

Remarks on Sardakai
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When in 1967 Rolf Liebermann, then director of the Hamburg State Opera House, commissioned me to write a second opera for his house (the first had been The Golden Ram in 1964) to be premiered in 1970 and conducted by me I accepted the commission with pleasure and added: "Let the premiere at least be on my seventieth birthday." When Liebermann learned that this was the 23rd of August, he said that at that time his opera house ~~was~~ was booked for guest appearances with Così fan tutte at the Lucerne Festival in Switzerland, and in this case it would be most practical if I could visualize my new opera to use the same apparatus as Mozart's masterpiece: six singers, no chorus, and a relatively limited orchestra.

Far from considering this an imposition, I took the assignment as a challenge. The problem, as I saw it, was to invent a completely new, present-day plot in which some of the characteristic motives of the Così story would re-appear in a new perspective. Going over my sketches (a batch of a hundred or more small sheets) I notice that at first my mind was still clinging to the subject matter of an oratorio that I had written in 1966 for the Hamburg radio, "To Believe and To Know" (Glauben und Wissen), and this I connected soon with the idea of the test which is the center piece of Così. Like a revenant from another world, elements from a story that I had written thirty years earlier show up in the sketches. But eventually the character of an exotic queen appears more persistently and a fairly complicated plot begins to delineate the gyrations of ~~her~~ five partners. One ~~can~~ can identify one of the central pieces of the Così mechanics in that one of the lovers pretends to go to war. But it is not he who returns in disguise to test his girl's fidelity, but it is the mastermind who engineered the silly ~~maneuver~~ maneuver and is forced to try his guile on his own lover who immediately sees through his disguise. In this detail I deviated from the model because I have always found the supposed impenetrability of the deceit in Così a weakness of that lovely plot. After I had thus established the relation of my story to that of the venerable opera I decided that the music would have to take a bow in that direction too. Hence the quotation over the transistor radio in the beach scene, which provokes the hilarity of the audience, as calculated. The opera pokes fun at a number of sacred cows as they crossed my field of vision at that time. I did not mean to satirize any one of them in particular, or perhaps all of them equally.

~~After the premiere~~ Eventually I learned that the Hamburg Opera was not going to Lucerne after all, and the premiere was scheduled in Hamburg, June 24, 1970. I was not too happy with the final scene where the six principals appear in new pairings, ~~which I decided to delete and replace with a scene of the six principals in a new setting~~ and I decided to rewrite this finale to make it more concise and musically more coherent. This new version has not yet seen the light of any stage, and its mounting in America would constitute a "world premiere" of sorts.

for Paula Barbara