herglauf’ne Laffen” is a catalogue aria, listing the ways in which he will

49 Warrack (2001:175, 235, 345, 376) provides a list from nineteenth-century operas no longer in the current repertoire by composers like Johann Jakob Haibel (1762-1826), Gottlob Bieray (1772-1840), Franz Gläser (1798-1861) and Peter Cornelius.
dispatch Pedrillo, as is Figaro’s “Aprite un po’ quegli occhi” which details all the different types of insects, flowers, night-creatures and spectres with whom women are compared. Despina’s “Una donna a quindici anni” catalogues all that a fifteen-year-old girl needs in order to succeed in the world. Van Bett’s comic aria “O sancta justitia!” (Zar und Zimmermann) is equally a catalogue of his abilities to manipulate a council debate through his fund of intelligence and argumentative skills, in short, to meet the responsibilities of his job. The latter is exactly what Rossini’s Figaro sings about in “Largo al factotum”, another catalogue aria, but, like Basilio’s “La calunnia” from the same work, which describes the growing effects of a spreading rumour, it is seldom referred to as such.

3.3.5.2 The dilemma aria

Conventionally in all forms of Baroque and Classical opera, arias are preceded by a recitative. However, in a few instances where an aria expresses a dilemma or emotional state of turmoil, it commences without any preceding recitative or dialogue. Webster (1997:347) calls this a privileged moment; the terms *indecision aria* and *aria d'affetto* are also used.\(^{50}\) The general characteristics of this type of aria are:

- that it is a soliloquy in which the character is in some distress due to a conflict that cannot be resolved by an act of their own will
- that it is introduced and accompanied by a reasonably independent orchestral part
- that the character arrives on stage in the emotional state to be expressed in the aria.

In *La finta giardiniera*, Sandrina sings two such arias, interrupting the action of each act with her emotional outpourings, but also marking the start of the finale in both cases.

\(^{50}\) The latter term has also been used to describe the *rondò* (Rabin, 1997:233-235), which will be discussed later in this chapter.
Two of the best-known dilemma arias are found in *Figaro*: the Countess’ aria “Porgi amor” which opens Act II, and Barbarina’s “L’ho perduta, me meschina!” which opens Act IV. Each also happens to be a cavatina,\(^{51}\) a characteristic they share with Sandrina’s first aria, and each marks, in its own way, the continuation of the drama from the previous act.

Both *Entführung* and *Don Giovanni* start with dilemma arias. Belmont’s aria follows directly after the overture, to which it is linked thematically, while Leporello’s goes even further, flowing directly from the closing bars of the overture without pause.

3.3.5.3 The vengeance/rage aria

As the name of this aria-type suggests, it is one in which a character expresses rage and/or desire for revenge. Although it is usually assigned to “the tormented baritone”, exceptions exist, as will be shown.

Typical of this style is its simple compound time with descending lines of quavers in the vocal part, the key of D major and/or minor, and coloratura passages at the conclusion of opening and closing sections (Hunter, 1991:99, 103, Hunter & Webster, 1997:12-13). Meyer (2003:85-87) adds that these melismatic passages often occur on key words such as *rache*. One also finds the use of melodies that have arpeggiated and augmented intervals, large leaps, wide vocal range, spectacular scale passages, and accompaniments incorporating restless syncopations that cause phrases to lose their regularity, surging chromatic scales, jaggered accents, violent dynamic changes, “swirling wind, stabbing brass [and] seething strings” (Warrack, 2001:180, 262, Meyer, 2003:38). Other typical features are the exploitation of the lower range of the singer’s voice, particularly if it is being sung by a male, and shouts or exclamations on emotive words in the text. While this aria is not a phenomenon particular to the comic genres, they are nevertheless one of the many aria types found in this genre, often in the form of a parody for the buffo

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\(^{51}\) Cavatina is the diminutive of the Italian *cavata*, which means “extraction”, referring to a short eighteenth-century aria that had been “carved out” of the preceding music. It now refers to a relatively simple, through-composed song or aria (Anderson, 1989:106).
bass (Bartolo, in Act I of *Figaro*). One of the factors listed by Warrack (2001:308) as evidence of Weber's attempts to synthesize the styles of *Singspiel*, Romantic opera and German grand opera is the presence of Lysiart's vengeance aria in *Euryanthe* (at the start of Act II).

In the comedies of Mozart, each of his villains has at least one aria of this type, although its use is not limited to them. In *Entführung*, Osmin’s “Solche herglau'ne Laffen”, details the cruel punishments he would like to deal out to Pedrillo in order to assuage his jealousy over Blonde’s love for the latter. Interestingly, this aria (in F major) is one of the few that is not in the key of D major/minor. It also partakes of the characteristics of a catalogue aria. For purposes of expressing the extent of Osmin’s rage, it avoids modulating to the closely related D minor, ranging instead to the more distant key of A minor (Moberly, 1967:28, Osborne, 1978:179). His aria “Ha! wie will ich triumphiren” is in D major and in true buffo form, incorporates an opening shout on “Ha!”, an emphasis and use of melismata on “die Hälse schnüren zu!” (“[your] neck tied shut”), and an exploitation of the lower extremes of his range, going down to the D below the bass stave. Konstanze’s showpiece, “Martern aller Arten” has all the marks of a rage aria, and it exploits both the top and bottom extremes of her range in presenting her resolve to resist Selim’s advances.

All three of the bass characters in *Figaro* are assigned vengeance arias, allowing Mozart to express various types of rage. Bartolo’s aria, in the key of D major is a typical buffo rage aria, using most of the characteristics listed above. The same can be said of Almaviva’s aria, also in D major, except that he employs the high style, and the result sounds therefore serious, rather than comic. Figaro’s aria “Aprite un po’ quegli’ occhi” is the last we hear in this opera and one of the most complex, breaking the mould by being set ironically in E flat major, a key that Webster (2009:29) associates with tender love-sentiments. This multi-faceted rage-vengeance-catalogue aria, brings into public scrutiny the depth of his despair, his deeply disturbed psychological state, and also his disillusioned view of women (Rabin, 1997:235).

The Queen of the Night (*Zauberflöte*) appropriately sings her second aria, during which she is unquestionably in a rage, in the traditional key of D minor,
using all the musical characteristics listed above, and, as she is female, Mozart exploits her neurosis by focusing on the upper extremes of her range – a phenomenon also heard in her first aria.

Other examples include Pizarro’s vengeance aria, “Ha! Welch ein Augenblick!” (Fidelio) which adds the use of “ferocious harmonic progressions” to the style of this type of aria (Warrack, 2001:264) and Caspar’s “Schweig’! Schweig’!” (Freischütz) that one may regard as modelled on Mozart’s music for the Queen of the Night, due to its use of arpeggios, furious scales and the key of D minor (Hunter & Webster, 1997:12-13). In both of these arias the use of shouts is much in evidence, such as in Pizarro’s opening “Ha!”, Caspar’s opening “Schweig’!”, and in both, the word triumph.

3.3.5.4 The rondò

The form of this type of aria is not related to the instrumental rondo, but consists of two, or sometimes three, parts, each of which may be repeated. The first is invariably in a slow tempo and the succeeding parts increase in speed. This aria-type was most often given to the upper-class characters, and placed in the last act of the opera (Durante, 1997:326, Meyer, 2003:88). Its main function was to delineate the intensity of internal conflict as the mood changes from introspection to resolution or hope (Webster, 2009:36-37), and would have been understood by a German nineteenth-century audience as a depiction of a complex or conflicted personality (Meyer, 2003:138). It can be surmised therefore, that this aria is more typically found in a seria opera. Mozart has few designated rondòs in his operas.52 Where they occur in comic works, it is usually at a serious moment. A well-known example is Fiordiligi’s rondò “Per pietà, ben mio, perdonà all’error” (II:viii), a moment of deep anguish, as she expresses her hope that Guglielmo remains true, while the horns in the accompaniment remind us, according to Gardiner (1992), that he is cuckolding her at that very moment. Konstanze’s aria “Martern aller

52 Out of some twenty-two works for the stage, there are only four arias that have the designation “rondò”, excluding the one in Il re pastore (1775) that is in fact designated as “rondeau”, and barely changes mood.
Arten” may well qualify as a *rondò* due its repeated sections and examination of desperation and determination. She is from the upper-class, but the aria does not appear at the typical moment, coming as it does in Act II, and is designated simply as “Aria”. The Countess’ “Dove sono” (*Figaro*) could be classified as a *rondò*, and Donna Anna’s “Non mi dir” (*Don Giovanni*) is labelled as one.

Several appear in the *Singspiele* of the early nineteenth century. The impetus for these seems to be to use the concept of the *rondò* in an attempt to construct a continuous type of musical scene out of something that was already familiar to the audience. Marzelline’s “O wär' ich schon mit dir vereint” and Leonora’s “Abscheulicher! Wo eilst du hin?” both have the required repeated sections and change in tempo and mood. Agathe’s, “Leise, leise, fromme Weise” and Max’s scene and aria “Durch die Wälder” also qualify for the same reasons. None of these, however, is designated as a *rondò* in the score, and each is near the beginning of their respective operas, rather than in the last act.

Donizetti produces a parody of this type right at the beginning of *Don Pasquale* in the aria “Un foco insolito” (“An unaccustomed fever”) sung by Pasquale himself as he imagines the brood of children his new bride will produce.

### 3.3.5.5 Songs and folk song

The Neapolitan comic operas introduced the use of a popular song, or “canzonetta”, sung by one of the humbler characters in the local dialect. These often took the form of folk-song, usually in compound duple time and sometimes in one of the old modes. Pedrillo’s romanza “In Mohrenland gefangen” from *Entführung* is just such an example. Its strophic verses are accompanied simply by pizzicato strings, in imitation of the guitar he is using, and although it begins in B minor, the vocal melody starts in D major, settles onto C major as the sub-dominant for a cadence in G major, then moves through F# minor to the dominant in the home key. Frau Reich’s (Page) “Vom Jäger Herne die Mär ist alt” in *Die lustigen Weiber* suggests similar qualities of
modality in its two strophic verses, although it is accompanied by the full orchestra, imitating hunting horns and braying stags.

In comic operas, these songs are often integrated into the plot, as evinced by such memorable instances as Cherubino’s “Voi che sapete”, Susanna’s canzonetta53 “Deh vieni, non tardar”, and the “Canzonetta sull’aria”, improvised on stage by the Countess in Figaro; the serenade “Deh vieni alla finestra” in Don Giovanni; and the serenade and singing lesson scenes in Barbiere. In French opera the song often took the form of a ballad, usually of several verses, giving the audience information relevant to the drama in the form of a story, or, as Pedrillo’s romance does, by filling in the details of events that precede the opening of the opera. Sometimes these reach back to their folk origins by being given to a secondary or minor character, as in the case of Ännchen’s romance “Einst träumte meiner sel’gen Base” (Freischütz) and both of the Lieder mit Chor, Nos. 6 and 16 for Konrad and Stephan in Hans Heiling. Such items reach as deeply into the Romantic genre as Senta’s ballad in Holländer, which is identifiably cast in the mold of a French narrative song (Dent, 1940:103-104).

Drinking songs were also popular and in Die lustigen Weiber, Falstaff and the chorus open Act II with one based freely on “When that I was but a little tiny boy” from Shakespeare’s The Merry Wives of Windsor (publ.1602).

Casper’s Lied “Hier im ird’schen Jammertal” (Freischütz) is also a drinking song, yet it is one that expresses more than this simple idea. It is a strophic, folk-like song, given appropriately to a secondary character. However, the ornamented orchestral introduction and inter-phrasal tags on two piccolos effectively suggest his evil intentions, and anticipate the eerie orchestral timbres of the Wolf’s Glen scene. Additionally, its use of the key of D major/B minor, the off-kilter effect of the third phrase, and the use of rapid scales and arpeggiated intervals, display qualities associated with the vengeance aria, hinting at the insidious motivation of his actions.

53 This canzonetta is identified as a “pastoral” canzonetta (Rabin, 1997:235). Mozart also uses this form for Cherubino’s “Voi che sapete”) and Don Giovanni’s “Deh vieni alla finestra”.
3.3.6 The exit convention

A convention inherited largely from Baroque opera is one in which a principal character exits after singing an aria that brings the scene to an emotional climax (Branscombe, 1971:103). Texts refer to this as either the exit convention, or the exit aria. Arias that precipitate an exit could represent various qualities ranging from tender to imposing, but as they are designed to be climactic they often employ showy music with a virtuosic quality.

Mozart abides by this convention in many of his operas, although his experiments in constructing more continuous scenes reveal the beginnings of its dissolution. As early in his career as the composition of La finta giardiniera both the exit convention and early attempts at a more continuous development of scenes are found. Figaro’s “Se vuol ballare” follows the convention, but in Così, Mozart and Da Ponte parody it by contriving circumstances that prevent it on two occasions. After Dorabella’s “Smanie implacabili” the two girls are instructed by stage directions to sit dejectedly to one side; Fiordiligi’s aria “Come scoglio” has an attempted exit in the stage directions, foiled by the two men (Goehring, 1995:120, Durante, 1997:317-319). In Zauberflöte, the Queen of the Night observes this convention after each of her two big arias. The other characters are worked dramatically into the longer phases of each section of the opera and observe this convention less often.

3.3.7 A mix of song and instrumental forms

Some dance types became almost universal in their usage, and their styles took on symbolic meanings that were then used in song. It is this type of usage that gives humanity and depth to many of Mozart’s protagonists.

In Figaro, the gavotte, a courtly ballroom dance for a couple, is invoked by Figaro in the second verse54 (or B section) of his “Non più andrai” dismissal of

54 The gavotte begins with the words “Non più avrai questi bei pennacchini”, when the phrasing changes from an up-beat on the fourth, to a start on the third beat of the bar.
Cherubino, whose send-off (to the army) is couched in a melody that consists almost wholly of march-like music, accompanied by an orchestration that features trumpet and trumpet-like fanfares (Allanbrook & Hilton, 1992:148, Monelle, 2006:176).

In Act II, the Count uses gavotte rhythms when confronting Figaro with the letter he had written (the section beginning with the words: “Conoscente, Signor Figaro”). This is a dance in which the step units and the musical units overlap each other, an effective musical symbol of the game Figaro will play with the Count at this juncture by denying his hand in the letter (Allanbrook & Hilton, 1992:147).

Susanna’s “Deh vieni, non tardar” with its six-eight metre and F major tonality is a typical pastorale, but gets quite close to the spirit of the siciliana through its use of dotted rhythm. Barbarina’s “L’ho perduto” is much closer to the wistful spirit often associated with the siciliana, even though it does not use its characteristic rhythmic lilt.

Figaro’s, “Se vuoi ballare”, is discussed only now as it presents a somewhat elevated usage of several rhetorical ideas simultaneously. It is a supremely subtle vengeance aria, also in F major like Pedrillo’s first aria. It is composed in the form of a simple song, but it is a minuet, a dance that belongs to the nobility, not servants. The duple-metre trio section is a contredanse, a form associated with the middle class (Allanbrook & Hilton, 1992:146). So it can be seen that in this cavatina, addressed directly to the audience, Mozart has ingeniously shown several sides of Figaro’s character all at once. In using the aristocratic minuet and bourgeois contredanse as his challenge to the Count’s intention to reinstate his droit du Seigneur, he makes a sardonic comment on the low designs of an ostensibly noble character, and we are informed of his ability to rise to a challenge, and his emotional self-control.

Marcellina also uses the minuet with irony in her aria “Il capro e la capretta” in Act IV, which is actually marked “Tempo di Menuetto”, but here she characterizes the civil mating habits of animals, contrasted, in the middle
section in march-like rhythms, with the crudeness of the human male towards his females.

The two men in Così are sent off to their (supposedly) soldierly duties by the chorus’ “Bella vita militar!” in suitably pompous march-like music.

Leporello and Zerlina use the gavotte in Don Giovanni. Leporello, like Figaro, turns his march-like opening aria into a gavotte when he thinks of his master’s seducing activities inside Anna’s bedroom (“O che caro galantuomo!”). Zerlina seduces her way back into Masetto’s heart using, according to Allanbrook (1992:148), gavotte rhythms in a parody of submission in the first part of “Batti, batti”, before shifting into the compound duple pastorale, recalling gardens and the seductive allure associated with this type of setting.

The polonaise found a role for itself in the comic operas of this century as the polacca, sung mostly by a soprano character (Warrack, 2001:176). Ännchen’s jocular “Kommt ein schlanker Bursch gegangen” (Freischütz) is a particularly good example.

Edgecombe (1998:395) points out the symbiotic relationship between dance and voice before Wagner “changed the face of the musical stage”. In what he calls an aria parlante, he cites several occasions in which composers “drape” a vocal part over an orchestral dance. Instances include the fandango in Figaro, the last scene in Don Giovanni, the Figaro/Almaviva duet “Numero quindici a mano manca” (Barbiere), Adina’s “Della crudele Isotta” (L’elisir d’amore, 1832), and the bass and baritone’s “Vedrai se giovin” (Don Pasquale).

3.3.8 The chorus

The chorus usually plays a far smaller role in comic opera than in opera seria, following the trends set by the Neapolitan and Venetian operas, which did not use it essentially because they could not afford it (Dent, 1940:103). However, when present, it was reserved mainly for spectacular endings that usually coincide with elaborate stage machinery (Donington, 1978:60). Mozart uses it very sparingly in his comic operas from Entführung onwards. None of his
early opere buffe or Singspiele has any type of chorus, but instead use the soloists in the manner of the Baroque soloists-chorus. *La finta giardiniera* offers a typical example in which the Act III finale *coro* is in fact a soloists’ septet.

However, it comes into its own in the Singspiele of other German composers. Lortzing uses it to bolster up the sound and scenic effect more than as a functional element of the story.

Nicolai integrates it into the plot of *Die lustigen Weiber* by incorporating it into the activities of the finales to Acts I and III, and Falstaff’s drinking song in Act II.

The French and Italian nineteenth-century composers of comic operas embraced its potential too, as can be seen in Donizetti’s *L’elisir* and *La fille du regiment* in which it contributes much to setting and characterising the scene. Rossini might not incorporate the chorus quite as closely in his comedies, but its involvement in ensembles and climactic moments is, nevertheless, invaluable.

**3.3.9 Ensemble finales**

Ensembles in comic opera come in two basic types, one which brings the action to a halt, and the other which continues the action, building it musically and dramatically to a climax.

The former is typified by Alessandro Scarlatti’s “ensemble of perplexity”, first used in 1718, in which several characters, faced with a difficult situation, reveal or discuss their thoughts on the matter (Dent, 1940:102, 105), thus bringing the action to a stand-still. “Fredda e immobile” from Rossini’s *Barbiere* is a famous example.

Many examples in the current repertoire do not include the element of perplexity, but use other static situations as a pretext, as in the farewell and betrothal scenes in *Così*. 
The second type has been named variously as an ensemble finale, or the “concerted finale”, an invention of the librettist Goldoni (like his *dramma giocoso*) (Dent, 1940:103, Gutman, 1999:338) that first appeared in the comic operas of Nicola Lagroscino (1698-1765) and Baldassare Galuppi (1706-85). In earlier examples of this type of ending, all the characters had to be moved off the stage without the use of the curtain, as this was only closed after the applause at the very end of the work. These early finales therefore tended to wind down until only the main comic character was left alone on stage (Dent, 1940:103). However, by Mozart’s time, this had been reversed and all characters were gradually assembled on stage, building the animation and tempo of the ongoing music as they joined in the singing, thus moving the drama forward and bringing the act to a climactic ending, on which the curtain would fall. Additionally, he was able to build on the symphonic style of musical development and increasing dramatic intensity as evolved initially by the composers Niccolò Piccinni (1728-1800), Giovanni Paisiello (1740-1816) and Florian Leopold Gassmann (1754-1806) (Grout & Williams, 2003:277-279). Mozart began experimenting with this in *La finta giardiniera* (1750), bringing it to full fruition in *Figaro* and *Zauberflöte* (Gutman, 1999:338-341).

This latter type of ensemble is unlike anything in serious opera. The musical complexity that arises out of the dramatic need to follow the rapidly changing action, and keep coherence of musical form while continuing the drama, without obscuring the text, meant that they were not generally used for the ending of the work when some clarity about the untangling of the plot was needed (Burkholder, Grout & Palisca, 2006:489). The finale of Act II of *Figaro* is probably one of the most celebrated examples of this type of ending. It runs for about twenty minutes beginning as a duet and gradually building up to a septet, structured as a double ensemble for trio and quartet. It begins in E flat major and moves through a wide range of keys back to its starting key. The overall structure falls into three movements, or action-expression cycles as Platoff (1989:195) has described them, each of which has a few subdivisions. It shifts in tempo from an *Allegro*, via *Molto andante*, to a rousing and cacophonous *Prestissimo* that captures, without interruption, every subtlety and twist of the protagonists emotions and connivings (Moberly,

The French *vaudeville*, as mentioned in the sub-section above, was another favourite form for the conclusion of an opera.

### 3.3.10 The fourth wall and moral endings

A dramatic device often employed in comedy involves the breaching of what has been termed the “fourth wall”, an invisible barrier between the audience and the stage.

The most common breaching of the fourth wall occurs at the end of many comedies and comic operas when the audience is addressed directly by one or more of the characters on stage. Shakespeare does it most memorably in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. This often takes the form of a “moral ending” in which the message of the tale is drawn for the benefit of the spectators. Mozart does it at the end of *Entführung*, *Cosi*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Figaro*, and even the final statement by Sarastro and the chorus in *Zauberflöte* can be interpreted as the final moral of that story. *Fidelio*, *Freischütz*, and *Zar und Zimmermann* all end with a presentation of a moral. *Die lustigen Weiber* disguises its moral ending as a chastisement of Falstaff, but the cast then breaches the fourth wall by expressing the hope that the audience has enjoyed their pranks.

The fourth wall can also be breached during the course of a comic opera. The most uncomplicated example of this is Papageno’s aria “Papagena, Papagena, Papagena” (*Zauberflöte*, II:xxix), in which he twice attempts to get the audience to stop him hanging himself.

Susanna addresses the audience directly in her duet with the Count in Act III of *Figaro* when she sings, “Forgive my deceit, you who know what love is” (“Scusatemi se mento, Voi che intendete amor”). *Figaro* also does this during “Se vuol ballare” and again in “Aprite un po’ quegl’ occhi”. Additionally, he is directly addressing the male members of the audience by his injunctions to
them to open their eyes, and to recall what it is they already know (Gallarati, 1997:109, Rabin, 1997:249).

