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Composed Politics? Mozart's Singspiele and Their Reflection of Political and Socio-cultural Discourse in Late 18th Century Vienna.

This study explores how the political and socio-cultural context of the 18th century is reflected in the textual, dramaturgical and musical choices of Mozart's Singspiele, showing the role of music as an integral part of political communication at the end of the 18th century. In a second step, the study asks whether we can understand Mozart's Singspiele as a point of orientation for the political, social and cultural challenges of our time.

German Singspiele – I will argue – had an important political function. Many of them were part of a larger perspective which incorporated art in a socio-political agenda as tools for moral instruction – “moral instruction” understood as a requisite for mature and responsible citizens, and for wise political leaders. Responding to the new enlightened concept of ideal rulership emphasizing the sovereign as the “first servant of the state,” the theatre entered a new role: no longer elevating the ruler as an earthly representative of God, it was legitimated and ennobled through the purpose of “enlightening” the general public. Consequently, rulers did from a standpoint of power politics hope that an educational theatre would strengthen their state. On the other hand, literates, philosophers and artists operated from a more idealistic point of view hoping an enlightened moralistic public would lead to a utopian world characterised by “Glückseligkeit” (“general happiness”). Analysing text and music of Mozart's Singspiele, the study demonstrate the adherence of these works to this tendency: Due to their political content, inspired by their imminent socio-pedagogical function under the auspices of enlightened absolutism and connected thinking during the nascent German idealism, they can be understood as paradigmatic reflections of contemporary socio-political discourses.

Analytically, the project trace the reflection of the socio-historical and socio-cultural context in the Singspiele from two angles: 1) from a macro-perspective, that is the main structural division in acts, scenes and general content, and 2) from a micro-perspective, that is the compositional and poetical choices of Mozart and his librettists. The combination of these perspectives makes it possible to pursue the calculated articulation of socio-political themes in the larger frame of these works as well as in details. A description of the interaction between text and music will play a decisive role in this approach.