

# PREFACE

*By Jens Staubrand*

The works of the author and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) one finds a well-developed linguistic rhythm besides great of ideas and a wealth of metaphors.

The melodic language can be clearly heard in this from Kierkegaard's analysis of Mozart's Don Giovanni in the essay: The immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical-Erotic, from the major work Either/Or (1843), in which Kierkegaard maintains that the musical portrayal of Don Giovanni is more important than the scenic representation:

'Listen to Don Juan; That's to say, if you cannot get an idea of Don Juan by listening to him, you will never get one. Hear the beginning of his life; as lightning twists out of the thunder cloud's murk, he bursts forth from the depth of earnest swifter than lightning, less constant than it yet as measured. Hear how he plunges into life's diversity, how he dashes himself against its solid dam, hear these light, dancing tones of the violin, hear the beckoning of joy, hear the exultation of desire, hear the festive bliss of enjoyment; hear his wild flight; he hurries past even himself, ever faster, ever more impetuously; hear the murmur of love, hear the whisper of temptation, hear the swirl of seduction, hear the stillness of the moment – listen, listen, listen, to Mozart's Don Juan'.

A corresponding melodic language can be found everywhere in the writings of Kierkegaard. This literary quality makes Kierkegaard's words suitable for singing, and together with reflective elements and metaphors we obtain in this way some unique vocal works.

Although Kierkegaard could write melodically and was a master of terse description, as can be seen for example in some of the aphorisms (called Diapsalmata) which introduce Either/Or, he never wrote any poetry.

Søren Kierkegaard was interested in the theatre and music. We know that he obtained music on behalf of his fiancée Regine Olsen, who played the piano, that he was a regular visitor to the Royal Theatre, that he was a member of Musikforeningen i København [The Copenhagen Music Association] – and we know that he wrote about both music and the theatre.

In the philosophical essay on music The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical-Erotic, Kierkegaard analyses the three Mozart operas *Le Nozze de Figaro*, *Die Zauberflöte* and *Don Giovanni*, which respectively had their first performances at the Danish Royal Theatre in January 1820, March 1816 and May 1806.

Kierkegaard also deals with the opera *Don Giovanni* in the article entitled A passing comment on a detail in *Don Juan*, *Fædrelandets Feuilleton* [The Fatherland Serial] 19th-20th May 1845, where the

Danish opera singer Jens Christian Hansen's (1812-1880) role as Don Giovanni (a role he played from 1839 to 1870) is analysed, as well in the diapsalma. These two well-known violin strokes, from the introduction to *Either/Or*, where the beginning of the allegro section in the Don Juan-overture is examined from an emotional angle.

In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard also analyses the French playwright Augustin Eugène Scribe's popular play: *The first Love*, first performed in June 1831, running until 1842, with 50 performances at the Danish Royal Theatre. Kierkegaard furthermore analyses 'tragedy' in the essay (in 'Either/Or') 'The Tragic in Ancient Drama, Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama'.

In the essay *The crisis and a crisis in the Life of an actress*, *Fædrelandets Feuilleton* [The Fatherland Serial] 24th-27th July 1848, Kierkegaard writes about the theatre, plays and in particular Johanne Luise Heiberg's (1812-1890) role as Juliet in the Danish Royal Theatre's new arrangement in 1847 of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. There is also, in the article, an analysis of the Danish actor Christen Niemann Rosenkilde's (1786-1861) comical skill (in the role as the court officer Hummer in Johan Ludvig Heiberg's vaudeville: 'The Inseparables', first performed at the Danish Royal Theatre in June 1827).

In the article called: *Mr Phister as Captain Scipio*, which was originally meant for *The Fatherland* [Fædrelandets Feuilleton], but was never printed (but which has now been published in Kierkegaard's Papers IX B 67-8; dated December 1848), Kierkegaard analyses the actor Joachim Ludvig Phister's (1807-1896) role as Scipio, a captain in the papal police force, in J.H.V. de Saint-George, L.J.F. Herold and Jacques Halévy's singspiel *Ludovic* (later known in Denmark under the name of *The Corsican*), which from 1833 to 1846 was performed several times at the Royal Theatre.

Kierkegaard was not himself musically creative. As regards plays, we know from his Papers (I A 11-18) that, during the period from autumn 1835 to spring 1836, he worked on the character of a master thief for a play, which however never came to fruition.

Both Danish and foreign composers and dramatists have been inspired by Kierkegaard's life and work to the creation of a series of musical works and plays.

The musical works are based on texts from *Diapsalmata*, and *The Seducer's Diary* (sections of *Either/Or*), as well as *The Sickness unto Death* (1849), *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *Works of Love* (1847), *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (1851), *Christian Discourses* (1848), *The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air* (1849), *The Unchangeableness of God* (1855), and several prayers from Kierkegaard's Papers.

The plays are based on texts from *Either/Or*, including *The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical-Erotic*, and *The Seducer's Diary*, on *In Vino Veritas* (a part of *Stages on Life's Way*, as well as on the Kierkegaard Papers and literature about Kierkegaard dealing with his childhood and youth, his relationship with his father, his dispute with

the church and Bishop Jacob Peter Mynster, the story of his engagement to Regine Olsen and his final illness and death at the Royal Frederiks Hospital in Copenhagen in 1855.

The Bibliography is in alphabetical order for the composers and dramatists respectively, and is in two sections. The first contains the musical works and the second the plays. The works are classed under their English titles with the Danish ones next to them, but in such a way as to give prominence to the original title.

The Bibliography is as exhaustive as possible; for each work information is given about the requirements for musicians, actors etc., as well as what Kierkegaard texts each work is based on.

If any further information, not mentioned in the Bibliography, might be forthcoming on Kierkegaard-based plays or musical works, I would be very interested to know about it.

*Translated by Gwyn Hodgson and Reay Jehu*