In Così, Guglielmo breaches the wall under similar circumstances in “Donne mie la fate a tanti”. Don Alfonso does the same in the first part of his recitative “Che silenzio, che aspetto” (I:x), and then does it more subtly by watching the amorous lovers in “Fra gli amпиессi in pochi istanti” (II:xii) in the same way that the audience is, and in this way, moving the privacy of Ferrando’s seduction into the public arena (Gallarati, 1997:109, DeNora, 1997:143).

Although Gallarati (1997:109) asserts that this ploy is absent from Don Giovanni, one can see the musical quotes in the last scene, from Una cosa rara (1786) by Martin y Soler (1754-1806), Fra i due litiganti il terzo gode (1782) by Giuseppe Sarti (1729-1802) and his own Figaro, as breaching the fourth wall by inviting the knowing complicity of the audience in accordance with the view expressed by Hunter (1997:190), that any theatrical element which draws attention to its own technical aspects and therefore away from that which it is purporting to express is a breach of this wall. Zeiss (2001:118) points out that musical allusions to other works are a regular feature of opera buffa.55

Mozart’s use of citation in the midst of the horror of this scene brings some levity to it, and simultaneously makes a semiotic commentary on the situation in which Giovanni finds himself:

- The subject of Soler’s opera concerns the fidelity of Lilla, the shepherdess, to her true love, and her resistance to the attempted seductions by the Prince, Don Giovanni. The music quoted is “O quanto un si bel giubilo”, which refers to a festive occasion in which Giovanni’s schemes are undone through parental intervention (in this case, his mother’s), just as (Mozart’s) Don Giovanni’s festivities are

55 Brunswick (1945:30-31) shows that Beethoven cites Mozart’s Zauberflöte in Fidelio, thereby drawing parallels between the comic wooings of Papageno and Marzelline.
disrupted by the parental figure of the Commendatore, who puts an end to his libertine career.

- The Figaro quote is from Figaro’s aria “Non più andrai, farfallone amoroso”, which refers to the end of Cherubino’s days as a promiscuous lover.

In addition to these musical breaches of the fourth wall, Heartz (in Zeiss, 2001:119) cites the use of the words saporito and cuoco in this scene as puns that would have been significant to the audience at the premiere. The first, Giovanni’s “Ah che piatto saporito!” (“Ah, what a delicate dish”) is a pun on the name of the leading soprano in the original production, Teresa Saporiti, while the second, Giovanni’s “Si eccellente è il cuoco mio…” (“My cook is so excellent…”) – to the last reprise of the Figaro quotation – is meant to draw attention to both the harpsichordist in this performance whose name was “Kuchar”, and to Mozart himself as the “cook”, or creator, of the drama. Wordplay is not nearly as common in comic opera as one might expect, but does play a role in Meistersinger, as we shall see later.

3.4 Summary

Theorists, composers and librettists recognised that comic opera had the potential to be the medium by which their societies’ foibles, hypocrisies and inequalities could be exposed in ways that would lead to its betterment. By appropriating to this genre, which came to dominate the eighteenth century only in its last few decades, the conventions of musical and theatrical forms and styles that already existed, a rhetorical system was developed that was understood by the audiences of the day, and which endowed its protagonists with life and humanity. Although such serious intentions formed part of the goal of comic opera, its most obvious perceivable function was entertainment. While audiences were able to recognise themselves in certain comic types,
they would nevertheless be able to distance themselves sufficiently to understand the issues involved without feeling personally affronted.

These conventions were built upon the stock characters that can be traced back to the *commedia dell’arte*, familiar to the audiences through the work of troupes of street players, in which the three levels of society were represented and shown interacting with each other. Humour was developed through an appropriation of styles of music and stage activities that depended upon parody, irony, satire and occasionally, knockabout comedy. Some of these were parodies of styles found in *opera seria*. Others depended on the irony and satire that could be wrought from exposing the inherent weaknesses and contradictions that made up the character of their protagonists, a technique that brought humanness and a sense of reality to the stories.

Wagner would have been intimately familiar with these conventions, due to the knowledge he had of many of the works mentioned in this chapter.

In the next chapter, it will be shown how this knowledge is revealed in his comic masterpiece, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. 
CHAPTER 4: WAGNER’S APPLICATION OF THE CONVENTIONS OF COMIC OPERA

4.1 Wagner’s views on music and drama

The theatre played an important part in Wagner’s upbringing. He participated in, and attended, regular performances of theatre under the influence of Ludwig Geyer (Geier) (1779-1821), his stepfather. A second important influence was his uncle, Adolf Wagner, an associate of E.T.A. Hoffmann and an expert on Shakespeare, the Greeks and the writings of the Romantics (Millington, 1992a:56). At the age of 13 he began writing his own dramas, the earliest being Leubald und Adelàïde (1826-28), for which he intended to compose his own music, leading to his first studies in harmony and counterpoint (Voss & Steidle, 1984). His elder sister, Rosalie (Marbach) (1803-37), became a well-established actress in her own right, and in 1829, played the lead role of the mute character, Fenella, in Auber’s opera La muette de Portici, an opera credited with starting the successful Belgian revolution in 1830, an event that must have held a deep significance for Wagner. Another sister, Klara (Wolfram) (1807-75), was a singer, as was one of his brothers, Albert (1799-1874), with whom Wagner co-produced La muette (Grey, 2003:323). In 1834, Wagner was appointed to the position of music director to Heinrich Bethmann’s theatre troupe. While visiting his sister Klara in Nuremberg in 1835, searching for singers for Bethmann’s troupe, Wagner experienced the late night street brawl that inspired the finale of Act II of Meistersinger (Spencer, 1992:21, Wolf, 2007:121, Grey, 2008:xix).

By the time Wagner began seriously to consider his own role as a composer of opera in the 1830s, opera in Germany was still highly influenced by the Italian and French operatic models. The works of Marschner and Lortzing, while popular and successful, were not equal to the ideals that Wagner had

56 Minna, Wagner’s first wife, also performed this role (Grey, 2003:342).
already begun to express as early as 1834 in the first of his writings, *On German Music*. In this essay he suggests that German composers fail because they are using forms that are inappropriate to the times. In 1843 he writes that the long years of French and Italian influence on the music of Germany has led to a decline in the quality of German dramatic music (Cohen, 2008:53).

This critique of German dramatic music was founded on Wagner’s wide knowledge of the current repertoire. Between 1833 and 1839, he had long-term engagements as conductor and *répétiteur* in Würzburg, Magdeburg and Riga, as well as a few short-term commitments in Berlin, Königsberg, Dresden and Bethmann’s theatre troupe. During this time, he is known to have either rehearsed or conducted a wide range of comic operas by composers from Germany, Austria, France and Italy57, as well as completing his operas, *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot* (Millington, 1992b:69-70, Grey, 2008:xix-xxi).

While it is generally accepted that it took Wagner many years to develop the theories of theatre and music-drama that define his major works, glimpses of these appear in a few of his earliest articles and essays. Writing for Schumann’s *Neue Zeitschrift* in 1834, he espouses the idea that “the essence of dramatic art is to portray the inner nature of human life and action”. During his years as a conductor, at a time when he is known to have been critical of German music, he is on record as declaring that it is only through song that humans can communicate musically, while at the same time acknowledging that the Italian and French operatic forms fail in this because of the lack of a psychological connection between their texts and music. He thought the solution to this problem could be found in a blending of the declamatory style

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57 He is known to have been the *répétiteur* and/or conductor of *Entführung*, *Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Zauberflöte*, *Fidelio*, *Freischütz*, *Barbiere* and *La muette de Portici*, and several other operas by composers such as Giovanni Paisiello (1740-1816), Johann Baptist Schenk (1753-1836), Joseph Weigl (1766-1846), Ferdinand Hérold, (1791-1833), Franz Gläser (1798-1861), Adolphe Adam (1803-56) and Heinrich Dorn (1804-92). While Wagner must have known the works of Lortzing (particularly his *Hans Sachs*) and Nicolai, scant reference to the former’s comic works exists in Wagner’s writings (Millington, 1992b:171), and although Nicolai is listed as his contemporary, he did not rehearse or conduct any performances of Nicolai’s works. However, Cooke (1959:173) reports that Wagner acknowledged the similarity between a melody from *Die lustigen Weiber* and the setting of Sachs’ words “Mein Freund, in holder Jugendzeit” (III:i).
espoused by Gluck and the melodic styles of Mozart (Stein, 1960:12-13). In his essay *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven* (1840), he expresses the theory that by using the voice like an instrument, a far greater depth of expression can be achieved due to the voice’s ability to carry text and express what is in the heart. This, in combination with the vagueness but more primal expressive capabilities of the orchestra, would infinitely transform music’s ability to communicate, enabling it to attain levels of a god-like consciousness (Jacobs & Skelton, 1973:80-81).

While his thoughts on music are always expressed with some clarity in his essay *Opera and Drama* (1850-51), Wagner seems to be deliberately vague as to the meaning of the word “drama” (Deathridge & Dahlhaus, 1984:76). In the aforementioned essay, he traces the evolution of drama through two routes; medieval romances that developed through the mystery plays and the *commedia dell’arte* into Shakespearean drama, and the Greek tragedies that evolved into the Racine-type of drama with its dependence on the Aristotelian Unities and its predilection for relating, rather than depicting, action (Skelton, 1991:2-3), recalling the arguments of Feind and Gottsched.

Wagner’s main premise in this essay is that language and music are the means to an end, which is drama, and that their combination should communicate to the emotions through the senses. Rationality, or the intellect, was to play no part, despite his belief that intellect communicated to feelings via its stimulation of the imagination (Stein, 1960:68, Skelton, 1991:22). His reading of Schopenhauer in 1854 brought gradual changes to some aspects of these ideas so that by the time he wrote his essay *Beethoven* (1870), he considered drama to be that which was observed on the stage – not the language in which it was enfolded, but the mimetic activity perceived. It was considered to be “the visible counterpart of the music”, and the real motivation for his music (Skelton, 1971:132, Deathridge & Dahlhaus, 1984:76-77).

The underlying significance of these theories is Wagner’s conviction that his concept of art would be the salvation of humanity. In his *Plan for the Organisation of a German National Theatre for the Kingdom of Saxony* (1848), he approvingly cites Emperor Joseph II’s dictum that the theatre’s first
duty is to contribute to the elevation of taste and morals (Skelton, 1991:73). In *The Artwork of the Future* (1849/50) he theorizes further that the theatre is the only place in which all aspects of being human (body, heart and intellect) can be brought together to lift man to his highest potential. He argues that by studying perceptively those roles he intends to portray, and by assuming the persona of these characters, an actor would be able to express artistically the highest and most common needs of all humanity and come to embody “the very essence of the species” (Weiss, 2002:210).

As early in his career as *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843), Wagner had already begun thinking of opera as a medium of moral upliftment and all his subsequent operas have strong moral messages: his characters are symbols and his plots, allegories⁵⁸ (Rayner, 1940:3).

One aspect of composition that Wagner struggled with during the “absolute-music” period of his youth was to find his own musical “voice”. He openly admits to imitating convention in the composition of his early operas (those written before *Holländer*), until he fully understood that music takes over where words end and that he was not looking for a melodic expression, but for an expression of the underlying feeling of his poetry. This led to his relinquishing of traditional melodic styles with rhythms derived either from the words or their poetic metre, and investing instead in harmonic characterization which expressed the feeling or emotional undertone of the verse. The importance given to harmonic material meant an increase in focus on the orchestra and its descriptive and expressive capabilities (Weiss, 2002:201). In this form of *Gesamtkunstwerk* every aspect of the work contributed to the essence of the drama – the “melodised” speech, the “verbalized” orchestrations, the stage designs and action, all became an integral part of the drama, not just extraneous pictorial or atmospheric additions: his music

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⁵⁸ A possible reason for this focus on opera might be the intense popularity of the art form among the middle classes around the time of the 1830 Revolution and subsequently. Meyer (2003:166-167) cites Fulkner’s description of how the closure of the Darmstadt opera around 1829-30 roused the ire and impatience of a population that regarded opera as one of the necessities of life.
was determined by the drama, and to some extent even by the scene changes (Dahlhaus, 1989:195-197).

A difference between traditional opera and Wagner's music-drama is that in the former an emotional outpouring is the goal of each moment in the plot, while in Wagner's, the drama is motivated by an interweaving of relationships and the developments that come from these. His development of the leitmotif to its full symphonic potential, with its ability to function as a nodal point connecting all other points in the drama, is a part of this philosophy (Dahlhaus, 1989:197-198, 200, Hatch, 2001:206-207). The unity this brings to his music-dramas, and particularly to *Meistersinger*, in which the opening eight bars of the overture contain the germs of virtually all the other leitmotifs (Magee, 2000:16), will be shown below.59

4.2 Wagner and Shakespeare

Shakespeare had a profound influence on German literature through the translations of Christoph Martin Wieland, Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) and Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853) and through performances by bands of travelling English players. Wagner was exposed to performances of Shakespeare from an early age, and developed a deep love of Shakespeare’s works through his

59 Adorno sees Wagner’s attempts at a totally unified art-form as the enemy of genre art (Adorno, 1981:54, 101), and calls Wagner bourgeois for the liberties he takes with specific facts of history, ignoring the fact that great dramatists such as Shakespeare and Schiller have been equally free with historical fact. The claim that Wagner equates poetic depth with an omission of historical specificity and a full, three-dimensional presentation of human nature, will, it is hoped, be seen not to be true in the case of *Meistersinger*. Further (Adorno, 1981:58), Wagner’s use of *Stabreim* is also called “bourgeoisified pathos” and no discussion is entered into of the role it plays in freeing his libretti from end-rhyme dependence and regular metres, as pointed out by Stein (1960:104-105, 132). The build-up of Wagner’s musical texture is described as a “phantasmagoria” (Adorno, 1981:90) designed to hide the effort Wagner expended in composing, and *Meistersinger* as a “witches’ kitchen” due to the presentation of old Nuremberg in a modern musical idiom (Adorno, 1981:120). It is notable that Gallarati (1997:165) ascribes positive qualities to “bourgeois” aesthetics, defining it as “a naturalistic style emphasizing individual subjectivity, capable of extraordinary expressive and rhetorical immediacy, and located between the artifices of high-flown language and the clockwork mechanics of buffoonish comedy”. When applied to an opera like *Meistersinger* this definition gives Adorno’s labelling of Wagner as “bourgeois” a more positive connotation, corresponding to Wagner’s own aims in this work “of offering the German public an image of its own true nature, so botched for it before; and cherished the hope of winning from the nobler, stouter class of German burghers a hearty salutation in return” (Adorno, 1981:96).
own readings. His lifelong admiration is expressed in his claim that Shakespeare was “my only spiritual friend” (Millington, 1992a:56) and the “mightiest poet of all time” (Ross, 2008:2). Wieland Wagner (1917-1966), the grandson of the composer, calls the second act of Meistersinger “Richard Wagner’s Midsummer Night’s Dream — an enchanted world of elves and goblins” and “a clear expression of Wagner’s veneration of Shakespeare”. Consequently, in his controversial production of 1963, he considered highlighting the farce-like, knockabout qualities of the humour by presenting it on a Shakespearian-like stage (Skelton, 1971:136, 170, 171).

In his essay On the Destiny of Opera (1871), Wagner describes Shakespeare’s plays as “fixed mimetic improvisations of the highest poetic value” (Millington, 1992a:233), an interesting choice of words, when remembering that by this time, Wagner’s ideal for drama was that it should be encapsulated by the mimetic activity one sees on the stage, to which end the music and libretto were but the tools. Some authors make the additional point that Wagner’s use of soliloquy has its roots in Shakespeare (Rayner, 1940:155, Ross, 2008:2).

The influence of Shakespeare on the young Wagner is evident in Leubald und Adelaïde, which draws on a panoply of Shakespearean models, including The Merry Wives of Windsor and A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Dean, 1964:90, Millington, 1992a:320, Nilges, 2007:8-9).

His second completed opera, Das Liebesverbot, is based on Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure (1604). Even though the number of characters and scenes has been greatly reduced, it still manages to show qualities of the plot and farce-like humour found in this dark Shakespearean comedy (Nilges, 2007:14-18).

60 Stein (1960:173), in his belief that many of Wagner’s written theories followed his practices, applies this description to much that is found in Meistersinger as well.
61 Alm (1995:80) records that for the ancient Greeks dance encompassed a wide range of physical activity including mime and gesture, and was used to express both music and poetry as it was sung or recited.
Nilges (2007:20) contends that the influence of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* on *Meistersinger*, while undeniable, has been difficult to quantify because of Wagner’s more mature understanding of Shakespeare and his absorption of the philosophies of Schopenhauer. The connections between Shakespeare and Schopenhauer are somewhat obscured by their opposing philosophies of love, as discussed by Wagner in his essay *On State and Religion* (1864). Shakespeare sees love as a positive value which has redeeming and altruistic qualities, – what Wagner calls the true *Wahn*62 (Millington, 1992b:241, Nilges, 2007:27) – while Schopenhauer views it negatively because of his philosophy of the denial of self – for Wagner the false *Wahn*. Nilges adds that it is by Wagner’s sublimation of Schopenhauer’s philosophy to what he (Wagner) calls “a most wonderful and blessed *Wahn*” that he achieves the intentions behind Schopenhauer, namely a love between the sexes which overcomes man’s egoistic and instinct-driven need for procreation, and that this is crucial to Wagner’s understanding and interpretation of love in Shakespeare’s work and in *Meistersinger*.

Nilges (2007:21-32) highlights the fact that C. M. Wieland’s translation of the play, *Ein St. Johannis Nachts-Traum*, held deep significance for Wagner, and notes the following similarities between the play and *Meistersinger*:

- In Wagner’s first draft of 1845 he names the location of the *Festwiese, St. Johannis* meadow. No such location has ever existed in Nuremberg and thus she views it as a clue to the associations in Wagner’s mind with the play.
- In both works we find the implication of a goblin’s interference in the fate of the lovers and the analogy of the unmatched glow-worm. This is highlighted in Sachs’s “Wahn” monologue, in the idea that these two nature-elements played a role in the midsummer madness that brings Act II to its climax, and is also alluded to by the Nightwatchman in his

62 As the German word *Wahn* has no direct equivalent English meaning, it seems preferable to leave it untranslated. The closest English words (illusion, delusion and mania) (Kopleck & Galloway, 2007:1508) do not accurately reflect the full significance of this word (Lee, 2007:83, Magee, 2000:251).
final statement of Act II: “Bewahrt euch vor Gespenstern und Spuck, / dass kein böser Geist eur’ Seel’ beruck’!”

- Both stories involve a daughter with an unwanted suitor, a situation not found in any of the other sources Wagner used for this story. This links directly, in both stories, to the development of the midsummer evening’s chaos, and the resolution on the next day of her dilemma. Additionally, both of the concluding “wedding” scenes contain a comic interlude (the mechanicals’ “Pyramus and Thisbe” and Beckmesser’s demise).
- Kothner’s roll-call (I:iii) is likened to Quince’s because in both cases, a list of those at the gathering is “pulled out”, and each announces his intention to call the roll in equally clumsy formal language.\(^\text{63}\)

Many of the similarities between the two works concern the principal comic characters Bottom\(^\text{64}\) and Beckmesser.

- Both display an inability to memorize their words correctly. This analogy extends to the clumsiness of their “rehearsals”: Bottom’s over-enthusiastic amateurism which requires Quince’s constant intervention in III:I, and Beckmesser’s serenade in II:vi, which is continually interrupted by Sachs’s hammering.
- Both are likened to a donkey. Bottom is given a donkey’s head and even refers to himself as an ass, while Sachs refers to Beckmesser as *Eselstreiber* (donkey-driver) in I:iii and Beckmesser’s neighbours compare his serenade to a donkey’s braying in II:vi.
- Both express themselves clumsily, through poor poetry in Bottom’s case and poor music in Beckmesser’s.

\(^{63}\) Warrack (1994:87) calls the absence of Niklaus Vogel from this scene a Shakespearean touch, although no such equivalent incident occurs in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

\(^{64}\) In her diary on the 28\(^{\text{th}}\) July 1881, Cosima wrote that their last laugh for the day was often at the expense of the mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, particularly Bottom (called Zettel – a slip of paper – in Wieland’s translation), whom they both thought of as a unique and original creation that only Shakespeare and Nature could invent (Nilges, 2007:31).
• Neither character undergoes a spiritual or psychic transformation through the experience of love.

Like many of Shakespeare’s comedies, *Meistersinger* has an underlying tone of melancholy and ends with an epilogue (Rayner, 1940:155).

An aspect that *Meistersinger* shares with Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* is that each is about the medium in which it is written: *As You Like It* is in part a play about language while *Meistersinger* is an opera about song (Rayner, 1940:149, Warrack, 1994:102-103).

### 4.3 Das Liebesverbot

*Das Liebesverbot* is generally regarded as a juvenile work, but is worth considering as it is Wagner’s only other comic opera, and reveals his attitude to the genre at that time, as well as the composers who had influenced his operatic thinking. In this adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, Wagner turns away from the German models evident in *Die Feen* to French and Italian influences, particularly those of Auber, Hérold, Rossini and Bellini. This is especially evident in the Italianate vibrancy of its melodic lines, and the construction of the finales to each act. In keeping with his own ideas regarding the didactic role of art, Wagner uses the opera to ridicule German Puritanism, reflecting the growing tendency to use comic opera as a vehicle for social commentary. On the whole, however, the work, with its heavy reliance on foreign models, cannot be considered a precursor to *Meistersinger*, which was written after Wagner had become convinced that German art should be based on German models.

*Liebesverbot* also reveals his first sustained use of the leitmotif, derived from the type of remembrance motif used by Weber in *Euryanthe*. German

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65 Shakespeare’s quartet of lovers, for instance, uses a very artificial form of speech as a summation and reconciliation of their problems (V:i:110-118).
66 This term was popularized by Hans von Wolzogen through his guidebook to *The Ring* in 1878, but was never used by Wagner himself (Rayner, 1940:178, Millington, 1992b:235).
influences are not absent, however, as his intention was to create a German synthesis of these various styles, and embryonic elements of his mature style can be seen in his use of the melodic appoggiatura and ornamental turn-figure (Millington, 1992b:71, 149, 274, Warrack, 2001:384, Cohen, 2008:48). As Grey (2008:28) says:

…it seeks to combine Bellinian lyricism, the taut rhythmic energy of post-Rossinian choruses, the supple, discreetly accompanied parlando dialogue of Auber’s comedies, and the whole stylistic palette of Auber’s historical drama La muette de Portici, while infusing all of these with Wagner’s abiding sense of ‘solid German workmanship’.

The overture is of the type used in opéra comique, a loosely structured medley of themes from the opera. It is a number opera, in which is found cavatina-cabaletta solos/duets, freely developed musical forms, dances, massed choruses and ensembles and extended finales all of which incorporate stretta endings. Its style is more closely related to an opéra comique striving towards grand opéra, than the Singspiel that the few bits of dialogue would imply it to be (Grey, 2008:27-32).

4.4 Possible German models for Meistersinger

Wagner would have been aware that Mozart had already begun to undo Metastasio’s separation of comic and serious elements in works like Don Giovanni, Cosi, Zauberflöte, and a little less so in Figaro, where even the Countess’s arias, despite their depth of feeling, never approach the gravitas of the seria styles found in the former three operas. He would have seen too, that the operas were not just simple entertainments, but provided social commentary, and in the case of Zauberflöte, put forward a philosophy and a political ideal. These tendencies would be carried further in works such as Fidelio and Freischütz, both of which are primarily serious. The comic works of composers such as Nicolai and Lortzing did little to advance the development of serious discourse, whether social, political or philosophical within comic opera, but tended rather to revert to the earlier function of the genre as pure entertainment.
Cornelius’ *Barbier* has been mentioned as possibly the first German comic opera to make uninterrupted use of the orchestra, and this may have had the effect of at least showing Wagner that this was possible.

### 4.5 Wagner’s conception of *Meistersinger* as a comic opera

While *Meistersinger* is a comic opera, it shares with all of Wagner’s dramas the serious aims outlined above, and, in the tradition of *Zauberflöte*, *Fidelio* and *Der Freischütz*, is a mixture of the comic and the serious. Lee (2007:83) sees it as consistent with his ideals that he should take a concept like *Wahn* as one of the themes of his comedy, suggesting that a fitting translation of this difficult word is “the irrational”. As comedy was considered the ideal medium through which correctional and moral instruction could be given, and as one of the themes is Sachs’s turning the “irrational” behaviour of the Nurembergers into a more considered, rational form, it is therefore an entirely appropriate theme for Wagner to have chosen. In addition, it is one with the idea of the metaphor of Walther’s character, that his impulsive, unskilled and immature talents need to be refined by the influences of hard work, learning and tradition.

The first draft of *Meistersinger* was sketched in 1845, although two incidents that inspired it occurred some years before. The first incident was an actual street fight that took place in Nuremberg about ten years previously, in which Wagner was one of the instigators. Pretending to be the famous singer Luigi Lablanche (1749-1858) scouting for singers, Wagner and his group of friends enticed a vain but mediocre local talent (Lauermann, a carpenter) into singing an audition for them, fully intending to make a fool of him. This led to something of a brawl that dissipated almost magically, immediately one of the rioters was knocked unconscious (Newman, 1949:298). The second, an assimilation of ideas rather than an incident, developed out of his studies into the history of German medieval poetry and his discovery, while preparing *Tannhäuser* in 1843, of the Minnesinger’s song contest of 1207 (Rayner, 1940:7, 15). Elements of these two events crystallized into the idea in which a rather pedantic “marker” would chalk up errors in an initiate’s song and its
corollary in the scene where Sachs completes a pair of shoes by hammering out the errors in that same marker’s song. Wagner initially was captured by the irony between these two scenes, but later realized that farce, or mirth, would better serve his aim of revealing the hidden depths of life (Newman, 1974:311), and so the street brawl in II:vii of *Meistersinger* ends with folk being doused by buckets of water and scared off by the town crier (Matthews, 1983:7). Warrack (1994:11) suggests that Wagner’s knowledge and recollection of the *Deutsches Sängerkfest* held in Nuremberg in late July of 1861 may have formed part of the inspiration for the final scene of *Meistersinger*.

Wagner’s initial intention of writing a comic opera of modest size is evident in the 1845 draft of *Meistersinger* and in the letters he wrote to his publisher, Schott (Rayner, 1940:65-66, Warrack, 1994:5, Wolf, 2007:122). A few years later, in the 1851 essay *A Communication to my Friends*, Wagner wrote:

> Just as in ancient Athens a humorous satyr-play would follow the tragedy, so there came to me on that pleasure-trip (the stay in Marienbad in 1843) the image of a comic play which could in truth be appended to my Singers’ Contest on the Wartburg as a relevant satyr-play. (Matthews, 1983:11)

In two letters to his publisher in 1861, Wagner promised Schott an “original, thoroughly cheerful, even hilarious subject, with transparent and pithy music of the most cheerful colour” (Wagner, 2000:88), adding further that it would be droll, light and easily staged without the need for a big cast, a heroic tenor or a tragic soprano (Newman, 1949:299). His initial intention was to create a mythical Nuremberg in which the current mid-nineteenth-century ideals of a nation unified against the pressures of political division and industrialization could be expounded. By the time of its final draft in January 1862, it had grown considerably, becoming a metaphor of his philosophy of art, and its role in the regeneration of Germany (Carnegy, 2006:60), and could no longer be called a modest, light work. By 1868, when it appeared in print, it was the
longest score ever to have been published\textsuperscript{67} (Newman, 1949:299, Berger, 1998:158).

The plot of \textit{Meistersinger} is based on the historical character of Hans Sachs, the mastersinger guilds, and the rules that governed their poetry and songs. Many of the details concerning Sachs in this libretto are factual, including the poetic and musical gifts ascribed to him, the loss of his wife and children, his work as a cobbler and his popularity in the community.\textsuperscript{68} Details surrounding his role in this particular story are a fabrication that may be based in part on works by other composers and dramatists known to Wagner. According to a comment in \textit{A Communication to my Friends}, Wagner chose to use the historical character of Hans Sachs because he saw him as “the last manifestation of the artistically creative spirit of the people” (Rayner, 1940:156-157, Wolf, 2007:121). He wanted to demonstrate the importance of art in the nation’s life, and, by revealing weaknesses in human co-operation, to inspire the overcoming of the same (Wolf, 2007:125). Additionally – and it is in this sense that Wagner uses history as parody – he wanted to contrast Sachs’s approach to novelty with the “philistine master-singing burghers, to whose droll, \textit{tabulatur}-poetic pedantry [he] gave personal expression in the figure of the ‘Marker’” (Rayner, 1940:157).

His, and others’, enjoyment of its comicality is expressed in two incidents. In a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, dated 3\textsuperscript{rd} February 1862, Wagner wrote that while working on the text of \textit{Meistersinger}, he had to “stop at times for laughing, and sometimes for crying” (Rayner, 1940:85). As was his custom with all his libretti, he gave public readings to selected audiences and, according to the memoirs of one attendee, Wagner kept everybody well

\textsuperscript{67} Although \textit{Rienzi} is longer, no complete score had at that time been printed (Millington, 1992b:276).

\textsuperscript{68} According to Lee (2007:114), Hans Sachs’ (1495-1576) first wife, Kunegunde Kreuzer and their seven children died in 1560, leaving the 66-year-old Sachs to look after 4 grandchildren. About a year later, he married Barbara Hörserhin (or Harscher, according to some sources), a woman considerably younger than himself, possibly young enough to be considered a child-bride. Lee proposes that the events presented in \textit{Meistersinger} could therefore only have taken place in the midsummer of either 1560 or 1561, as these were the only summers in which Sachs was an unmarried widower. Wagner would have known these details from his reading of Gervinus’ \textit{Geschichte der poetischen National-Literatur der Deutschen}. (Rayner, 1940:12-13, 114, Lee, 2007:109)
entertained with his animation of David’s and Beckmesser’s parts (Rayner, 1940:86).

In composing *Meistersinger*, Wagner had to abandon, to some extent, his theories of musical continuity and unity, and compose in a style contrary to the principles of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as expounded in 1850.\(^{69}\) The drama is about creating song, and song by its very nature is a closed form: songs starting, ending and interrupting the flow of the drama therefore become an essential element of the style and structure of the work. His fairly conventional use of the chorus\(^{70}\) is an obvious example of his writing contrary to his earlier theories on the music drama. Another is the moment of sheer melodic beauty he creates in the quintet, where he unambiguously uses pre-existing comic opera styles in which the action is arrested while each character reflects upon his own thoughts – perhaps the most important antecedent to this ensemble is the quartet in canon in Act I of *Fidelio*. While Wagner maintains the orchestra with its “endless melody” in its role as exponent of the inner drama most of the time, he freely relegates it to the role of an accompanist when song becomes the centre of attention.

Rayner (1940:149) applauds *Meistersinger* as the “Apotheosis of Song” for the freedom Wagner allowed himself in yielding to his instinct for vocal melody, and the balance he achieved between this and dramatic homogeneity. Magee (2000:246) regards *Meistersinger* as “a transmutation of Wagner’s ideas about opera into an opera” and as “the paradigm work of his mature theories as adumbrated in *Beethoven* [1870] and [On] The Destiny of Opera”. It illuminates Wagner’s lifelong belief that art should be for the whole community, and investigates the relationship held between the rules of art, society, tradition, and the place of the individual in this. At some point in

\(^{69}\) Stein (1960:153) shows in great detail how Wagner’s later theories explain and justify the apparent contradictions between *Meistersinger* and his earlier theories.

\(^{70}\) *Meistersinger* is the only one of Wagner’s mature works in which he uses the chorus meaningfully throughout the entire opera: removal of the chorus from *Tristan* and *Götterdämmerung* would not affect the essence of these dramas. In his final opera, *Parsifal*, the choruses of knights and flower-maidens make a meaningful contribution to the drama, but not nearly to the same extent as in *Meistersinger*. 
each act is to be found a discussion and a demonstration of the technicalities involved in setting words to music, much of which is achieved by what appears to be an improvisation of these skills – Walther’s Trial and Prize Songs are typical of this type of presentation, as is Sachs’s hammer-stroke accompaniment to Beckmesser’s Serenade.

In addition, Wagner, despite his avowed intention of disregarding the conventions of traditional opera, engages with a wide range of them in *Meistersinger*.

### 4.6 Conventions of subject matter

#### 4.6.1 Stock characters

The characters in *Meistersinger* are firmly based on the archetypes found in traditional comic opera, which in turn have their origin in the *commedia dell’arte*. This chapter investigates the ways in which Wagner adopted and adapted the conventions of comic opera, as listed in Chapter 3.

In keeping with the traditions of comic opera, Wagner introduces the characters immediately in the role they will fulfill in this work, and in a fixed relationship to each other (Hatch, 2001:199). We know immediately the curtains open, without a word being sung, that Walther and Eva are the lovers, and that Magdalene is Eva’s companion/confidant. David’s entrance establishes him as the comic-servant type, lover of the companion/confidant, and the more senior organizer of the other apprentices. The opening of I:iii establishes quickly the self-conscious, somewhat pompous nature of the masters we are about to meet. This scene singles out Pogner as the father figure, Beckmesser as the one who has unrealistic amorous designs on Pogner’s daughter, and Kothner is shown to be the pompous, box-ticking bureaucrat. Sachs is revealed as the wise one that the others look up to, and who brings things to a happy resolution by his realization that the old must absorb and inform the new, while the new needs to learn from the old.
In typical comic opera fashion, the two contrasting couples, Walther/Eva and David/Magdalene, both face impediments to their betrothal and overcome these with the aid of the leading bass character, Sachs.

In the original 1845 draft, Wagner presented David and Magdalene as a conventionally comedic “below-the-stairs” pair of lovers (Warrack, 1994:78). In the final version they are more closely integrated into the plot, but are used nevertheless to comedic ends, as we shall see. The fact that David is at least one generation younger than Magdalene is viewed by some as a miscalculation on Wagner’s part (Rayner, 1940:169), although it is not without precedent; in Figaro we find a similar situation between Figaro and Marcellina, and between Cherubino and the Countess, and in Die lustigen Weiber, between Anna and those her father has chosen for her. In all these cases it serves to establish the lesser (because to audiences of the time slightly ridiculous) nature of the attachment, when compared to that of the principal couple.

To compliment and reveal the skills of the wise character, there needs to be a character whose actions upset the status quo and whose weaknesses are easily exploited for comic effect. Examples include Count Almaviva in Figaro, Doctor Bartolo in Barbiere, Donizetti’s Don Pasquale, Van Bett in Zar und Zimmermann and Falstaff in Die lustigen Weiber. Beckmesser fulfils the above-mentioned functions by his obsessive dependence on the rules of the guild and his theft of Walther’s poetry, all in pursuit of his ludicrous determination to marry Eva. Additionally, it is in the contrasting of Beckmesser and Walther that Wagner plays out one of the main themes of his comedy: the tension between tradition and the creative spirit in art, in which Beckmesser satirizes a stubborn adherence to tradition and rules, and Walther represents the innovation and drive of the young artist, resistant to restraints.

However, David and Beckmesser are not simple, two-dimensional buffa types. They reveal themselves as more fully developed characters through their actions and words, proving that Meistersinger not only explores the comic in
human nature and behaviour, but also examines the humanity of its protagonists, as Matthews (1983:14) points out.

While the essential role of each character remains the same for the duration of the opera, and each reaches its expected denouement, Sachs, by virtue of his deeply considered philosophizing and the development of his relation to Eva brings elements of serious opera and progression of character into the work. His suffering teaches him to find joy in others and gives him the strength of his principles (Grout & Williams, 2003:466). He is never presented as a comic character, although elements of comicality do emerge in some of his scenes.

This dichotomy between comedy and seriousness is further developed and given meaning if one traces Sachs's Distress\(^\text{71}\) as it appears in some odd-seeming and unexpected places in the score, such as the final cadence of each of Walther's Stollen, as Sachs teaches him how to make a master song (III:ii), and his Abgesang\(^\text{72}\) to Eva; at the start of Eva's paean of thanks just before the quintet (III:iv), and Sachs's response to the "Wach' auf" hymn (III:v). On a few occasions just the opening harmony colours Sachs's responses, as when he greets Walther (III:iv), and hands Eva over to Walther. These reveal an ever-deepening sense of the darker side to the difficulties life can offer. However, one of the beauties of Meistersinger is that these difficulties, as experienced by Sachs in reaching the point where renunciation of Eva is possible, are continually overshadowed by the essential optimism of the whole work. The triumph of restraint, discipline, rationality, and the health and harmony of art, metaphorically represent the same qualities needed in human goodness if a society is to be able to adapt well to the changes of life and the chances it offers (Warrack, 1994:96, 110), qualities that Beckmesser patently lacks.

\(^{71}\) Leitmotifs will be shown in small capitals. See Addendum 2 for this motif, and footnote 106 for a discussion on the use of this name.

\(^{72}\) Lee (2007:112) suggests that for the mastersingers, the word Stollen meant support, as pedes does for the troubadours, so that the use of two Stollen would be like two columns supporting the Abgesang.
While the commedia dell’arte represented a two-dimensional, knock-about form of comedy, its plots nevertheless drew on relevant topical and social issues. Warrack (1994:90-91) makes the point that the questions posed by events in Meistersinger reveal it to be a serious comedy that entertains while challenging the audience to consider various social, ethical and moral values. This has antecedents in Wagner’s discussion on the disunity between the individual who desires to follow his natural instincts, and the need in society for an established and controlled order, found in the second part of his essay Opera and Drama (Skelton, 1991:10). It is one of the central themes in Meistersinger that finds acute expression in the “Wahn!” monologue, where the audience is presented with a sharply focused view on the foolishness of our existence. It is in the resolution of this dilemma that Meistersinger shows itself most clearly as a counterpart to Tristan: Tristan and Isolde choose to follow their instincts, renouncing their place in the social order and embracing delirium and death, while Sachs chooses to adhere to the social order, renouncing his instincts and embracing wisdom and life.

4.6.2 Botanical symbolism

Nature and flowers play a variety of roles although the overt references to the sensual and sexual links between flowers and women, common in comic operas, are not as immediately perceivable.

Flowers, fruits, herbs and other types of plants feature prominently in David’s catalogue aria “Tön und Weisen”, although in this case they are merely references to types of melody and poetry used by the mastersingers.

Nevertheless, two scenes take place outside:

- Act II occurs in the streets of Nuremberg with trees and bushes marking important points of stage action and having semiotic references to the same. The elder tree outside Sachs’s house was
thought, in folklore, to keep evil spirits away, and the aphrodisiac qualities of its scent mingled with the memory of Walther’s Trial Song feature prominently in his aria “Wie duftet doch der Flieder” (Lee, 2007:113-114). The linden tree, outside Eva’s house, was associated with the goddess of marriage, Freia.

- The dénouement of Act III takes place in a meadow, recalling the final scenes in the garden in Figaro and in the forest in Die lustigen Weiber in which all of the resolutions occur.

Additionally, the poetic content of Walther’s dream so closely weaves together images of Eva, nature and a garden, that Beckmesser’s impression is that of a biblical song. While it should be remembered that this was the Mastersinger’s preferred type, his inability to understand Walther’s poetry in any other context reveals the level of his bias and rigidity of thought.

4.6.3 Supernatural intervention

The influence of the supernatural in the life of the human protagonists is gently parodied on two occasions through the character of Walther. The first is presented in III:ii, in the dream-like inspiration of Walther’s Prize Song. Wagner has ingeniously devised a three-prong parody in this event. Schopenhauer believed that while most dreams could not be remembered upon awakening, the “light morning-dream” was accessible to the conscious mind (Warrack, 1994:33-35). While dreaming is a natural human activity, its timely occurrence here amounts to the intervention of the supernatural in a difficult situation, and its function is to release Walther from a situation over which he has limited, if any, control. The release from a tight spot at the last minute is, of course, also a convention of the rescue opera not dissimilar to

73 The elder tree was associated with respect and medicine, and was thought to offer protection from witches and spirits. It was also associated with a god whose actions were difficult to predict or anticipate and therefore it was unlucky to cut it down. Only its berries and flowers could be taken (Dumas, 32-33).

74 Nuremberg took an ancient linden tree as its symbol, and believed that these trees brought on enchanted sleep (Lee, 2007:113). It was traditional to present a beribboned sapling to the house of one’s beloved (Dumas, 32-33, Becker, 1994:178-179). The use of the name “linden” is preferable to the more commonly used “lime” in order to more accurately identify this tree as belonging to the genus tilia.
the *deus ex machina* in Greek tragedies. So here, in one stroke, Wagner parodies Schopenhauer, supernatural intervention and the release from a tight spot, while simultaneously appropriating the Romantic trend for the use of botanical images, mentioned earlier. There is also a little more to this incident, as we shall see below.

The second parody occurs later in the same act, concerning the arrival of Walther’s best suit of clothing in time for the *Festwiese* and his betrothal to Eva. Wagner makes no reasonable attempt to explain this;\textsuperscript{75} instead, Sachs tells us simply that –

\begin{quote}
Eu'r treuer Knecht / fand sich mit Sack und Tasch’ zurecht: / ... / Ein Täubchen zeigt’ ihm wohl das Nest, / darin sein Junker träumt’.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Your faithful servant / found his way here with your pack and bag: / ... / A little dove must have shown him the nest / in which his master was dreaming.
\end{quote}

### 4.6.4 Wooing and disguises

When Beckmesser sings his Serenade in II:vi, it is to Magdalene disguised as Eva, whom David recognises, but not Beckmesser. This leads to David’s jealous attack on Beckmesser and the free-for-all that brings Act II to its climax. The whole is strongly reminiscent of the serenade scene in *Don Giovanni*, as it employs many similar comic conventions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Don Giovanni</strong></th>
<th><strong>Meistersinger</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Servant (Leporello) disguised as master (Giovanni) to free up the latter for an amorous rendezvous</td>
<td>Servant (Magdalene) disguised as mistress (Eva) to free up the latter for an amorous rendezvous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working-class girl at window (Elvira’s maid) serenaded from below by a man of a higher social order (Giovanni)</td>
<td>Working-class girl at window (Magdalene) serenaded from below by a man of a higher social order (Beckmesser)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of a plucked instrument (mandolin) to accompany the serenade</td>
<td>Use of a plucked instrument (lute) to accompany the serenade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{75} Newman (1949:392) contends that this reference to a dove is a remnant from one of Wagner’s earlier drafts of the Morning Dream Song. He adds that it also has a connotation in German as a term of affection, thereby implying that it is Eva who directed the servant to Sachs’ home.
The serenade is a strophic song of two verses

The serenade is a strophic song of three verses

The supposed serenader (Leporello) receives a drubbing

The serenader (Beckmesser) receives a drubbing

4.6.5 Dishonesty of the virtuous

In *Meistersinger*, each of the main characters has a moment when they withhold their true thoughts, or speak less than “the whole truth”:

- One can assume that Walther’s desire to become a *meistersinger* arose out of his meeting Eva, and was not, as he claims in I:iii something he “forgot to mention” to Pogner the evening before.
- Twice, Sachs is less than completely truthful in his interaction with Beckmesser:
  - In I:iii, Sachs raises the rule that could have prevented Beckmesser being the Marker of Walther’s Trial Song, due to the fact that he and Walther would be co-competitors for the title of Mastersinger and therefore for Eva. It would have been fairer of Sachs to raise this objection before Beckmesser had mounted the marker’s podium. Sachs knew this rule, but brought it up only once Beckmesser had revealed his bias.
  - In III:iii, Sachs, knowing that Beckmesser has pocketed Walther’s poem, allows him to make his own choice between stealing it outright or using it with the complicity of Sachs, whom he presumes to be the author. (Weikl, June & September 2005). Sachs never gives him cause to think that the words, written in Sachs’s hand, are not actually Sachs’s creation, and thus leads him into the trap of competing against Walther with the latter’s own poem (Newman, 1949:399).

There are other incidents of this kind, and each will be discussed in the section dealing with the relevant character.
4.7 Stylistic conventions

In this work that Lee (2007:34) calls “Wagner’s answer to his critics”, we find stylistic elements that are unique in Wagner’s œuvre, such as melodies that are easily remembered and singable due to their diatonic nature and folk-like quality, a simplicity of idiom despite occasional ventures into fugal and contrapuntal textures, and regular, balanced phrases. It is in these qualities that Meistersinger also shows its historical connection, its rustic nature and its Germanness76 (Grout & Williams, 2003:466-467). Additional points that reveal its historical connectedness are the use of an actual Meistersinger melody (measure 41 of the overture), a parody of their “Blumen” or melodic ornaments in Beckmesser’s songs, and a paraphrase of Hans Sachs’s poem (the chorale “Wach’ auf!” in III:v) (Grout & Williams, 2003:465). These help to situate the work in the “real world”, as opposed to the legendary and mythological realms of Wagner’s other operas.

4.7.1 A move towards reality

There is little doubt that Wagner regarded the style of comic opera as more realistic than that of serious opera. This is evinced by his instructions that the realistic exchange between Siegfried, Hagen, and Gutrune, in Götterdämmerung II:ii, be performed as “a kind of lively conversation on the stage … wholly in the style of comic opera” (Carnegy, 2006:94).

This naturalistic style of comic opera became a notable feature of Meistersinger, particularly in relation to the rest of Wagner’s œuvre, as noted by Wieland Wagner:

76 With respect to the harmonic language that Wagner uses in Meistersinger, Carl Dahlhaus writes: “The impression that diatonicism has been reinvested with its old, ‘classical’ rights is completely illusory: what is denied is always present, even though unexpressed. Chromaticism has become the normal language of music, the rule to which diatonicism is now the exception, conspicuous because unusual… The diatonicism of Die Meistersinger is somehow dreamlike, not quite real in the 1860s; the style of the work is less a restoration than a reconstruction, it is ‘secondary’ diatonicism, in the sense of Hegel’s ‘secondary’ nature.” (Deathridge & Dahlhaus, 1984:102-103, Warrack, 1994:99).
*Die Meistersinger* calls for a certain naturalism, imposed by a historically fixed time, a geographical place and human beings of flesh and blood (Skelton, 1971:133).

In *The Art of the Future* (1849), Wagner wrote:

> The stage setting that is to convey to the audience the picture of human life must also, to ensure a full understanding of life, aim to represent a living picture of Nature, only within the bounds of which the artistic human being can come to see himself fully (Skelton, 1991:100).

This view seems to have changed little in the nineteen years before the premiere of *Meistersinger*, if we consider Wagner’s insistence that it be performed on solid, three-dimensional sets. This was a radical departure from current trends in Germany at a time, when the illusion of stage-depth was created by layers of flat, painted scenery (Baker, 1998b:247-248, Carnegy, 2006:61). This underlines the realistic tone of the work, supporting also Wagner’s contention that man was not a species found in the natural world by accident, but an integral part of nature. When compared to Wagner’s other operas, this echoes the tendency to realism in comic opera.

The move away from fixed forms that one sees in the mature music-dramas of Wagner is associated with his aim to present a naturalistic, psychological flow of thought. This freedom of form is not generally found in traditional comic opera, in which strict forms and a general sense of rhythmic verve are more characteristic, and his use of it in *Meistersinger*, particularly in the music of the more serious protagonists, is another indication of the qualities of realism and humanness in this work, which will become more apparent in the discussion of each character below.

### 4.7.2 Vocality

In the distribution of voice types Wagner conforms closely to comic opera traditions. Sachs and Beckmesser form a contrasting pair of basses, while David and Walther present a contrasting pair of tenor (rather than soprano)
roles. The two female roles consist of a principal soprano (Eva\textsuperscript{77}) with a mezzo (Magdalene) as her confidant. However, this latter character blends two of the traditional roles in that she is the confidant to the first pair of lovers, and lover in the second pair – a role that would normally have been taken by the soubrette soprano. The only other characters, Pogner and Kothner, have secondary roles and both are basses.

While Wagner uses a vocality similar to (if slightly lighter than) that in his other works for most of the characters, Beckmesser, as the main comic character, often sings in a rapid parlando style similar to that used in comic arias by composers such as Mozart, Rossini and Lortzing. His very first utterance in the score is an example of this:


\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Ex1.png}
\caption{Beckmesser's parlando.}
\end{figure}

It should perhaps also be mentioned that there are times when Wagner uses different types of music in the course of this opera. Walther's explanation of himself to the guild masters in "Am stillen Herd", is not meant to be perceived as song, it is speech intensified by music – the masters perceive it as a spontaneously composed poem. His Trial Song is the only true song in this scene (Warrack, 1994:104).

4.7.3 Emotional detachment

The fact that Wagner chose, in this work, not to give his lovers music of great emotional intensity, is indicative of his aim to maintain a lightness of touch. This approach reflects the fundamentally comic nature of the work, and enables the audience

\textsuperscript{77} It is notable that Eva is closer to the full-bodied lyrical soprano used by Mozart for characters such as Elvira (\textit{Don Giovanni}) and the Countess (\textit{Figaro}) than to the dramatic soprano used by Wagner in his other late works.
• to not take too much moral umbrage at the possible effects of Pogner’s gamble with Eva
• to find humour in the street-brawl
• to laugh at David and Beckmesser, who, while presented as fully developed characters, most often represent the lighter side of Wagner’s drama
• to accept the unlikely, such as Walther’s overnight success, the effectiveness of Magdalene’s disguise, Beckmesser’s inability to make a successful song despite his knowledge and position in the guild, and the mistaking of the Nightwatchman for the police, not once, but twice in the same act.

4.7.4 Word-play

Wagner’s love of puns is one of the first comic devices to feature in the text. It appears in the very first scene at the confusion of the apprentice David with Saint David, patron of the mastersinger guild; in III:i when David realises that Johannestag is also Hans Sach’s Tag; and the repeated use of “Sachs” in rhymes with wachs, playing on the double meaning of “to wax” as used in the sense of expanding, and the properties of the substance itself which strengthens the grip of Sachs’s thread on the shoes he makes and prevents it from slipping (and by extension, on the plans he initiates). The names of some of the mastersingers hint at further use of a play with words – Vogelgesang (bird-song), Nachtigall (Nightingale), and the wonderfully hissing quality of the name Sixtus Beckmesser and its association, literally and metaphorically, with a knife (messer). During the role-call of the guild masters, some of them respond with puns on their names: Hermann Ortel replies with “Immer am Ort” (“Always in his place”), Conrad Nachtigall

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78 Hauer (1991:55-57) provides an extensive list of puns found in The Ring such as Loge and “Lohe” (flame), Mime and “Memme” (coward), Rheingold and “Reines Gold”, and the “gute Runen” that Siegfried sees in Gutrune’s eyes. Hauer’s list includes many more.
answers “Treu seinem Schlag”, a play on an older German use of the word Schlag in relation to bird-song.79

4.7.5 Musical burlesque

Wagner even uses burlesque of a type found in Zar und Zimmermann at the ending of Van Bett’s aria (No.4) when the last note (low F) of a short, rather pompous cadenza is played by bassoon while the singer – on instruction in the score – opens his mouth in a pretence of singing this note (Lortzing, 35). We find a similar type of burlesque in Beckmesser’s dogmatism, his C#-F# ending, his serenade, the mistuned lute, his misunderstanding of Walther’s poem, and Walther’s “unintentional” modulation, all of which will be dealt with in detail later.

4.7.6 The fourth wall

There are several instances in which Wagner breaches this invisible barrier, but most of these are better seen in the section dealing with the relevant character. However, one incident which is closely related to the idea of burlesque, is that of having the tailors sing of their ancestors’ use of disguise in saving the city of Nuremberg with a parody of the opening phrase of “Dintanti palpiti” from Rossini’s Tancredi80 (Newman, 1949:406, Wagner, 1983:473).

4.8 Formal conventions

While it was Wagner’s avowed determination to abolish the forms of earlier opera, an ideal he applied to all his works from Holländer onwards, Meistersinger is more like a traditional opera than any of Wagner’s other works since Lohengrin – the arias and solos of Walther, Beckmesser, Pogner, David, Eva and Sachs fall very naturally into its structure, as do the overture, preludes, choruses and ballet, as well as the purely operatic quintet which

79 See, for example, the nursery rhyme Wenn die Nachtigalen schlagen (When the nightingale sings).
80 When Tancredi sings this aria, he too is in disguise in order to save Sicily.
does not further the action in any way. In addition, the clarity of musical form is an expression of the essential musical nature of this opera, which represents the closest possible union of music, character and drama, as will be shown below.

The opera as a whole is given a Bar-form structure in that Acts I and II are parallel structures in which Act II parodies the corresponding scene from Act I (Rayner, 1940:152), and they form the two Stollen to the Abgesang of Act III (Grout & Williams, 2003:467). This not only creates a link between the macrostructure and individual songs, but can also be viewed as an elaborate joke on the composer’s part – the opera as a whole being Wagner’s master-song on the mastersingers.

As noted in the previous chapter, comic opera does not normally offer many opportunities for the orchestra to be in the limelight. However, Wagner’s concept of the orchestra as psychological commentator on the drama gives it far greater importance than it has in a traditional comic opera.

4.8.1 The overture

Meistersinger is the only one of Wagner’s music dramas to open with an “independent” overture, a form Wagner had earlier denigrated as an indication of the composer’s vanity. All his other operas after Tannhäuser use a type of introduction that is more prelude-like in style, even if based on material from the opera. While it is linked to the opening chorus in the operatic score, it was written and given public performances in 1862, before Wagner had even completed the text of the opera (Newman, 1949:311, Skelton, 1991:63-64). Nevertheless, it is fully integrated with the opera itself, presenting motifs associated with the mastersingers, the song competition love and the comic.81 Furthermore, the Act III finale, from the point when the mastersingers enter, is really an expanded and varied restatement of the overture (Grout & Williams,

81 Motifs that appear in the overture include MASTERSINGERS, BANNER, ROMANCE, COMMUNITY OF ART, LOVE’S PASSION, LOVE’S IDEAL, MOCKERY, as well as a variant of SPRING’S BEHEST (Rayner, 1940:189).
This certainly serves to integrate the overture into the opera, giving it an important cyclic function in the over-all structure.

It presents the motifs as themes in a sonata-form structure, rather than as a loose sequence designed to prepare an audience for the mood of the opening (Rayner, 1940:183), as Lortzing does in *Zar und Zimmermann*. The three sections common to sonata form, exposition, development and recapitulation, are easily identifiable, and occur with appropriate modulations away from and back to the home key of C major. As mentioned previously, many of the events in Act II are parodies of parallel events in Act I. The overture shows this relationship in that the themes of the middle section parody those of the first (Grout & Williams, 2003:467). Newman (1949:314) singles out one event as a sure indication of its comic nature, and that is the comic trill played, not just by the basses, but particularly that it is played on the tuba as well (bar 172). Magee (2000:249), in agreement with sources unquoted, suggests that it bears some resemblance to a Lisztian symphonic poem, as it shares with a classical symphony the qualities of an *Allegro*, *Andante*, *Scherzo* and *Finale* compressed into a single movement, reflected in the overture’s first subject, second subject, development, and reprise.

Much has been written about the fact that there is no “mention” of Sachs in the overture. This applies equally to Beckmesser. And further, while the overture singles out the mastersingers, some comic activity and Walther, it also has the unique status in Wagner’s œuvre of being unrelated to the central issues of the drama (Newman, 1949:319, Warrack, 1994:83-84, Lee, 2007:13).

The prelude to Act III, which is a vivid description of Sachs’s character and psychological state at that moment, is an outstanding instance of Wagner’s use of the orchestra as the carrier of the inner action of the drama. It is not

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82 The famous trill for the whole orchestra in *Falstaff* (1893) might owe something to this one, as *Meistersinger* was performed in both Milan (1889) and Turin (1892) in the years preceding Verdi’s comic masterpiece.

83 See also the highly detailed analysis of this prelude by Puri (2002:212-236).
the only occasion when it does this, as we shall see later, but it is one of the less graphic or mimetic instances.

4.8.2 Dances and instrumental forms

The march-like MASTERSINGERS, which forms the principal theme of the overture, returns as a march proper in the Festwiese, announcing the arrival of the masters, and signalling the start of the finale and extensive working out of the overture material. The opening notes of the trumpet call announcing the beginning of the Festwiese, and woven intermittently through the festive music, quotes an old Prussian cavalry signal Remette le sabre (Monelle, 2006:168).

Dances are rare in Wagner’s œuvre. The two best-known instances are the sailor’s dance in Holländer and the contentious inclusion of the Bacchanal in Tannhäuser. Newman (1945:III,75) records that the little Wagner had to say in Opera and Drama about the use of choreography as a dramatic expression, reveals his essential lack of experience in this medium. In Meistersinger, dance features as a link between III:iv & v. As none of the other late works contain dances, and as they appear not to have formed part of Wagner’s concept of the Music Drama, their use here probably derives from the conventions of comic opera.

4.8.3 The aria

In keeping with the conventions of comic opera, Wagner deploys a wide variety of aria forms and types, from the simplest strophic form to those that have no identifiable traditional structures because they take their form from the text or the drama. As these have more relevance to the delineation of the character of his protagonists, they will be discussed below.

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84 The Venusberg scene in Tannhäuser was fairly brief in the original (1845), and was extended into the Bacchanal for its performance in Paris (1861).
85 An exception might be made for the Flowermaidens in Parsifal.
86 Wagner’s historical survey of dance in The Art-Work of the Future is inaccurate and tendentious, according to Stein (1960:62).
Of more general interest is the fact that the original mastersinger type of Barform is found in all of Walther’s songs. Beckmesser, however, creates a version that is pedantically correct, but artistically poor, in his Act II Serenade (Grout & Williams, 2003:466).

An aspect of Meistersinger that may be difficult to prove, yet bears acknowledgement, is the number of arias in this opera, compared to Wagner’s other later works. One reason for this difficulty would be the definition of what it is that makes an aria. If one were to restrict the definition of an aria (or a song) to an individual utterance in closed form, which momentarily stops the flow of time and/or dramatic development, then few of Wagner’s later works have any. Almost all of the protagonists in the Ring, Tristan, Meistersinger and Parsifal have long speeches, many of which involve narration, instruction, argument and dialogue, but few of which are presented as soliloquies. Nevertheless, in these works, some items could be viewed as arias, but in the Ring, Tristan and Parsifal these seldom add up to more than one or two per character per work. Meistersinger, however, presents numerous moments strongly resembling arias. In Addendum 1, these have been divided into four convenient, if not always traditional, groups: those that appear to be true songs; closed forms that have a well defined beginning and ending; those “disguised” arias/songs that seamlessly emerge out of, and merge back into, the “endless melody” of Wagner’s orchestration, and monologues. The 34 instances listed show clearly how numerous are the incidents of solo song in this opera.

4.8.4 Ensembles

Ensembles represent a musical style that Wagner had essentially rejected as unnatural. Nevertheless, instances appear in Holländer, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, and twice in the Ring.87 In Tristan, “the most uncompromising expression of Wagner’s ideas” (Skelton, 1991:63), a duet is needed in order

87 The duet of Siegfried’s vow of brotherhood with Gunther, and the trio ending Act II in which Gunther, Hagen and Brünnhilde agree that Siegfried must die.
to reveal the oneness of the lovers and Wagner did not shy away from its creation in this context. By the time Wagner came to compose *Meistersinger* he felt he had progressed beyond the rules that had governed his previous works and now had the sense of mastery in his craft to give free reign to his creative instincts (Rayner, 1940:146, 238, Skelton, 1991:63). Unlike his other late works, where ensembles are restricted to subsidiary and uniform groups, *Meistersinger* also features ensembles for the principals. As in *La finta giardiniera, Entführung, Figaro, Zauberflöte, Die lustigen Weiber* and *Zar und Zimmermann*, the first appearance of the principals involves ensemble. As in *Tristan*, the use of ensemble is motivated by, and is used to resolve, the dramatic situation.

There are not many ensembles purely for the principals in *Meistersinger*. The opening scene ends in a brief trio in canon for Walther, Eva and Magdalene. Walther vigorously affirms his intention to woo and win Eva, while she basks in the declaration of his love, affirming her complicity by repeating his melody in canon; and Magdalene attempts, unconvincingly, to persuade her to leave. One may surmise that Magdalene’s intentions are not inimical to the lovers, and her efforts merely formal, as she also employs fragments of their canonic material and COURTING (Wagner, 1983:36-37).

The quintet, like the trio, can be regarded as an instance in which the opera turns from an external view of its actions to an internal one. But unlike the trio, it brings the action (and the progression of time) to a momentary standstill, recalling the way the four-part canons function in *Così* and *Fidelio*. Sachs has come to terms with his renunciation of Eva; Eva and Walther are fully united; David has been promoted to journeyman and can now marry Magdalene. So essentially all the threads are now poised for their final resolution. The quintet is not canonic, yet each pair of lovers is united by having their own matching music and words, while Sachs has music that

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88 See, for instance, the Rhine Maidens, Walkyries, Norns and Gibichungs in the Ring, or the Flower Maidens in *Parsifal*. 
clearly differentiates him from each pair.\textsuperscript{89} It comes at the climax of the drama and serves musically to highlight the moment (Warrack, 1994:126).

Other examples of ensemble singing involve the principal soloists with larger groups, usually the ten other mastersingers, in music that most often represents a heightened form of speech. Most of I:iii, prior to the finale, represents music of this type, reflected in the essential independence of the mastersinger’s vocal lines from the orchestra’s motifs and textures, as we shall see.

The full ensemble that ends Act II represents the entire community of Nuremberg and here the orchestra weaves their snippets and interjections into a seamless three-part texture.

The use of ensemble and set numbers in \textit{Meistersinger} has been criticized as contrary to Wagner’s theories. However, his later writings show a move towards greater flexibility with regard to those earlier theories from the 1850s (Stein, 1960:153, 173). The plot of \textit{Meistersinger} deals with the writing of songs, a number of which are included as set pieces in the score, and so the use of a quintet and larger ensembles that bring his acts to a grand conclusion is not really out of place, particularly in relation to the traditions of comic opera. Wagner’s use of them equates to the convention of the concerted finale, in a blend of the later Mozartian model with the earlier Scarlattian type. In the first two acts, Wagner builds the endings by the gradual augmentation of his forces, only to have them flee the stage abruptly, leaving just one person on whom the curtains close – an emotionally despondent Sachs at the end of Act I and a physically battered Beckmesser at the close of Act II.

\footnote{The set-up closely parallels the Act I quintet in \textit{Così}, where Don Alfonso comments on the two pair of lovers managed by him.}
4.8.5 The chorus

One can sense Wagner’s developing freedom from his earlier theories, by the inclusion of the chorus. As it was needed so it was given its place, large or small, and treated according to its role and function within the drama as evinced by its appearance in Götterdämmerung, Tristan and Parsifal. In Meistersinger it is representative of the community and morality of Nuremberg, and so it finds its place in hymns, riots and festivities, more representative of the elements of traditional grand opera, than of comic opera.

The chorus is given a far more functional role in Meistersinger than in most comic operas. The overture flows directly into a hymn sung by the community, from which many of the protagonists will emerge. Its involvement from here onwards remains central to all of the dramatic climaxes and outcomes. Its vaudeville-like comments on Walther’s Prize Song (III:v) reflect Wagner’s belief in a democratic right for the people to demonstrate their ability to show accurate judgment and perception, an echo of similar sentiments expressed in Das Liebesverbot (Grout & Williams, 2003:466, Cohen, 2008:50, McClatchie, 2008:139).

The apprentices belong to this group, but due to the way Wagner uses them, they will be discussed separately.

4.8.6 The ending

According to Warrack (1994:109) the ending of Meistersinger is one of true comedy in which all the loose ends have been tied up and all the principal parties sent happily into their futures, including the audience. The fact that the miscreant gets his/her just desserts is, of course, also a convention in comic opera, as can be seen in works such as Don Giovanni, Zauberflöte and Die lustigen Weiber.

90 It is notable that, as in Tannhäuser, to which it forms the comic counterpart, the Meistersinger overture uses as principal theme a march that will later be sung by the chorus.
The preceding information reveals some of the more general similarities between *Meistersinger* and the traditions of comic opera. However, Wagner’s text and music includes many other details that reveal his deep understanding, not only of those fundamental elements which the average audience member would have expected to find in a comic opera of the nineteenth century, but of the many less obvious and possibly less consciously expected conceits. The remainder of this chapter will comprise of a discussion of these, most of which contribute in some measure to the overall comicality of this opera. Many of these conventions have no essential connection to the drama, but show Wagner’s indebtedness to the traditions of the genre, despite his avowed intention to abolish these.

### 4.9 Wagner’s orchestra

The orchestra Wagner uses for *Meistersinger* is quite small when compared to those of his other mature works. It is the same size as that needed for Beethoven’s 5th Symphony, with the addition of three brass players and a harp (Lee, 2007:10-11).

His use of the orchestra ties in closely with his belief about the origins of words and language. He believed that emotions were defined by vowel sounds, and that these were the closest remnants of mankind’s primal speech. The addition of consonants to these vowel sounds revealed the reason or cause of the emotion, giving them precision (Skelton, 1991:30). In developing this analogy for the orchestra, he equates harmony to vowel sounds, and each individual instrument, with its unique timbre and emotional connotations, to consonants, thus enabling the orchestra to play a far more intimate and detailed role in communicating the drama than had previously been realized (Skelton, 1991:40). One cannot, therefore, forge too close a link between Wagner’s use of the orchestra and that of the comic operas of his predecessors and compatriots.

In contrast to traditional opera, in which each aria had its own form without any significance to the overall structure of the work, Wagner’s orchestra and
its use of motif unified the whole work, creating and sustaining the overall dramatic form. This is achieved by the ability of the motif to anticipate, remind and recall dramatic associations, unspoken thoughts and feelings (Skelton, 1991:47). This follows from his ideal that the orchestra should function like the classic Greek chorus: that it should comment upon and explain the drama (Rayner, 1940:149). In Meistersinger, Wagner achieves this in many ways, a few examples of which will suffice:

- The orchestra’s depiction of the mastersingers and their ensuing activities in I:iii, wittily reminds us that there is more going on than physically appears to be in this committee meeting set to music (Warrack, 1994:89).
- The chaos of the end of Act I presents three different types of music, according to Warrack (1994:105) – the Abgesang of Walther’s Trial Song; the guild masters’ argument; and the apprentices who mock using David’s Chaplet Tune (I:ii:390), first heard when he wishes Walther well for the trial. But, the guild masters are not meant to be singing; their argument is speech. The orchestral textures support only the music of the apprentices and Walther, thus backing up Warrack’s conjecture.
- In III:i, the orchestra keeps reminding us that David’s appearance and song is an intrusion, separating the prelude from the “Wahn” monologue (Warrack, 1994:107). This will be discussed in more detail below.
- During the Festwiese, Beckmesser’s competition song is accompanied in a highly formalized style, only by his mistuned lute, while the orchestra adds gestures that have no bearing on his song, indicating instead, the increasing mystification and antipathy of the crowd. In the same scene, Walther’s competition song is given the full benefit of orchestral support and “sympathy” in the expression of his emotions. This type of “partisan” treatment is common to many comic operas, but may also be seen as an instance of Wagner’s “sadistic” humour.
The point this raises relates to the place the orchestra occupies in this work. Stein (1960:177) is of the opinion that it has the dominant position in the drama, that it is the musical centre of gravity, and allows the focus to move onto the stage only when pure song takes over and dialogue is no longer of importance. Magee (2000:249) agrees with this, adding that it continuously holds one’s attention by its “large-scale symphonic working out of musical material appropriate to the scene, in a style that manages […] to be polyphonic and free”. In comparison to his earlier music dramas, the motifs are developed more freely and there is a stronger sense of improvisation about their integration into the drama (Stein, 1960:74). They do not “illustrate” the text as closely as they do in _The Ring_, but are woven into a continuous accompanying fabric, which underpins the drama, linking the orchestra, freely and independently, with the mimetic, dramatic activity. Each scene, according to Magee (2000:262), is introduced by its dominant musical motif that is then developed freely and richly with the stage action. This is clearly seen during the course of the first section of I:iii, in which a new, four-note motif representing the pompous mastersingers, is freely and extensively developed from the opening of the scene until Pogner begins his address, occupying some seventeen pages of the vocal score. Another example is the development of the finale of Act II, the _Prügelszene_, out of two essential ideas – the ornamental melisma from Beckmesser’s serenade, and the inclusion, contrapuntally, of David’s _CHAPLET TUNE_ – which run for some forty-two pages of the vocal score.

In using the orchestra to underpin the drama and to maintain its “endless melody”, Wagner could allow the singers to engage in a kind of _Sprechgesang_, which, according to Weissmann (1925:144, 147), he would never have been able to do without a thorough knowledge of both of the traditional forms of _recitative_. In _Meistersinger_, _Sprechgesang_ is used, for the first time, in the discussion and portrayal of everyday events, an example that would be much emulated in twentieth-century opera.
4.10 The characters

Up to now, Wagner’s usage of the conventions of comic opera in *Meistersinger* has been considered in fairly general terms. The sections that follow will explore the details of how Wagner has adopted, adapted, or disregarded these conventions, with specific reference to the needs and characterizations of his dramatis personæ.

4.10.1 Beckmesser

As has already been established, Beckmesser is Wagner’s main comic foil in this work, and, from the summary of the *commedia dell’arte*, it can be seen that he embodies particular traits from Capitano, Dottore Graziano and Pulcinella. But Beckmesser is never meant to be a caricature. While he fulfils the conventional role of a wily personage, Wagner has created a richer, more fully rounded character in Beckmesser than his *commedia* types, and it is most probably just a coincidence that he is made to look ridiculous in similar fashion to Calmari in Johann Ludwig Deinhardstein’s *Salvator Rosa* (1823).91

Wagner uses the bigotry, folly and hyperbole of this character to comic effect (Matthews, 1983:14), through irony, satire, pathos, ridicule, farce and slapstick.

Beckmesser’s character is made clear in his very first moments on stage. His first line of text, delivered in a comic parlando style, shows him to be somewhat jumpy and anxious (Warrack, 1994:87) and in an aside immediately after, he reveals his insecurity and an inherent distrust of his fellow guildsmen. This supports the bigotry he displays during his first encounter with Walther, adding to the features that make his theft of the song a believable action. A more direct type of wiliness is shown in his first and last appearances on stage, in which he deliberately attempts to create bias in two of the main protagonists, Pogner and Sachs. As he comes on stage for the first time, we hear him trying to persuade Pogner to convince Eva to favour

91 See chapter 3, “Wooing and disguises”.
him. When he comes on stage for the last time, we see how little he has changed, as he tells Sachs that he is relying on him (Sachs) to sway the crowd in his favour.

Beckmesser's view of his situation and abilities leads to bad decisions time and again, one of which reveals an aspect of Wagner's understanding of Schopenhauer relating to the perception of reality being a delusion. Beckmesser truly believes that he could win Eva as his bride, and that she could genuinely love him. This is the delusion that leads him into error, pinpointed in Sachs's moral at the end of III:i. Here, Sachs surmises, somewhat sophistically, that Beckmesser's attempt to use the stolen poem could be the moment of weakness that causes him to take counsel with himself, and his (Sachs's) belief that common sense would keep Beckmesser from his malicious course. We know this will not happen, but the hope of it needs to be expressed if only to highlight its failure and thus make Beckmesser's demise his own lesson to himself (Warrack, 1994:36).

This latter point is in keeping with elements of Singspiel that had begun to occupy composers in the early 1800s – along with the interaction of dreams and reality, they sought for a musical expression which would bring together the inner and outer worlds of a character (Warrack, 2001:231-232, 238-239). Beckmesser demonstrates this clearly in two key episodes:

- He reveals his vanity and the shallowness of his affections for Eva in his Act II serenade, the content of which is all about himself, and not (as one would expect a serenade to be) about the qualities of his beloved.
- In the Festwiese scene he reveals awareness of his insecurities, at some conscious or subconscious level, by his fumbling attempt to mount the singer's podium, for which he blames the apprentices as a cover for his lack of confidence.

In I:i.iii Beckmesser wrongly accuses Walther of several poetic transgressions, including obscurity, ambiguity and false rhyme, but misses the only error that Walther really does make, which is rhyming a soft consonant with its hard
Ridicule, hyperbole and a little pathos are evoked in his scene with Sachs in II:vi, when his behaviour devolves from obsequiousness to insult as he tries to win Sachs’s co-operation and approval. Interestingly, this disintegration occurs during three short monologues that vaguely resemble a Bar-form structure, leading Sachs to enquire, sarcastically; “War das eu’r Lied?” The first monologue is an attempt at flattery to which Sachs does not respond, because in trying to elevate Sachs’s poetic skills, Beckmesser inadvertently demeans his abilities as a cobbler. Beckmesser then brushes that off as a joke, and tries to argue that Sachs’s position in the community qualifies him to give positive criticism of his song in order that he may improve upon it. Again Sachs rejects the offer, self-effacingly, to which Beckmesser can only respond with anger, insult and vows of revenge. Beckmesser promises that as long as he is able to make rhymes, Sachs will never be appointed marker, but then promptly appoints him as one with permission to complete his shoes by hammering out the errors perceived in his serenade.

The serenade that follows uses elements of distortion and slapstick, yet it functions on several levels as both a commentary of Beckmesser’s abilities and a parody. The lute accompaniment, which starts by being out of tune, and the lack of orchestral involvement both reflect Beckmesser’s status of being out of touch with the world and with his community (Hatch, 2001:210). There is additionally a poor Bar-form structure in each of the three verses in his serenade, as its poetry and melody are made up of two seven-line Stollen followed by one six-line Abgesang. Remembering that the Abgesang should be twice as long as each Stollen, and, as Kothner tells us, use a melody that is different to the Stollen, we can see that Beckmesser does not quite make the grade. The obvious melodic turns and phrases force a dislocation of verbal accents that parody the Italianized serenade as it existed in the German operas of Wagner’s day (Newman, 1974:318). It also has strong
echoes of an earlier event, as Beckmesser endures the same treatment he gave Walther in I:iii, – Sachs’s hammering is like Beckmesser’s chalk scratchings; Sachs interrupts him after his second verse; and Beckmesser ends his serenade having to sing its third stanza over the riot of the crowd (Lee, 2007:32).

Elements of irony, ridicule, farce, folly, distortion, word-play, slapstick and pathos are to be found in Beckmesser’s attempt, in the final scene of Act III, to sing the words Walther had composed for the Prize Song. Compare, in the table below, the first verse of Walther’s words with Beckmesser’s faulty memorization:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Walther</th>
<th>Beckmesser</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morgenlich leuchtend in rosigem Schein,</td>
<td>Morgen ich leuchte in rosigem Schein,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>von Blüth' und Duft</td>
<td>voll Blut und Duft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>geschwellt die Luft,</td>
<td>geht schnell die Luft: -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voll aller Wonnen</td>
<td>wohl bald gewonnen!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nie ersonnen,</td>
<td>Wie zerronnen, –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ein Garten lud mich ein,</td>
<td>im Garten lud ich ein –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>garstig und fein.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shining in the rosy light of morning,</td>
<td>In the morning I shine in a rosy light,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with blossom(s) and scent,</td>
<td>with blood and scent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the air swells</td>
<td>the air moves fast: -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full of every</td>
<td>surely soon won!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unthought of joy,</td>
<td>as if melting, –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a garden invited me, -</td>
<td>in the garden I invited –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>repellent and fine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which translates as -

Beckmesser's version of the Prize Song, along with the shapelessness of his lute introduction and accompaniment, highlight the irony of his inability to construct a song successfully, despite his expertise as a marker. His attempt to mount the singer’s podium is sheer slapstick, and his malapropisms, resulting in farcical nonsense, lead to his ridicule. The folly of his blind determination to woo and wed Eva, leading ultimately to this abortive attempt at a prize song, is traced in different events throughout the course of the opera, epitomising Bergson’s “mechanical inelasticity”.

The song contest represents a double failure for Beckmesser (Warrack, 1994:65): failure to memorize Walther’s poem correctly, and failure to
compose a proper melody for the words as he remembers them. Beckmesser's expertise in all that the mastersingers represent is insufficient to move him to the kind of generosity and truthfulness Sachs displays in his teaching of Walther, and also shows that mere learning cannot replace talent and artistic sensibility (Warrack, 1994:109). Hence the serenade he composes in II:vi is pedantically almost correct in respect of the guild’s requirements – two Stollen and an Abgesang repeated to make a song of three strophes – but it lacks in aesthetic appeal, textural and melodic congruity, and, as detailed above, its text is wholly inadequate as a serenade. Additionally, he abuses his knowledge of Tabulatur by his poor and biased adjudication of the faults in Walther’s Trial Song.

Beckmesser’s fight with David resulting from his serenade, is sheer slapstick (Baker, 1998a:14-15). An orchestral motif, derived from Beckmesser’s vocal ornamentation, accompanies this Prügelszene:


Although Beckmesser is not the only character in this opera to have a mimetic scene, – Walther and Sachs both have important mimetic moments – Lee (2007:116) views his mimetic scene, which opens III:i, as a caricature of Wagner’s mimetic usage in his other operas.92

92 These include Senta in Holländer, Act II; Elisabeth in Tannhäuser, Act III; Elsa and Ortrude in Lohengrin, Act I; Wotan, Brünhilde, Siegmund, Mime and Siegfried in various parts of The Ring; Isolde at the opening of Tristan; and Kundry for virtually the whole of Act III of Parsifal.
Beckmesser’s mimetic scene may well be one of the most eloquent in all Wagner’s operas, as each twitch and twinge of his pain is depicted in the music, and it is an accurate description of Beckmesser’s psychological and physical state at that moment. The orchestration has all the markings of the accompaniment to a vengeance aria, which is also the first type of aria that Beckmesser will sing in this scene. The absence of song at this moment, the only time we see him alone on stage, is also a comment on his musical and creative abilities. Where another character would have been assigned a soliloquy, Beckmesser gets a silent monologue – “all gesture and no song” (Hatch, 2001:212).

It is specifically in connection with Beckmesser and his theft of Walther’s poetry that Wagner taps into the convention of the chromatic mystery line. Although there is one other instance of a harmonised chromatic line spanning the interval of a fifth associated with Beckmesser, all the others occur in his mimetic scene. The first time it is sounded by the clarinet and horn (C# down to G) shortly after his arrival on stage (Wagner, 1983:406). We hear it again, accompanying his line “Ein Lied von euch, deß’ bin ich gewiß” (“A song of yours, I’m sure of that”) in a chromatic slide from B down to E played by the oboe and horn (Wagner, 1983:422). It is also played by the oboe, clarinet and two of the horns descending from G down to C (Wagner, 1983:430) in the last three bars of Beckmesser’s exit music, just before Sachs’s moral. To state categorically that Wagner appropriates the convention here, or even that he is making a parody of it, could be hazardous, considering the chromatic style of his harmony at this stage of his career, but the fact that it is exclusively associated with this character, and occurs in original as well as inverted form lends some weight to the argument.

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93 A wonderful description of Wagner miming to his own music has been recorded by Rayner in his book Wagner and Die Meistersinger (1940:133).
94 In this instance it is ascending, and the mystery is Beckmesser’s, as it reveals his inability to understand what Sachs is playing at by singing his “Jerum” song. It accompanies Beckmesser telling Sachs to go and do his cobbling inside his workshop, quietly (Wagner, 1983:258).
This scene with Sachs (III:iii), which reveals much about Beckmesser, is divided into three action-expression cycles each ending in a monologue by Beckmesser. His first, “O Schuster, voll von Ränken”, is a vicious attack on Sachs. It has all the qualities of a traditional vengeance aria, being tonally centred on D, as are those by Count Almaviva, the Queen of the Night, Pizarro and Casper. The vocal style is that of an angry, pompous, but comic parlango, using large leaps, short phrases which are often unbalanced, an essentially syllabic setting which includes the occasional pair of matching phrases that have the quality of coloratura without actually being so – a kind of fake ornamentation giving the impression of a *stringendo* although the actual tempo marking does not change. Also typical of this type of aria are the shouts. Beckmesser has three of these shouts, which in one case is just *Au, aul*, all in the context of his pain from the previous evening’s brawl and his excitement at the discovery of the letter.

In his second aria in this scene, “Da seid ihr nun wieder” in B minor, Beckmesser, caught off guard by Sachs’s gift of the poem, sings a crazily off-balance waltz in which he weighs up the odds of using and succeeding with the poem. Its melodic line begins somewhat smoothly, in keeping with his false obsequiousness, but he cannot maintain this for long and soon devolves into a parlando with leaps. Naturally, he suspects a trap, but self-pity and desperation overtake reason, and Sachs easily convinces Beckmesser that he would have no competition or challenge from him.

The third aria, “Freund Sachs”, the comic climax of this scene, is in D major and a simple triple time that is unbalanced quite often by time signature changes. It aptly portrays Beckmesser’s emotional state at having been given the poem without realizing the web he has spun about himself. It is a rollicking, overconfident paean expressing his misjudgement of, and gratitude to, Sachs. The poetry for this monologue is divided metrically into three unequal sections that make up a poorly constructed Bar-form: the first two sections are not of equal length, and the final is too long for a balanced ending. However, the music does not reflect this structure. This aria also
shows Beckmesser overestimating his own abilities in burlesque fashion, as he leaps beyond the correct resolution of the leading note C# onto an F#.\textsuperscript{95}

This aria also represents the only occasion when Wagner taps into the convention of the exit aria. As he typically builds his emotional tension over extended periods, Beckmesser’s comically triumphant exit with its ironic emotional climax is one of the few occasions in this opera for a suitable display of this convention.

The entire scene with its opening “overture”, three clearly defined sections, climactic closing orchestral “postlude” and moral by Sachs comprise a group of features that incline this writer to view it as a parody of a comic intermezzo. Additionally, this view is strengthened by its position between sc.ii, during which Walther sings the first two Stollen, and sc.iv in which he sings the Abgesang of his Morning Dream Song.

We find in Beckmesser a character who is neither aware of his limitations, nor acts in a manner appropriate to his age. His inability to see through Magdalene’s disguise;\textsuperscript{96} his inability to compose a true master-song; the insecurity aroused by his rivalry with Walther; and his belief that he really could get Eva to love him become the skins upon which his character slips (Baker, 1998a:14-16, 18).

An aspect of our reaction to the character of Beckmesser, alluded to by Rayner (1940:166), relates to whether we like or dislike this character. It is his contention that because Beckmesser is never obnoxious or malicious in his dealings, we can laugh without ever despising him; support his humiliation while hoping that it will not result in total ostracism by the community; and hope that his chastisement will lead to a happier future, albeit that he remain a bachelor.

\textsuperscript{95} This F# may well be a parody of, and have semiotic meanings that relate to its use in Der Ring des Nibelungen, as we shall see later.

\textsuperscript{96} Even though this is a well-used comic convention, Beckmesser is the only character on stage to be taken in by the disguise.
It is by keeping Beckmesser at a distance from our sympathies, that Wagner uses him as the main comic foil in *Meistersinger*. It is on Beckmesser’s inability to deal effectively with the reality of his situation that Wagner builds the on-stage mimetic and dramatic comedy, and creates the situation Sachs uses to effect the story’s resolution.

Beckmesser fits Schopenhauer’s description of “civic tragedy” in that his humiliation in Act II and demise in Act III are in line with the idea that these events in a comedy should enlighten a thoughtful audience to the uselessness of an attachment to such desires and actions, thus leading to “his (the audience’s) cheerful abandonment of the world in the consciousness of its worthlessness and vanity” (Warrack, 1994:76), which is the point Sachs makes in the moral he presents at the close of III:iii.

There are elements in the character of Beckmesser that reflect and compliment his main protagonist, Hans Sachs, which could be interpreted as showing them to be two sides of one dramatic character.97 Both men are in love with Eva; both are guild members and know the *Tabulatur* rules intimately; both are able to compose poetry and music; we have to assume that both are accredited mastersingers; and both are also baritones. There is one additional point of an even more subtle nature, not noted by any of the sources that have been referenced for this dissertation, but mentioned in an unrelated context by Hatch98 (2001:215). Tucked into the motifs associated with Sachs and Beckmesser is a sequence of notes, bracketed in example 3, that is virtually identical, forging a significant musical link between these two protagonists.

97 Grout (2003:465) suggests that Wagner may have presented two idealised versions of himself in these two characters.
98 The context in which Hatch reveals this similarity pertains to his discussion of descending sequences and harmonic progressions in *Meistersinger* and their model in Bach’s Prelude in A major, from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Bk II.
Ex. 3 Sachs’s and Beckmessers’ common motif.

However, while both have social occupations, Sachs is a craftsman who works with his hands and Beckmesser is not – he is the town clerk. Their affection for Eva shows the difference between selfless and selfish love. While both know their *Tabulatur* well, Sachs approaches it creatively, in contrast to Beckmesser’s sterile bigotry. Beckmesser represents the typical comic character who is unable to alter his actions in accordance with the situation, or even stick to a decision of his own making, as described above, while Sachs represents the wise, older man who is able to reflect deeply on the situation and take actions which demonstrate tremendous flexibility of mind and purpose.

4.10.2 Hans Sachs

A play by Johann Ludwig Deinhardstein, *Hans Sachs*, was used by Lortzing as the basis for his opera (1840) of the same name. Wagner knew both works and, although the details of the story differ, the outline is the same: Sachs is a cobbler-poet who uses his poetic skills to win the hand of his beloved, who has been promised to an unsuitable older town councillor by her father. For his efforts he wins her as bride and gets the crown for his poetry (Warrack, 1994:21-22).

Lortzing’s opera includes further circumstances that point to *Meistersinger*:

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99 One wonders at the level of affection that he holds for his office, as he is never associated with NÜRNBERG at any time during the course of the opera, even when he mentions the city by name. Newman (1949:410) describes him as “an ornament to the Town Council”.

100 The pedantic and hypocritical qualities of Beckmesser’s character have evolved into a vernacular idiom. The expressions “*So ein Beckmesser!*” and “*Hör auf mit der Beckmesserrei!*” are used to stop someone who is being insincere or fussily critical. The Collins electronic translation facility, for instance, translates “Beckmesser” as “faultfinder”.

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• the arrival of Eoban (a Beckmesser type) who wishes to become a Mastersinger and join the guild, and is favoured as suitor for Kunegunde by her father
• the judgement biased against Sachs’s attempts in the contest
• the awarding of Kunegunde as bride to the winner
• the involvement of a secondary lover-couple of a lower social level – Sachs’s apprentice Görg and Kordula, Kunegunde’s cousin
• the use of a stolen poem by Görg (a poem by Sachs in this case)
• Eoban’s false claim on the poem which he then turns into a muddle when he tries to prove ownership by recitation (Warrack, 1994:22).

Two other sources from the 1820s have also influenced Wagner in determining the character of Hans Sachs. In Goethe’s prologue to Deinhardstein’s play, written for the 1828 performance in Berlin, Sachs is presented as a man of wise judgement, contemplating the torn and confused world he sees around himself.

A second influence may have come from an imaginative account by Friedrich Furcheau that describes a poem written by Sachs, in which a love dispute between an old man and a proud knight (ein Ritter stolz) is settled. The free style of the poem shows Sachs as a man of independent mind, and may possibly hold the clue to the origin of Walther von Stolzing’s name (Warrack, 1994:23-24).

Wolfgang Schadewaldt, a conservative German classicist, claimed in 1962 that Wagner’s Sachs was based on Socrates (Deathridge, 2008:103). This idea has some merit if one considers the deep philosophising of which Sachs is capable and the fact that Wagner wanted Meistersinger to be the satyr-play partner to Tannhäuser, but Schadewaldt seems to be alone in his conjecture.

In a typical comic opera, a character like Hans Sachs would represent the older, wiser man who has the ability to bring everything to a happy conclusion, or the higher, outside authority that restores the status quo: the type represented by Sarastro in Zauberflöte, Don Fernando in Fidelio, and in Der Freischütz by two characters, Prince Ottokar and the Hermit, or the much
livelier versions of Don Alfonso in Così and Figaro in Barbiere. In Meistersinger, Wagner casts the cobbler-poet Hans Sachs (1494-1576), more richly and fully rounded, as this type of character. One finds very little of the commedia in him, but in his loneliness and eventual detachment from Eva, Pierrot is his closest archetype. While his actions bring about the expected happy ending, his motivation is against pedantry and for creativity in artistic endeavour (Rayner, 1940:164). That a character like Sachs should end up alone at the end of the work is well within buffa conventions. Don Alfonso (Così), Don Anchişte (La finta giardiniera) and Dottor Malatesta in Donizetti’s Don Pasquale all find themselves in the same position after their management of the plot (Gutman, 1999:337).

As mentioned above, Wagner saw Hans Sachs as “the last manifestation of the artistically creative spirit of the people” (Rayner, 1940:156-157, Wolf, 2007:121). Meistersinger presents Sachs as having to resolve the dichotomies between his ideal of the world and its realities, which include the renunciation of his love for Eva, in order to affect a redemption of the conflict that has arisen in the aspirations of Beckmesser and Walther due to Pogner’s promise, and to bring some kind of compromise between the trusted old ideas and the new (Puri, 2002:214). The real heart of Meistersinger lies in Sachs overcoming two obstacles: firstly the recognition of himself in Beckmesser as a middle-aged suitor vainly competing for a beautiful young girl, and secondly, in defeating the marker’s unrealistic efforts (to compete for and win Eva as his bride, and to quash new ideas) (Warrack, 1994:77). His final renunciation of Eva is accompanied by a storm of emotions described in the orchestra by RIOT and JERUM, and is depicted mimetically as he transfers Eva to Walther, an act of which Eva is symbolically unaware, described as the most Schopenhauerian moment in the opera (John, 1983:113, Warrack, 1994:79). In bringing this form of “salvation” to Eva, Walther, Pogner and Beckmesser, Sachs represents a type of spiritual intervention not unlike that found in the early nineteenth-century rescue operas and German Romantic operas, including Wagner’s own earlier compositions, and maintains the imagery that links John the Baptist and Sachs, first established in the opening chorale and

While Sachs fulfills the conventional role of the older, wiser man, it is essentially through him that Wagner manages a shift of focus from an external to an internal view: a shift that equates to a move from comic to serious opera, another of the many techniques Wagner is said to have learnt from the plays of Shakespeare (Warrack, 1994:71). This could be the reason that some productions, from quite early in the history of this opera, and contrary to Wagner’s intentions, have overemphasized the more weighty and philosophical aspects of Sachs’s character (Warrack, 1994:140). However, unlike his counterparts in the operas of Mozart, Nicolai and Donizetti (such as Giovanni, Almaviva, Alphonso, Falstaff, Pasquale and Malatesta), Sachs shows himself not to have a cynical or self-interested attitude towards love, but sees it in much the same light as the historical Sachs did, as a quality to be preserved and valued and as a source of true happiness and contentment.101

In Schopenhauer’s concept of self-sacrifice is to be found the essence of Sachs’s character as Wagner finally portrayed him in the opera:102 Sachs’s disinterested love for Eva leads to his self-sacrifice for her happiness, in spite of his deep “erotic” love for, and wish for marriage to her,103 a need he recognizes as one that he shares with Beckmesser (Warrack, 1994:73, 77). Schopenhauer’s idea of the “silent sadness” hidden within the character of the noble, is reflected in the prelude to Act III (Rayner, 1940:158, Puri, 2002:215), the “Wahn!” monologue, and Sachs’s reaction to being hailed by “Wach’ auf!” in the Festwiese (Warrack, 1994:74). This can be seen more particularly in

101 Sachs had two marriages, both of which were blissfully happy (Rayner, 1940:11-12); and the popularity of his works lie in the fact that they display his morality with spirit, wit, pathos and a genuine love for his community (Winkworth, 2010:117-120).
102 In earlier drafts of the libretto (1845), Sachs was not in love with Eva, and was still only the conventional comic character of an older, wiser man who would sort out the intricacies of the plot. The additional complication of his love for Eva evolved in later versions in an attempt more fully to incorporate the philosophies of Schopenhauer (Warrack, 1994:75).
103 Rayner (1940:156-164) goes to great length to show that Sachs harbours no such “erotic” love for Eva, but makes no mention of the emotional turmoil depicted in his aria “Hat man mit dem Schuhwerk nicht seine Noth!”
Wagner’s own words to the effect that underneath the surface of humour in *Meistersinger*, lay “deep melancholy, ... tears, [and] the distress call of poetry in chains”, written in response to Ludwig II’s comment about its serious undertones\(^\text{104}\) (Skelton, 1971:134).

In the “Wahn!” monologue the reference to Schopenhauer is particularly marked by Sachs’s opening analogy to hunting: Schopenhauer makes the point that in the Kingdom of Nature, neither the hunted nor the hunter knows any other kind of freedom – it is by necessity that both are in this role. The Kingdom of Grace, in which mankind finds itself, is that in which he knows freedom through renunciation of his will (Warrack, 1994:80). This mastery over himself is the metaphor Sachs represents: his mastery of the rules of art and his selfless use of them in aiding Walther to win Eva equates to mastery over himself and his will (Warrack, 1994:109). The moment of recognition of his passion for Eva is depicted in the orchestra by a fleeting reference to the sensual world of *Tannhäuser*, probably the only musical connection recalling Wagner’s original idea of an opera that would be the satyr-play partner to *Tannhäuser*:

\[\text{Ex. 4a Tannhäuser: Overture, 1st bar of Allegro. (Wagner, no date:4)}\]

\[\text{Ex. 4a Tannhäuser: Overture, 1st bar of Allegro. (Wagner, no date:4)}\]

\(^{104}\) The full quote is; “It is impossible that you should not have sensed, under the opera’s quaint superficialities of popular humour, the profound melancholy, the lament, the cry of distress of poetry in chains, and its reincarnation, its new birth, its irresistible magic power achieving mastery over the common and the base”. (Newman, 1949:297)
The moment this passion is conquered is depicted by the quotation from the prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*, which is already anticipated by the “resolution” onto the prime form of the Tristan chord at the end of the above extract. In depicting Sachs’s resolution to renounce his feelings for Eva by quoting the music from *Tannhäuser* and *Tristan*, Wagner takes the audience into his confidence by breaching the fourth wall, described by Warrack (1994:102) as pure Shakespeare, and one of the few moments in Wagner’s presentation of Sachs that brings out comedic irony.

The quote from *Tristan und Isolde* recalls Mozart’s quotation from his own earlier *Figaro* in the last act of *Don Giovanni* (Lavignac, 1921:334, Warrack, 1994:93). Puri (2002:228), describes it as an “interopus reference [which] breaks the meniscus of *Die Meistersinger*. Sachs’s reference to the ill-fated lovers is not at all far-fetched, as he had written a play about them in 1553 (Deathridge, 2008:114). The quote underlines the similarities between the Tristan-Isolde-Marke and Walther-Eva-Sachs triangles, and between the transcendent aspirations of Isolde (symbolised by the four-note ascending chromatic motif) and Eva.

- The opening of Tristan is first evoked in the third phrase of “Am stillen Herd” where it appears in slightly ornamented form:

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**Ex. 5 Meistersinger I:iii:506-507.** (Wagner, 1983:117)
• The same motif is heard repeatedly at Eva’s entrance in II:iv, and after her statement “Füß’ mir getraut”, it accompanies the stage instruction “Eva sits close to Sachs on the stone seat”:


![Ex. 6](image)

• After Walther’s third rendition of his Morning Dream Song, it increasingly becomes a feature of the musical fabric until Eva, accompanied by Tristanesque half-diminished quartads, sings it on the words “(Euch) selbst, mein Meister”, which lead to the actual quote, and Sachs’s reference to the tale of Tristan:


![Ex. 7](image)
It may seem, in considering all the above, as if Wagner did not incorporate any conventional comic-opera elements in his characterization of Sachs. A closer examination of his text and music reveals several such elements, although, in keeping with the character of Sachs and his role in this work, they are not often overtly comic.

Sachs’s “Flieder” monologue (II:iii) begins with a motif usually called SPRING’S BEHEST that comes from its association with the words “Lenzes Gebot” in this aria. The aria begins with a description of the relaxing, yet stimulating, effects of the scent of the elder blossom, and progresses to a discussion of Walther’s Trial Song of the previous act.

The stimulating effects of this scent will come back to him during the “Wahn!” monologue in III:i when he surmises that if the street-brawl was not started by a goblin, or a glow-worm that had failed to find its mate (which is actually a reference to himself), then it could have been the scent of the elder tree on the eve of Johannestag.

The description of the song being “so old and yet new” is compared to the morning song of birds in spring. The three-note incipit of this motif is also closely related to fragments found in the music for Eva, SACHS’S DISTRESS and Walther’s songs, particularly Walther’s Prize Song in which it can be found in various forms, thus making a firm musical connection between the idea of nature and the emotions involving Sachs, Eva and Walther. In fact, this three-note fragment appears throughout the opera, associated with several of the motifs.
Sachs’s “Wahn!” monologue meets all three of the general characteristics of the dilemma aria, in spite of the very different context in which it appears. The prelude to Act III sets Sachs's mood of deep introspection, serving as the independent orchestral introduction to the aria, and although David interrupts this mood with some frivolity and his song about St. John the Baptist, Sachs retains his mood of introspection throughout this interruption, as the orchestra constantly reminds us. Upon David’s exit, the music returns immediately to the mood of the prelude and Sachs picks up the train of thought that occupied
him throughout the prelude and David’s interruption. The dialogue between
David and Sachs does not prepare one for the content of Sachs’s “Wahn!”
monologue, other than as a reinforcement of the idea that Sachs is acting on
two levels – dealing politely with David while continuing to consider the issues
that will emerge upon David’s exit. Breaking a serious mood with a lighter
one is a technique dramatists often use to cast their more serious moments
into sharper relief, and here also functions as a means of fragmenting a
conventional set piece (the dilemma aria) in order to integrate it into the flow
of the drama. Placing the scene with David at this juncture achieves this
contrast not only by the very different orchestral timbre and textures between
the two parts of this scene, but also by highlighting issues of everyday life
(David’s desire to marry Magdalene), the communal street-brawl of the night
before (David’s inadvertent singing of Beckmesser’s serenade melody), and
David’s misunderstanding of Sachs’s mood reflected in his final comment that
Sachs seems to be uncharacteristically kind.

Another example of the use of music that has origins in comic opera involves
the use of folk song. From as early as his composition of *Holländer*, Wagner
realized that the influence of folk music had limited application to his melodic
writing. In his early days, when concerned with “opera melodies”, it had
influenced him both consciously and subconsciously, but once he had
realized the need to express dramatically the feelings of his characters in an
emotional language, he realized too that the idioms of folk music would be a
hindrance, unless specifically needed for setting the scene as in the Spinning
Song from *Holländer* and the sailors’ music in *Holländer* and *Tristan*, which
also includes a shepherd’s shanty (Weiss, 2002:200). In *Meistersinger*, the
only folk-like solo song is entrusted to Hans Sachs in the form of his cobbbling
song, “Jerum!” This constitutes a departure from the operatic convention of
giving such songs to comic or minor characters, as seen in *Zauberflöte*,
*Freischütz* and *Hans Heiling*, and as Wagner does in *Holländer* and *Tristan*.

The function of Sachs’s cobbling song is not dissimilar to that of Figaro’s “Se
vuol ballare”, as it too reveals several layers of meaning. “Jerum!” is a
strophic song that is essentially meant to be a solo song in a folk-like style, as
evinced by the falderals at the beginning of each verse. The content concerns the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, and is full of nature images, but it is metaphorically a warning to Eva and Walther not to carry out their plan to elope, which warning Eva registers.

A feature of this song is that, for dramatic reasons, its three verses are separated by discussion, argument and interjections by the other characters on stage. The interruption between the verses of a strophic song is not uncommon in comic opera,¹⁰⁵ and can be related both to a tendency towards naturalism and Wagner’s own preoccupation with breaking up closed forms. Wagner would also have known of this dramatic technique through his readings of Shakespeare. It is a strategy that Wagner uses more than once during the course of Meistersinger: Walther’s Trial Song in I:iii is interrupted by Beckmesser between the second and third stanzas, and his fledgling attempt at constructing his Morning Dream Song in III:ii is broken into by Sachs’s teaching and encouragement.

Comedy that emerges from the weaknesses and accidents of our humanity is usually played out with suggestions or expectations that things will work out well for all concerned. Wagner’s close personal identification with Sachs and the ideals and thoughts he postulates through him, especially in the three big monologues of Act III, bring a sense of nobility and authoritative decision to the work. This exceeds the way such monologues work in other comedies, in which moments of nobility lead to resolution, but perhaps with less pontificating (Warrack, 1994:90-91). Warrack draws a parallel between the ideology of Tristan und Isolde in which reality (day) must give way to illusion (night) and Meistersinger in which illusion (Wahn and Johannisnacht) must give way to reality (Johannistag). Whereas Tristan and Isolde wallow in their shared Wahn, Sachs’s task is to turn Walther’s and Eva’s Wahn from hope into reality. The seriousness of this task is the impetus that shifts the audience’s view of Meistersinger from comic to serious. A further parallel can

¹⁰⁵ Examples can be found in several comic operas that were known to Wagner, such as Entführung, Die lustigen Weiber and Zar und Zimmermann, as well as in works that are not comic, such as Freischütz, Hans Heiling and Rossini’s Otello.
be drawn between the reactions of the two rejected older men, as represented by Sachs’s “Wahn!” monologue and King Marke’s monologue. The latter represents a negative and passive response; the former a positive and active one.

Sachs’s metaphor of the glow-worm in his “Wahn!” monologue is a reference to himself and the results of his meddling in the affairs of Walther and Beckmesser in order to secure a happy outcome for Eva (Warrack, 1994:70, 77-78). Sachs attributes the community’s brawl to a goblin and a glow-worm and then pins the cause for the brawl on a cobbler in his shop under the elder tree, who plucks at the edge of Wahn. Eva registers Sachs suffering when she cries out “Das ich so Not dir machen kann!” (“That I could cause you such distress!”) during the third verse of “Jerum!”, and Sachs registers his own, when he describes himself as the glow-worm that did not find its mate. The musical depiction of his resignation (Wagner, 1983:371-372) – a drop from E major to C major – is, for Warrack (1994:78, 91), like a turning from the darkness of night (Johannisnacht) to the bright light of day (Johannistag), thoughts he re-enforces in the next scene as he tells Walther that the rules of the mastersingers are there to help maintain the vigour and youthfulness of Spring when one reaches the arid wasteland (Nöten Wildnis) of old age (Warrack, 1994:79).

If Wagner has indeed set this opera in the summer of 1560/1, as some have claimed (Newman, 1949:322, Lee, 2007:114), then the 66-year-old Sachs shows remarkable flexibility in his Nöten Wildnis, as demonstrated by the forms of the songs he sings. The wide variety of these formal structures is another link to comic opera, which uses a larger range of aria types to characterize its protagonists than would be the norm in serious opera. The following can be considered both as examples of musical and poetic structures and as musical character sketches (all motifs mentioned below appear in Addendum 2):

• The “Flieder” monologue is a rondo (A-B-A-C-A-coda). While there might be some justification for considering the poetry to be in Bar-form, the song imposes its form freely upon the poem. All the motifs used
here refer to Walther’s songs from I:iii. The exception occurs at the moment Sachs tries to distract himself by working on his last, when COBBLING is heard, describing Sachs’s physical, rather than his intellectually reflective, activity.

- “Jerum!” is purely strophic, consisting of 3 verses, each of which begins with three lines of the same falderals. COBBLING, and motifs taken directly from Sachs’s melody line accompany the song. During the third stanza, the orchestra introduces a contrapuntal motif, SACHS’S DISTRESS, which will be developed extensively in the “Wahn!” monologue. This is the only aria in which the motifs are all his own. However, other than SACHS’S DISTRESS, none describe him emotionally at this point.

- The Wahn” monologue has a freer form (A-B-A-C-coda), but in style and content, comes very close to the two-part rondò as used by Mozart and Weber. The motifs accompanying this monologue are mostly representative of Sachs’s train of thought and memories of the previous evening’s riot – SPRING’S BEHEST; NÜRNBERG; RIOT; BEATING; MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S MAGIC; JOHANNISTAG; POETIC ART; and, interestingly, the opening four notes of LOVE’S IDEAL creep in contrapuntally the last time he sings the word “Wahn”. However, the monologue opens with the only theme representing Sachs’s inner turmoil: the SACHS’S DISTRESS counterpoint, indicative of the madness in people he has been reading about, and not yet of his own contributions towards the previous evening’s madness. The only time he does consider himself in this monologue, he is accompanied by MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S MAGIC, RIOT and BEATING.

- “Hat mann mit dem Schuhwerk” represents Sachs’s only emotional outpouring as he finally renounces Eva. It is through-composed, with a short section in a catalogue-aria style. The scansion is free, as in speech. It opens with the mimetic scene in which Sachs passes Eva to

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106 Rayner (1940:225) labels this VANITAS VANITATUM, and Puri (2002:215), KLAGERUF. However, as it is more generally associated with his sense of distress over his renunciation of Eva, SACHS’ DISTRESS would seem to be more appropriate.
Walther, accompanied by Sachs’s Distress marked fortissimo, its loudest and most forceful presentation in the opera. The orchestra accompanies Sachs with Jerum, Eva’s Apprehension, Love’s Question, Cobbling and Mockery.

- Sachs’s response to the community’s greeting, “Euch macht ihr’s leicht”, is a more complex structure that evolves continuously over an A-B-C₁-C₂-C₃-D format. It begins with a very short section governed by Sachs’s Distress (A) – the only time in this aria that a theme directly associated with Sachs is used, as he tells the people that the honour is distressing to him. This soon changes to Goodwill (B) that is attributed to the guildsmen for his appointment as speaker for the day’s event. After this there are three subdivisions governed by Guild (C₁), which is then combined with Johannistag (C₂) and a variant of The Masters (C₃). The aria concludes with a short section (D) governed by Nürnberg, symbol of the art of the mastersingers.

- Sachs’s concluding moral, “Verachtet mir die Meister nicht”, resembles an abridged rondo (A-B-A-C-D-A). The poetry has clearly been structured in two Stollen with an Abgesang. Although the music does not follow this pattern, the first A and B sections represent the two Stollen, while the remainder makes up the Abgesang. All the motifs refer to the community and none to Sachs. The opening A section combines Walther’s Prize Song with Mastersingers and uses Community of Art as a link to the B section, which uses The Banner. The A section returns, using only Community of Art. The C section is essentially a type of free recitative, leading to a very short D section in which Nürnberg is heard. The final A section contrapuntally combines Mastersingers, Walther’s Prize Song and The Banner.

We can see from the above that Wagner paints Sachs as an altruist and deep thinker. Motifs that are directly associated with him are used on only a few occasions as his love for his fellow man and their betterment is of greater importance to him than his own present needs. This is borne out in the way he is depicted in Act III in which we see everyone coming privately to him, and his initiation of the processes that will resolve their problems (Lee, 2007:42).
His generosity is not only revealed through the libretto and these arias, but also by way of a musical motif that is made much of in his dialogue scenes with other characters. This motif has been labelled variously as GOODWILL (Rayner, 1940:207) and SACH’S BENEVOLENCE (Newman, 1949:348). He is accompanied by it first in I:iii when he tries to get the masters to re-evaluate Walther’s Trial Song in the face of Beckmesser’s attempts to persuade them otherwise (Wagner, 1983:146). It appears next just after Sachs’s “Wahn!” monologue, when trying to convince Walther that the guildsmen are genuinely attempting to do good by protecting their form of art so strictly, and again in the same scene when he offers to pen the words of Walther’s Morning Dream Song (Wagner, 1983:374, 387). Beckmesser is confronted and confounded by Sachs’s goodwill (Wagner, 1983:419) when he produces Walther’s words, still wet upon the page, from his pocket. And, finally, GOODWILL dominates the B section of his penultimate aria, “Euch macht ihr’s leicht”, where he expresses his humility and love to the community.

In keeping with many of the comic operas and plays that have preceded Meistersinger, the moral of the story is announced to the audience in the final scene. This task is entrusted to Sachs, not once, but twice.

The first appears unexpectedly at the end of III:iii, after Beckmesser’s “theft” of Walther’s poem. Its similarity to an intermezzo opera, mentioned earlier, gives Sachs’s concluding comment the quality of a moral. Upon Beckmesser’s exit, Sachs makes the comment “die schwache Stunde kommt für jeden, da wird er dumm und lässt mit sich reden” (“Everyone has a moment of weakness in which they look foolish, but then they listen to reason”).

The second of his two morals comes in its expected place, at the end of the opera. It is his controversial “Verachtet mir die Meister nicht”, a summation of the essence of this opera, that art is not only built on the revolutionary, novel and improvisatory, but also on tradition, history and discipline.
4.10.3 Walther

Walther and Eva function in this drama like the *commedia dell’arte*’s first pair of lovers. Although neither of them is presented as comic figures, elements of comedy are evident in some of their scenes. Additionally, concepts that emerge from the dealings of these non-comic characters fit well with Wagner’s philosophy that his operas should ennoble and uplift the German people.

We meet Walther first through his mimetic attempts to make contact with Eva during the opening chorale. Wagner’s use of mime has been discussed elsewhere, but suffice it to say here, that although there might be a sense of the ridiculous in Walther’s gesticulating attempts to communicate with Eva, the accompanying music bears no trace of comedy. We hear motifs from the overture that cannot have any significance, as they have not yet been associated with any text, but during the course of the opera, take on meaning as GROWING INTIMACY, WALther’S PRIZE SONG, and a variant of SPRING’S BEHEST. The only trace of comedy lies in the fact that the whole could be considered a parody of a chorale prelude, with Walther’s mimetic music depicting decidedly profane intentions freely interwoven between the statements of the phrases of the chorale, with its sacred connotations.

His first vocal interaction with Eva following this mimetic scene does have elements of comedy, manifested mainly through the character of Eva’s confidant and maid, Magdalene. Walther has fallen in love with Eva, impulsively, at first sight. In this, his first opportunity to speak to her, we discover that she has deliberately left two of her possessions behind on the pew and instructs Magdalene to fetch them, one at a time. Each time Magdalene is away, Walther tries to find out if Eva is betrothed, but Magdalene returns just as Walther is about to ask the relevant question. Then Magdalene, in an act of complicity, goes to find her own book, ostensibly left on the pew. There is a tiny four-note motif that seems to
underlie the complicity of the two girls. As Walther sings it first in his opening line on the words “ein einzig Wort!”

Ex. 9a COURTING (A). Meistersinger I:i:71 (Wagner, 1983:19)

Both Eva and Magdalene repeat it within the next few bars, and it appears a few more times throughout this scene, always in the vocal part, and mostly sung by Magdalene who elaborates upon it by smoothing it out, extending the falling fifth and the line leading up to the concluding drop. Magdalene’s attempt at closing their discussion, just before David enters, is sung to this motif, giving the impression that the matter is not closed. Interestingly, Sachs also sings it several times in III:ii when teaching Walther about singing.

This is the prime form of the motif associated with COURTING (A), and has not been identified by any commentators on Meistersinger. This form is exclusively vocal, whereas the inverted form, COURTING (B), is given to voices and instruments. It underpins much of I:iii, and is a good instance of Wagner’s use of a leitmotif to create a larger musical structure with some loss of the semantic specificity of its association.

Ex. 9b COURTING (B) Meistersinger I:iii:2 (Wagner, 1983:68)

When Walther eventually succeeds in asking his question, Magdalene overhears and steers the conversation away from the topic. The arrival of David gives Magdalene opportunity for further stalling of the discussion,

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107 The last three notes are a retrograde inversion of the three-note incipit of SPRING’S BEHEST.
108 A full list of its appearances is given in Addendum 3.
109 The motif can be derived from a 4-note cell consisting of a leap followed by a scale in the opposite direction, that occurs in a number of the principal motifs, including MEISTERSINGERS, SPRING’S BEHEST, COMMUNITY OF ART, COBBLING, MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S MAGIC, EVA’S APPREHENSION, and THE PRIZE SONG.
causing Eva to impulsively reveal her infatuation for Walther by a rash promise to make him a master at the next day’s song trial – this is the first of two occasions when Magdalene’s interruptions cause Eva to lose a little self-control; the second occurs in Eva’s scene with Sachs in Act II, and will be discussed below.

The next scene involves Walther’s singing lesson with David. It is a type of pre-parody of the lesson Walther will have with Sachs in III:ii. In this scene and the next, we see more of his impulsivity due to his readiness to take on the seemingly impossible task of becoming a mastersinger within 24 hours, and through his curt responses to, and impatience with, David. The comic focus here is on David, and Walther is essentially the “fall-guy” – in the parlance of modern comedy – for David’s bad teaching.

In this first act Walther sings only one real song, his Trial Song. “Am stillen Herd” is not heard by the guild masters as a song, but as poetry intensified by music (Warrack, 1994:104), which Vogelgesang identifies after the first two verses as “Zwei art’ge Stollen”. Beckmesser, however, stirs up bias, commenting firstly about learning singing from the birds, and then after Walther’s third stanza; “Entnahmt ihr was der Worte Schwall?” (“Does this flood of words mean anything to you?”). Nevertheless, it is cast in a perfect bar-form of two Stollen and an Abgesang. Additionally, Walther gives some indication of his poetic skills by placing the word “Vogelweid” in the identical position in each of the two Stollen. While we are hereby shown Walther’s skill as a poet, Wagner uses the response of the guildsmen to create comedy.

When it comes to the Trial Song, Walther, being of noble birth, chooses to imitate his old teacher, the minnesinger Walther von der Vogelweide, by singing a love song. This horrifies Kothner, because the mastersinger tradition prescribes a religious song. The riot that erupts as a result of Walther’s Trial Song “So rief der Lenz in den Wald”, is pure farce, but it is not due to any comicality inherent in the actions or personality of Walther. When Sachs reflects on Walther’s potential in II:iii, it is because of what he had heard in this Trial Song.
Wagner intended the opera to represent the tension between traditionalism and spontaneity (Rayner, 1940:144), and this scene is the first in a series which indicate that Walther will only deserve Eva once he has learnt to discipline and order his youthful passion and spontaneity in conformity with the rules of the society in which she was nurtured (Warrack, 1994:109).

We get further glimpses of Walther’s impulsiveness in II:v, in his attempt to fight all and sundry and his decision to elope with Eva when the outlook for their betrothal seems poor.

These impulsive traits are also shown by the only moment of musical burlesque in his part – the “unintentional” modulation to another key at the end of the second strophe of his Morning Dream Song (III:ii), despite being told by Sachs to do another just like the first. This song is like the letter scene in Act II of Figaro, in which we witness a set piece being created on stage by the Countess, as she and Susanna plan an assignation with the Count in the garden later that evening. The music portrays Susanna copying the words of the canzonetta as the Countess “improvises” them. Walther’s song is one of his own invention, improvised on the spot while Sachs copies the words, and while it is in reality a three-stanza creation, only two of its stanzas are heard during the course of III:ii as Sachs instructs Walther in the art of creating a master-song. The third stanza is heard in III:iv, making this an extreme example of the interrupted strophic song.

His final act of impulsiveness and submission – refusing the mastersinger’s medallion and then accepting it after Sachs’s injunction to a reverence of their cultural heritage – does not have any comic overtones, and is dealt with as a moment of high tension, resolved by the actions and closing moralizing of Sachs.

While there is little comedy in Walther’s role, the conventions of comic opera are not entirely absent. His songs and poems are full of metaphors and similes derived from nature. His explanation to the masters that Walter von der Vogelweide was his teacher is couched in images of winter, snow, the awakening of spring, summer meadows, forests and bird-song. During his
Trial Song, which uses fewer nature-images, his first reaction to Beckmesser’s disparaging noises from the marker’s box, draws on metaphors of winter’s jealousy of spring. His Abgesang, however, sung over the cacophony of the full ensemble, is once again heavily dependent on nature’s metaphors for its meaning, ultimately equating the masters with “Meister-Kräh’n” (“master-crows”). The effect on Beckmesser of the botanical images in the poetry of his Morning Dream Song has already been mentioned.

Walther’s outburst “Ha, diese Meister!” in II:v, has distinct elements of both a vengeance aria and a catalogue aria. Apart from his actual songs, this is the longest stretch of uninterrupted singing that Walther has, reaching a climax (which proves to be an anti-climax) in his scream at the arrival of the Nightwatchman. Its catalogue aria qualities can be seen in the poetic metre, which is essentially in five beats, but has the occasional line of four or six beats, and in one instance, seven beats. Both asyndeton and anaphora are in evidence, particularly in the second half, when the non-essential clauses are dropped in order to speed up the flow of ideas, and in the number of lines that rhyme with words ending in “en”, which also tends to pull his ideas closer together. Musically, Walther’s growing anger/excitement is depicted in his use of a type of parlando, characterised in this instance by repeated notes, in conjunction with leaps and semitone shifts. The instruction Animato is given for a large portion of the second half, and the staccato orchestral accompaniment is reduced to repetitions of just two motifs.

Its vengeance aria qualities are evident in the text, in which his frustration at the masters’ stuffiness and unwillingness to broach any new ideas is expressed. There is some evidence of a leaning towards the key of D minor in the opening section “Ach nein! Du irrst: der Freundin Hand”, but this is never settled upon – the key signature reflects C major. Most of the other musical characteristics, such as wide leaps, syncopated rhythms, strongly contrasted dynamics and scalar passages are well represented.

Walther is the only person of noble birth in this opera, and the character who has the most to lose, should he fail to win the song contest. The people who guide him are all simple journeymen, or, in the case of David, just a lowly
apprentice – a convincing reversal of convention, although not without precedent; the "problem solvers" in *Figaro* and *Barbiere* (Susanna and Figaro respectively) are also from the lower class. However, the true source of Walther's release from his tight spot is a dream – his own dream – an intervention of both supernatural and personal forces. Wagner here draws on and parodies two salient trends in contemporary Romantic thinking, namely the concepts of supernatural intervention in the destinies of mankind and the artist as hero, two ideas that gave *Die Zauberflöte* and *Der Freischütz* their popularity and their status as the true originators of German Romantic opera.

### 4.10.4 Eva

Eva and Walther are a young couple, desperately in love and unable to marry due to conditions imposed upon them by a higher authority, in this case Eva's father. Such situations are common in comic operas and can be seen in *Figaro* (Figaro and Susanna), *Zauberflöte* (Pamina and Tamino), *Barbiere* (Rosina and Almaviva) and *Die lustigen Weiber* (Anna and Fenton).

As is usual with the first pair of lovers, Eva is not presented as a comic character: she is merely the pawn in the game her father has initiated by his desire to prove the burghers' worthiness and disinterestedness. However, as with Walther, comic episodes can be found in her scenes, as was seen above in the discussion of her first scene with Walther.

Towards the end of this scene Wagner parodies his own *Holländer* by having Eva admit that her love for Walther has been brewing for some time due to a picture she has seen of David, the slayer of Goliath, as painted by Dürer. Wagner's three-fold pun on David's name that occurs at this point will be discussed below.

Her scenes with Sachs, in which each skirts around the truth of the issues they would like to discuss, reflect elements of deception and scheming, as well as deep pathos in dealing with the way these characters interact. In II:iii, Eva plays on Sachs's love for her in order to find out how Walther may fare in the competition and if Sachs intends aiding him in any way. Sachs, in turn, plays down his intentions and presents Walther in a rather hopeless light in
order to discover Eva’s real feelings for him, and by so doing actually incurs her anger, which is kept in check until Magdalene’s interruption causes her to lose control. Neither Sachs nor Eva is completely truthful in this scene, nor in III:iv, where Eva uses the pretext of an ill-fitting shoe to press Sachs for information.

Her intended machinations are interrupted by the arrival of Walther, which prevents the “game” from going any further, and clarifies the situation for everyone. In this brief scene, Wagner has very obviously parodied the legend of St Crispin, the patron saint of cobblers. According to the legend, Ursula, the Emperor Maximinus’ daughter, pretends that her shoes do not fit in order that Crispin may stroke her foot and so declare his love for her (Warrack, 1994:17, Lee, 2007:116).

Her rising anxiety is given an interesting vocal characterization in the two scenes she has with Sachs. In II:iii, in which she tries to elicit information about Walther’s potential in the trial, her music sits firmly in the middle of her range, rising only towards the end of the scene as she grows more agitated about Sachs’s refusal to give her the information she seeks, and reaching its highest note (A above the stave) on her final outburst. Her next scene with Sachs (III:iv), in which she is being deliberately arch, has melodies that sit in the upper half of the stave, marked piano for the full duration of the scene until her exclamation at the arrival of Walther. This difference in vocal range is readily heard and emphasized by the accompanying orchestration that sits high in the treble for the first part of their dialogue. It is an excellent example of Wagner using musical means to reveal the state of mind of the character.

4.10.5 David and Magdalene

The character of David is first introduced by way of a three-part pun – when Eva mentions David, Magdalene first thinks she means her beloved and Sachs’s apprentice, who just happens to appear in the church at that moment,

110 The comparison of tessitura between these two scenes was not done using Rastall’s computing system as described by Rushton (1997:417), but merely by a visual scanning of the score.
then that Eva is referring to the biblical King and psalmist with his harp and sceptre, depicted on the Mastersinger’s crest, when all the while Eva is thinking of Dürer’s depiction of the young David as giant-slayer (Lavignac, 1921:128).

His pairing with Magdalene is true to the convention in comic opera of linking a character of her type – the confidante, nurse, and usually the mezzo – with the tenore buffo (Rayner, 1940:169).

The first big moment of solo song that is encountered in Meistersinger is David’s “Tön’ und Weisen”. It is a catalogue aria in which he describes all the different types of melodies and poetic styles that Walther needs to master in order to succeed in the song competition. It is not as simply structured as its eighteenth-century precursor, as in this instance, David’s aria fills an entire scene and falls into four large sections separated by some dialogue between David and Walther. Its music and text have many of the requisite characteristics in that there is a gradual shortening of the musical phrase and textual metre in which both asyndeton and anaphora can be found, accompanied by many changes of tempo and mood. However, whereas in a typical aria the quickening of pace leads to its climactic ending, David’s presents a more complex structure due to its spread over the whole scene. The tempo is highly flexible and marked by many changes of time signature and tempo instruction. Instead of just using tempo and parlando, Wagner creates a sense of building towards a climax through his use of orchestral timbre, the chorus and by giving David increasingly higher notes at the climaxes of successive sections.

In trying to instruct Walther in the intricacies of master-singing, David overloads him with detail (Lee, 2007:18), telling him all about the many different types of melody, only to then deflate Walther’s confidence by informing him that all this knowledge will only qualify him as a singer. Before being able to qualify as a master, he needs also to develop the skills of poetry and the ability to combine the melodies and poems in the correct formal structures. The use Wagner makes of the catalogue aria here resembles that of Leporello’s “Madamina” in Don Giovanni. In both cases, the catalogue of
information is confounding rather than illuminating owing to the sheer volume of information, the speed at which this information is given, and the psychological impact of it all. It also makes a subtle reference to the exit convention as David, who has been the centre of attention for the whole of this scene, essentially disappears as he is relegated to a place among the other apprentices and has virtually no solo music for the rest of the act. However, this rather extended catalogue affords Wagner the opportunity for some mimicry as he gives the orchestra thumb-nail sketches of each of the styles that David lists (Rayner, 1940:197), recalling the musical depiction of the female types in Leporello’s aria.

The comedy in David’s role mostly revolves around his lack of maturity and wisdom. In I:i, he is supposed to teach Walther. Instead, he shows more concern for impressing Walther with the extent of his knowledge about cobbling, poetry and singing, and how well he knows them, leaving Walther puzzled and a little repulsed, rather than informed. This lack of communication skills is also reflected in his resorting to violence as a response to the other apprentices’ taunts.

There is a hint here that he could become another Beckmesser in the future, as he seems to have become bound by what he has learnt from Sachs, rather than to have developed a way of using it creatively (Warrack, 1994:86). We can see this in the melisma he uses on the word “Schüler”, which is an exact copy of the phrase Sachs will use to end the second verse of his Cobbling Song (on the word müssen), a suggestion that he had learnt this phrase directly from Sachs. David’s absentmindedness is revealed in his forgetting the rules of protocol by answering for Sachs during Kothner’s roll-call, and is further developed in III:i when he realizes only at the end of his “Johannestag” song that Johannestag is also Hans’ Tag.

The quality of his absentmindedness is developed further by his farcical and somewhat shell-shocked reactions to Sachs’s noises in III:i, revealing also his lack of insight into Sachs’s introverted mood. When Sachs noisily turns the page, David jumps, and when Sachs closes the book, David falls to his knees, inadvertently at Sachs’s feet. Sachs remains indifferent to David’s reactions.
Meanwhile, David is so shaken by all of this that when Sachs asks him to sing his “Sprüchlein”, David uses the tune of Beckmesser’s serenade instead of his own (Lavignac, 1921:143).

The method of his promotion to journeyman (viz. the box on the ears) that so offends Dahlhaus and a few others is open to several interpretations, and is a moment perhaps of rather black comedy, being as it were, the final beating of an apprentice, who, according to the libretto, was regularly disciplined by such methods. Barry (1880:90) views the box on the ears as designed to firmly imprint the occasion in David’s memory, while Berger (1998:187), suggests that this overt gesture has the same ritual symbolism as that of dubbing a knight with a sword.

As a couple, David and Magdalene form the comic counterweight to Eva and Walther, equal to the commedia dell’arte’s second pair of lovers and the zanni. It is David’s status as an apprentice that prevents their betrothal, rather than the difference in their ages. David is much younger than Magdalene, a situation echoing that of Figaro and Marcellina in Mozart’s Figaro, but with more reciprocal willingness for a betrothal between Wagner’s pair. In Donizetti’s Don Pasquale the relationship and age difference between Pasquale and Norina is used purely for comedy and satire. A similar situation exists between Anna and the two suitors her father prefers to Fenton in Die lustigen Weiber, although less is made of the age gap, as the focus of this opera centres on Falstaff’s shenanigans. Whereas Mozart, Donizetti and Nicolai intend their mismatched couples to be comic, Wagner never exploits the age difference between David and Magdalene for comic effect; he leaves that to the apprentices who regularly taunt David about this.

Lee (2007:115) suggests that Wagner has taken a leaf from the comedy of the ancient Romans by presenting both of them as “running slaves”, who, having done their master’s bidding, are ignored despite their attempts to gain his attention. We see this when Magdalene goes back to the pew repeatedly to retrieve Eva’s belongings and in her many, frequently brief, appearances and interruptions of events. In David’s case, we see it when he is relegated to
the chorus for the whole of I:iii, and is summarily dismissed after setting up Sachs’s work-table (II:ii) and delivering Beckmesser’s shoes (III:i).

Magdalene’s use of food as a means of maintaining David’s affections shows that dependencies are part of the glue holding this unusual relationship together. In his scene with Walther (I:ii), we learn that she has been undermining Sachs’s discipline by feeding him when Sachs withholds sustenance. It is with the promise of delicious food that she gets him to teach Walther, which she withdraws, when she discovers that Walther has not succeeded in his trial. At the start of Act III, however, we discover that it has been given as reward for thrashing Beckmesser.

The burlesque of cross-purpose regarding the identity of the David discussed by Eva and Magdalene (I:i) has already been mentioned. Such cross-purposes are in evidence again in Act II with David’s misunderstanding of Magdalene’s presence in the window during Beckmesser’s serenade.

Magdalene’s interruptions of events at crucial moments represent elements of farce. These interruptions are not unlike the kind found in French farce during which most of the cast are thrown into a frenzy of activity, rapidly entering and exiting the stage in pursuit of some goal they never quite reach. Although Magdalene always intrudes upon the action with a purpose, she interrupts it when one would least expect it. She does this three times in the very first scene of the opera, as already mentioned. She also has three of these interruptions in II:

- She interrupts Eva and Pogner just as he confirms that Eva is to be the reward at the song competition, and then leaves Eva hanging with the thought of Beckmesser, but not knowing is full significance.

- During Eva’s conversation with Sachs, and just when Eva thinks she is getting some answers about Walther’s chances as a mastersinger, Magdalene interrupts again, a distraction that causes Eva to lose control of her temper more rapidly than she might otherwise have done.
• Her final interruption comes just after the Nightwatchman appears at the climax of Walther’s tirade against the masters and all of Nuremberg: Magdalene calls Eva inside so that they can swap clothes in preparation for Beckmesser’s serenade.

Magdalene has no further impact on the drama after this, apart from her disguise as Eva at the end of Act II,\(^\text{111}\) although the apprentices manage to use the threat of her arrival to tease David in III:v, when he is dancing with one of the girls at the start of the Festwiese.

4.10.6 Kothner, Pogner and the other mastersingers

The mastersingers are treated as a group of individuals – they all have names based on historical characters;\(^\text{112}\) at some point each of them has a solo line; in ensemble, they are each given individual lines of music to sing as well as communal lines;\(^\text{113}\) some even have opinions that differ from the rest; but in essence these men represent a fairly homogenous group of minor characters who essentially satirize the deep-rooted immovability of the establishment. It is only Kothner and Pogner who are made to stand out from this group.

The presentation of Kothner has strong elements of satire and comicality. He depicts bureaucracy at its most pompous and self-important, as can be seen by the way he conducts the initial meeting of the guild in I:iii. The type is familiar from the *commedia dell’arte*, and from the lawyers or doctors found as secondary or minor characters in *Figaro*, *Così*, *Barbiere*, *L’elisir d’amore* and *Don Pasquale*.\(^\text{114}\) Kothner is only able to function within the trappings of pomp and ceremony, to the degree that he begins the roll-call by announcing his own presence and name. This is seen further in his overly serious questioning of Pogner and Walther, upon learning of the latter’s intention to sing for membership of the guild. His reading of the *Tabulatur* is, according to

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\(^\text{111}\) Her only other vocal contribution to the opera is in the quintet in Act III.

\(^\text{112}\) Wagnersell lists the names of twelve mastersingers from Nuremberg and Wagner uses their names almost exactly as listed (Rayner, 1940:70, 72).

\(^\text{113}\) The Valkyries who open Act III of *Die Walküre*, are presented similarly.

\(^\text{114}\) Despina’s caricature of this type, when in disguise in Act II of *Così*, encapsulates its qualities well.
Lee (2007:21) proclaimed “in four Germanic lines of recitative that end with Bach-like falling scales that are lavishly – and hilariously – ornamented.” This is also a moment when Wagner allows a partial penetration of the fourth wall, as Kothner’s reading of the Meistersinger rules\(^{115}\) is primarily for the audience’s benefit, although it also gives further insight into his and the mastersinger’s dependence on formality. His strong suggestion of the type of theme Walther should choose (a holy theme), and impotent rejection of Walther’s chosen subject for his Trial Song (a love song, like Walther’s minnesinger namesake) is another indication of his mired bureaucratic attitude. Wagner gives Kothner the ultimate anti-climactic line: just as Walther is ready to sing, he intones, “Der Sänger sitzt”, proclaimed, according to Wagner’s instructions, “sehr laut” (“very loudly”), obviously meant for the marker ensconced in his box and therefore unable to see, but guaranteed to elicit a ripple of laughter from many audiences.\(^{116}\)

Pogner is the equivalent of the commedia’s Pantalone, the father figure with lots of money, who is to be bested by the young lovers. However, he is not treated in any overtly comic manner and has none of the negative characteristics associated with Pantalone. This can be seen in his opening phrase at the start of I:i, which is melodic and self-contained against the pompous, almost obsessive, motif associated with the Guild. It reflects the secure benevolence of Pogner’s character (Warrack, 1994:87), qualities that emerge with more clarity as the scene progresses.

His intention to use his daughter, the dearest among his possessions, along with a dowry of all his worldly possessions, as the ultimate reward in the singing competition, is not out of keeping with a character like Pantalone and the use to which wealth is often put in comic operas. This type of offer often

\(^{115}\) Wagner would have known these rules well, as he had made a study of them in three sources: Wagnerseil’s Nuremberg Chronicle (1697), Jacob Grimm’s Über den altdeutschen Meistergesang (1811) and Gervinus’ History of German National Literature (1826) (Newman, 1949:296, 300).

\(^{116}\) When the singer Michael Pabst sang in our local production (August 1987) he found the lack of audience response to this moment remarkable, being used to the response it usually elicited in the German houses in which he had performed. Those Germans consulted about this, tell me that it is a genuinely funny moment for them (Schwartze, 2010).
forms the starting point of dramatic narratives, and as noted earlier, may owe its place in this opera directly to Shakespeare. In this case it reflects a somewhat over-reaching attempt to re-establish the reputation of the guildsmen of Nuremberg, who have been perceived, according to information he gathered during his travels, as being interested only in usury and money. However, this offer as a sinecure for the guildsmen’s reputation seems to be an isolated instance of such altruism in comic opera. He is unaware of the fast-developing romance between Eva and Walther, at the time the offer is made, and the promise he makes to Beckmesser to speak to Eva in his favour is sincerely given, despite Beckmesser’s distrust. In the developing fuss made over the novelty of his offer, he reveals himself to be inherently a conservative man who does not wish to introduce too many new ideas at once. The argument by Sachs that if she can be part of the judging process, then the populace should be allowed to do so too, goes just a bit too far for him. Giving Eva the option of accepting their chosen master-singer feels justifiable to him, as it allows her a hand in her affairs; at the same time he is happy to condemn her to an unmarried future should she reject the mastersingers’ choice.

At the opening of II:ii, he shows some doubts about the course he has set for Eva. This is revealed in his opening lines that show him reaching towards Sachs for some guidance, as all the other characters do in Act III, and questioning Eva as to her thoughts on his decision. However, he steps back from this, refrains from expressing his reservations to her or anyone else, and takes just a little comfort in her (apparent) willingness to be obedient to her father’s wishes. His realization at the end of this scene that he has misread her reactions to Walther at his dinner the previous evening\textsuperscript{117} and has possibly committed her to an unhappy future with Beckmesser, gives him pause, but he does not pursue the matter further. Nevertheless, he is clearly relieved when the problem is resolved. He is revealed as a man of humility by his very public show of appreciation, and by his willingness to let Sachs place

\textsuperscript{117} This event has no place in the actual opera, but we are told about it in the course of I:i.
the winner’s medallion around Walther’s neck – a privilege that Pogner should have had, as the senior of the Guild (Newman, 1949:413).

4.10.7 The apprentices

This group is somewhat larger than the guild, and it is treated like a unit of people, as none of them is named and none has individual lines of text or music. This group of apprentices is meant to represent males of various ages, and it is here that we find Wagner tapping into the convention of the hosenrolle, as their parts include sopranos and altos who are meant to represent younger apprentices.118 They are obviously like the zanni in traditional commedia dell’arte, but here, their mischief and teasing is directed specifically at one of their own, namely David, who is regularly taunted about his relationship with the much older Magdalene. Their inability to set up the singing school correctly without David’s leadership, sets them apart from him, a relationship that Wagner maintains throughout much of the opera by using them as single unit of sound against David’s solo singing. In I:iii, David becomes one with them, singing the 1st tenor line, but they maintain their individuality against the music of the mastersingers in the finale of Act I. While they merge with the townsfolk for the riot that ends Act II, they keep their identity as a unit in Act III until near the end, when they merge once again with the whole community.

A tune that is particularly theirs is the CHAPLET TUNE (Newman, 1949:332, Rayner, 1940:198), which sings of the promise of being given the silken garland as reward for successfully competing in the song competition. It is used to mocking effect as the accompaniment to the final phrase and exit of Beckmesser’s scene with Sachs, highlighting the vanity of his hopes of winning the silken garland at the song competition.119

118 He does this again in Parsifal, but only for the quartet of squires (Knappe) in Act I.
119 Ironic references to earlier material can be found in a number of comic operas, perhaps most famously in Basilio’s sardonic reiteration of his (well-founded) suspicion at the moment of the discovery of Cherubino’s hiding place in Figaro.
4.10.8 The Nightwatchman

The Nightwatchman was a familiar figure in many German cities and makes many appearances in opera. Wagner may well have known such figures and their call from his boyhood, especially as the words he gives this figure to sing are virtually identical to a mid-sixteenth century version (Newman, 1949:361). In 1789 he appears in Dittersdorf’s *Komisches Singspiel, Hieronymus Knicker*. He appears again in 1794 in *Die Schwestern von Prag*, a Singspiel by Wenzel Müller (Warrack, 2001:172), in which he foreshadows *Meistersinger* by quelling a riot caused by the successive serenades of five suitors. August Kotzebue’s play *Die deutschen Kleinstäder* (1802) has the nightwatchman quell a noisy neighbourhood argument with the lines -

Hört ihr Herren und lasst euch sagen: Die Glocke hat neun geschlagen.

– used virtually intact by Wagner in his Nightwatchman’s melopœia, and before him by Mendelssohn in his one-act *Liederspiel, Heimkehr aus der Fremde*, during which two characters alternately pretend to be the nightwatchman in order to prevent the other serenading the same girl.\(^\text{120}\)

E.T.A. Hoffmann has him appear at midnight in his lively comedy, *Die lustigen Musikanten* (1805), in which his role has been compared to the *commedia* character, Truffaldin. His appearance always restores order and calm at the moment of chaos, when the light he brings either reveals peoples’ identities or simply causes them to flee the scene (Warrack, 2001:172, 250).

Additionally, in presenting this character as an intrusion into the scene, Grew (1934:608-610) suggests that Wagner has taken a musical idea from Beethoven. In essence this involves the Nightwatchman’s horn on the note F# which is always foreign to his F major melopœia, and all the music it interrupts. The gist of this idea probably derives from the finale of Beethoven’s 8\(^{th}\) Symphony, which features the sudden intrusion of a *fortissimo C#* into a passage that is essentially in F major and *pianississimo*.

\(^{120}\) In Kotzebue’s play a lover also starts a riot by serenading his intended who is not in the window as he supposes, but nearby in the arms of her real lover (Warrack, 1994:21).
The use of this gesture is one of the elements that give the movement its humorous character, which Grew describes as ranging from horseplay to fine artistry, taking in boisterousness and practical joking along the way. This type of humour is comparable to the effect Wagner achieves with the out-of-key intrusion of the Nightwatchman.

Another aspect that Wagner’s grandson, Wieland, points out, suggests that the use of F# in Meistersinger is a parody of its use in Der Ring des Nibelungen in which it refers to the end of the world (Skelton, 1971:169). Unfortunately, the instances he is referring to are not given, but the occasions in which this may have significance in Meistersinger are:

- Beckmesser’s ridiculous “resolution” of the leading note C# on to an over-ambitious F#, at the end of his “Freund Sachs” monologue, which marks his embracing of a course of action while unaware of its certain failure. If he were to adopt Sach’s moral, it would also mark the end of his Wahn about his own abilities.
- The diminished 5th opening of “Wahn!” between F# in the orchestra and C natural on Sach’s first word, as he begins his contemplation of madness in the world, and his descent across the interval C – F# on “Gott weiß, wie das geschah?” in the middle of this same aria. C major is, of course, the main key of this opera, and F# represents the opposing polarity to this key.\(^\text{121}\)
- The Nightwatchman’s quashing of Walther’s anger and the neighbourhood riot with the intrusion of F# against the prevailing F major.

4.11 Summary

We have seen how Wagner uses music, musical form, the text and his staging to take his characters from their commedia dell’arte origins and turn

\(^{121}\) This can also be related to the opening of Tristan, where the home key of A minor appears to represent reality, while its opposite (D#/E flat minor) represents the world of the lovers’ Wahn.
them into fully rounded people. It has become obvious too that not all of his characters are meant to display the purely humorous qualities of comedy, and that in certain instances, such as Sachs, humour may result through their interactions with the other, more comedic characters only as a by-product of his irony and satire. The role of Sachs in particular keeps turning the opera towards an introspective view in a manner that has caused Warrack (1994:90) to call it a “noble comedy”. Pogner, Eva and Walther remain somewhat above the comedic elements, although their actions give rise to some comic situations and interactions. David and Magdalene show the least amount of character development through the course of the drama, but maintain their role as the foci of light and low comedy, while Beckmesser, who undoubtedly descends through a negative character development, takes the main thrust of the comedy at many different levels.

It has also been shown that there are many instances during the course of the work when Wagner has tapped into the conventions prevalent at the time for his characters. Most remarkable of these are the use of key, libretto and lyrical traits for some of his arias like David’s catalogue aria, Beckmesser’s vengeance aria, the use of both types in a combined aria for Walther, the use of ensemble and the chorus, and the similarities that can be drawn between characters and situations in this work and those of Mozart, Beethoven Weber, Nicolai, Rossini, Lortzing, Marschner and others.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The status of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* as a comic opera is a somewhat contested one. While some critics admired it for its clear musical forms, essential diatonicism, humanity, and mix of philosophical and farcical elements, others have criticized it as being incomprehensible, monotonous, over-stylized and somewhat sadistic.

The work certainly sounds unlike any other comic opera, mainly because it avoids for the most part the closed, song-like numbers and lively accompaniments based on simple rhythmic patterns that are characteristic of earlier comic opera. Nevertheless, Wagner adopts, adapts and re-interprets many of the conventions of the genre, and especially of German comic opera.

Drawing on his love and knowledge of theatre and the works of Shakespeare, his intimate knowledge of the standard operatic repertoire, and the contemporary thinking about, and practices of, theatre and opera, he developed and published his theories concerning his ideal form of the music-drama. These included the use of language and music working together to create drama, and that the main focus of his works should be the musical and mimetic depiction of a realistic interweaving of the relationships between his protagonists. In order to achieve this, he envisioned a form of musical expression that had its basis in the declamatory style of Gluck, the melodic and symphonic styles of Mozart and Beethoven, and the “unifying spirit” envisioned by Weber.

*Meistersinger* was initially conceived as a light entertainment, small-scale, satyr-play partner to *Tannhäuser*. But like its immediate predecessor, *Tristan*, it grew in size and concept during the twenty-years or so of its gestation, incorporating qualities found in Shakespeare’s plays and the operas and *Singspiele* of Mozart, Beethoven and Weber, such as a free mix of both comic and serious elements. Some elements of the story were inspired by real events, such as the street brawl that concludes Act II, and Wagner’s knowledge of the historical Hans Sachs, the mastersingers and their music, and the singing competitions held in Nuremberg. Much of the opera is,
however, Wagner’s own improvisation around these events and other sources such as the plays and operas on the subject of Hans Sachs that preceded his composition.

The conventions of subject matter employed by Wagner include the focus on characters and events that have direct antecedents in the *commedia dell’arte*: a primary pair of lovers who have to overcome a number of obstacles to achieve happiness, and are aided by a wiser, older man; an unwanted comic suitor; a contest between the suitors; a second pair of lovers of a lower social order; scheming; disguise; and a riotous “free-for-all”. While these conventions are readily perceived, more subtle references to the conventions of comic opera are to be found in Wagner’s use of botanical symbolism, which supplies a rich source of metaphor in the libretto, particularly in the trial and prize songs of Walther. Reference is also to be found in the inspiration Walther draws from his dream, which makes a subtle parody of release from a tight spot through the intervention of supernatural forces, as well as the Romantic notion of the artist as a super-hero. Some self-parody, inviting the knowing complicity of the audience, is also evident in musical and dramatic references to his earlier works.

*Meistersinger* is the only one of Wagner’s mature operas in which the protagonists are ordinary people, linking it to a long tradition in comic opera, which stands in contrast to the mythological, legendary and heroic figures associated with serious opera. In keeping with comic tradition, Wagner also assigned each of his protagonists a specific vocality and style of expression. The conventions of comic opera are also evident in such features as the use of word-play, musical, literary and dramatic burlesque, the breaching of the fourth wall, and a wide variety of comedic styles, including elements of parody (and pre-parody), irony, farce, and slapstick, as well as the appropriation of high, medium and low forms of comedy.

Wagner, like Mozart, also mixes comic and serious styles and content. This is evident in the differences in the degree of character development, which range from the profound changes evinced in Hans Sachs (the wise, older man who realizes his love for a young woman is pointless, and who arrives at a
state of selflessness in which he is happy to aid a younger man in wooing her), to the mechanical inelasticity of Beckmesser, Sachs’s main comic foil, who cannot conceptualize the pointlessness of his own attachment to the young woman. This shows Wagner daringly enriching a genre in which it is generally accepted that character development can be a hindrance to comicality, with elements borrowed from serious opera, including the theme of renunciation so important in his later music-dramas. These two contrasting baritone roles are mirrored by two contrasting tenor roles: Walther learns to improvise freely and creatively within the restrictions of a respect for tradition, and David, who has essentially learnt his lessons by rote, graduates from apprentice to journeyman with a very traditional ditty on an approved, religious subject. The musical (and dramatic) gathering-of-forces towards a “free-for-all” conclusion to Acts I and II, is modelled on both the Scarlatti and Mozart types of finale.

Formal structures, not usually a readily identifiable feature of Wagner’s mature music-dramas, play an important role as descriptors of his protagonists. It is one of the means by which his characters are given dimension and psychological depth, an aspect that is particularly noticeable in the range of forms employed by Sachs, and the unsatisfactory application of the forms employed by Beckmesser. Goldoni’s concept of *chiaroscuro* is vastly expanded through Wagner’s use of free forms, as developed by him in his music-dramas, and used here alongside forms traditionally associated with comic opera. The use of actual songs in the plots of comic opera is a familiar convention, and one that Wagner not only adopts, but develops into one of the central themes of the work. While musical items in comic operas are usually unrelated and separated by recitative or spoken dialogue, Wagner’s ideal was an uninterrupted continuum of music in which the leitmotifs unify the whole by forming a tightly integrated web of musical and dramatic relationships. In *Meistersinger*, he achieves an effortless and convincing amalgam of these two styles as moments of pure song smoothly emerge from, and merge back into, his endless melody.
The overture is both a traditional sonata-form structure and a single-movement, Lisztian symphonic poem. It is also closely linked to the whole work, as virtually all of the opera's motifs trace their origins to this item, which flows directly into the opening scene and forms, in expanded version, the material for III:v.

Conventionally, the orchestra claims the spotlight only during such opening sections and scenic marches or dances, as its main purpose is that of accompanying the singers. Wagner casts it in this traditional role when necessary for the story, but, in keeping with his ideal that the orchestra should function like the communicating Greek chorus, he also uses it to convey the inner aspect of the drama and to generate symphonic structure.

The bar-form structure given to the three acts of the opera, in which I and II form the _Stolen_ to the _Abgesang_ of III, not only creates a link between the macrostructure and the individual songs, but can also be viewed as an elaborate and somewhat erudite musical joke.

The central role given to chorus as the community within which the events occur, and the use made of ensemble, reflect an apparent negation of his earlier theories, but equally reveal the comic-opera roots upon which this work is built.

_Meistersinger_ does not rely on these conventions in an obvious manner, but where it suited his purposes, Wagner embraced them, and achieved much of his comic effect through a rich and subtle interaction with them. Forms like the catalogue, vengeance, and dilemma arias, the _rondò_, moral endings, associations of key, and independent orchestral forms all make an appearance during the course of the opera, but unlike their usage in conventional comic operas, they do not always appear where one would expect to find them, nor as isolated, readily identifiable structures associated with their traditional usage.

Where necessary, and in order for a greater exposition of the moral of this story, he applied techniques more closely associated with his theories of the music-drama. This can be seen most clearly in the richly detailed, tightly
unified body of leitmotifs, and the symphonically worked out orchestral score that resembles the role of the orchestra in eighteenth-century operas on only a few, pertinent, occasions.

While the incorporation of the rhetoric of music-drama greatly augmented the expressive palette at Wagner’s disposal, it has led to claims that the opera is hardly comic at all. Nevertheless, the symphonic language is certainly simpler and less saturated than in the music-dramas, but still far less governed by lively and simple rhythmic patterning than conventional comic opera. The psychological flow of the musical narrative makes the texture less typical of comic opera, but greatly enhances the naturalism of expression, which is one of the salient tendencies in comic opera.

The serious messages underpinning the action at times may tend to overshadow the moments of comedy, but the work is, nevertheless, written about with great affection for the humanity of its protagonists by authors such as Rayner, Newman, Warrack and Lee. It is notable too, that of all his mature works, this is the only one of which the title does not refer to its hero or central theme, but rather to the community in which the drama occurs (Matthews, 1983:9).

In the end, one can but agree with Tovey (2009:26) that Meistersinger is truly “a comedy full of kindly wisdom and bathed in sunshine, with no shadows deeper than moonshine”.

167
### Addendum 1: Songs, arias and aria-like forms in *Meistersinger*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Closed Form</th>
<th>“Disguised” aria</th>
<th>Monologues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sachs</td>
<td>• Jerum! Jerum! (II:vi)</td>
<td>• Wie duftet doch der Flieder (II:iii)</td>
<td>• Mein Freund, in holder Jugendzeit (III:ii)</td>
<td>• Die Hoffnung lass’ ich mir nicht mindern (III:i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wahn! Wahn! (II:i)</td>
<td>• Verachtet mir die Meister nicht (III:v)</td>
<td>• Aha! Hier sitzt’s: nun begreif’ ich den Fall (III:iv)</td>
<td>• So ganz boshaft doch keinen ich fand (III:iii)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Mein Kind: von Tristan und Isolde… (III:iv)</td>
<td>• Euch macht ihr’s leicht (III:v)</td>
<td>• Mein Freund, in holder Jugendzeit (III:iii)</td>
<td>• Hat man mit dem Schuhwerk nicht seine Noth! (III:iv)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mein Freund, in holder Jugendzeit (III:iii)</td>
<td>• Euch macht ihr’s leicht (III:v)</td>
<td>• Die Hoffnung lass’ ich mir nicht mindern (III:i)</td>
<td>• Ich sag’ euch Herr’n, das Lied ist schön (III:v)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walther</td>
<td>• Fanget an! So rief der Lenz in den Wald (I:iii)</td>
<td>• Am stillen Herd in Winterszeit (I:iii)</td>
<td>• Ach nein! Du irrst: der Freundin Hand (II:v)</td>
<td>• Ein sau’re Amt, und heut’ zumal (I:iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>• Preislied: Morgenlich leuchtend in rosigem Schein (III:ii)</td>
<td>• Morgenlich leuchtend in rosigem Schein (III:ii)</td>
<td>• Ach nein! Du irrst: der Freundin Hand (II:v)</td>
<td>• Freund Sachs! So hört doch nur ein Wort! … Lasst das doch sein! das war ja nur Scherz. (II:v)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beckmesser</td>
<td>• Serenade: Den Tag seh’ ich erscheinen (II:vi)</td>
<td>• O ihr boshafter Geselle! (II:vi)</td>
<td>• Freund Sachs! So hört doch nur ein Wort! … Lasst das doch sein! das war ja nur Scherz. (II:v)</td>
<td>• Ein sau’re Amt, und heut’ zumal (I:iii)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Morgen ich leuchte in rosigem Schein (III:v)</td>
<td>• O Schuster, voll von Ränken (III:iii)</td>
<td>• Freund Sachs! So hört doch nur ein Wort! … Lasst das doch sein! das war ja nur Scherz. (II:v)</td>
<td>• Ein sau’re Amt, und heut’ zumal (I:iii)</td>
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<td>• Da seid ihr nun wieder zu bescheiden (III:iii)</td>
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<td>• Freund Sachs! So hört doch nur ein Wort! … Lasst das doch sein! das war ja nur Scherz. (II:v)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Freund Sachs, ihr seid ein guter Poet (III:iii)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ein sau’re Amt, und heut’ zumal (I:iii)</td>
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## Addendum 1 (cont.)

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<th>Character</th>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Closed Form</th>
<th>“Disguised” aria</th>
<th>Monologues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| David     | • Glück auf zum Meistersingen (Chaplet tune) (I:ii)  
• Am Jordan Sankt Johannes stand (III:i) | • Mein Herr! der Singer Meisterschlag (I:ii) | • Gleich! Meister! Hier! (III:i) |
| Pogner    | • Nicht doch, ’s ist mild und labend (II:ii)  
• Nun hört, und versteht mich recht! … In deutschen Landen viel gereist (I:iii) |  | • Tu’ ich’s? – Zu was doch? … (II:ii) |
| Kothner   | • Ein jedes Meistergesanges Bar (I:iii) |  |  |
| Eva       | • O Sachs! Mein Freund! Mein theurer Mann! (III:iv) |  |  |
Addendum 2: Leitmotifs referred to in the text.

All examples are based on the extracted examples in English National Opera Guide No.19 and the 1983 Breitkopf vocal edition of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.
Addendum 3: COURTING (A)

<table>
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<th>Page</th>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Walt: Ein Wort! ein einzig Wort! Eva: Wohl liegt's im Ort– Magd: Nun heißt es: such'!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A word! a single word! It's probably in our place– Now I must search!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Magd: Hier ist das Tuch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Here is the kerchief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Magd: Fürwahr ist Evchen Pogner Braut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is true that Pogner has betrothed Eva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Walt: Find’ ich zum Vers auch den eig’nen Ton.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If I find the proper tone for the verse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Beck: Das bei dem Kind ihr für mich spricht,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To speak to the child on my behalf,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Walt: Hier eben bin ich am rechten Ort:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This is the right place for me:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Walt: Heut' muß ich’s laut zu künden wagen:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I must be bold and proclaim it out loud:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Beck: In stiller Nacht, von ihr nur gehört,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the silence of the night, heard only by her,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>Sachs: Als ich und ihr, muß der Freier sein,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Than you and me the wooer must be,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>Koth: Seid ihr bereit, ob euch geriet,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are you ready to show us now, (ref. to Walther)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146</td>
<td>Sachs: sie fand ich neu, doch nicht verwirrt: Sachs: Wollt ihr nach Regeln messen,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I found new, but not confused: If you wish to measure according to rules,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209</td>
<td>Eva: dass ich sie noch nicht an die Füß’ mir getraut.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That I have not yet dared put them on my feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>213</td>
<td>Eva: Wie so denn der?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why he then? (ref. to Beckmesser)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>278ff</td>
<td>Sachs: D’rum singt ihr nun, ich acht’ und merk’,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So if you sing, I’ll note and mark,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>380</td>
<td>Sachs: Ja, ja! Schon gut!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, yes! Very true!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>382</td>
<td>Sachs: Der Lenz, der sang für sie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The spring sang for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>385</td>
<td>Sachs: Und helfen wohl bewahren, was in der Jugend Jahren,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And help you keep what in youthful years,</td>
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<td>Page</td>
<td>German</td>
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<tr>
<td>391</td>
<td>Walt: <em>von Blüt und Duft geschwellt die Luft,</em> (descending sequence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>392</td>
<td>Walt: <em>bot gold'ner Frucht heilsaft'ge Wucht</em> (descending sequence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>394</td>
<td>Walt: <em>an meiner Seite stand ein Weib,</em> (descending sequence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>397ff</td>
<td>Walt: <em>verschied der Tag, wie dort ich lag:</em> (descending sequence) Walt: <em>wie weit so nah' beschienen da zwei lichte Sterne</em> (descending sequence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>398</td>
<td>Walt: <em>jetzt schwellt er an sein hold Getön’ so stark und süß…</em> (descending sequence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>399</td>
<td>Sachs: <em>Freund, euer Traumbild wies euch wahr:</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>Sachs: <em>Des traumes Deutung würd’ er berichten.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>420</td>
<td>Sachs: <em>Wie’s euch belieb’.</em> Sachs: <em>Wenn’s nicht zu schwer.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>439</td>
<td>Walt: <em>So licht und klar im Lockenhaar,</em> (descending sequence)</td>
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<tr>
<td>440</td>
<td>Walt: <em>zwiefachen Tag ich grüßen mag;</em> (descending sequence)</td>
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<tr>
<td>441</td>
<td>Walt: <em>Den Kranz, vor zweier Sonnenstrahl</em> (descending sequence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>449</td>
<td>Eva: <em>Du warest mein Gemahl,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>462</td>
<td>Sachs: <em>Den Vater grüß!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>534</td>
<td>Walt: <em>von Blüt und Duft geschwellt die Luft,</em> (descending sequence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>538</td>
<td>Walt: <em>auf steilem Pfad war ich genahlt wohl einer Quelle reiner</em> (descending sequence)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography

Sources cited


**Sources consulted**


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