



# DON GIOVANNI. LETZTE PARTY

## INTERVIEW WITH ANTÚ ROMERO NUNES AND JOHANNES HOFMANN

### **Why tackle *Don Giovanni*?**

Antú Romero Nunes: Don Giovanni is to me the most enigmatic figure in the history of European literature. Here's a being who does nothing but what he wants. He's decided to spare himself the bad moments in life, the ones that are sad and boring. With Mozart's opera, we wanted to challenge ourselves on a formal level. The story of Don Giovanni is told not only through the text, the libretto, but also through Mozart's music, which gives the whole thing an entirely different emotional dimension. You need first to listen to and understand that music before you can think about how you're going to direct it. Usually, theatre is based on a text, on which the actors rely to create their characters. Here, though, the text is only one specific part of a larger whole. We had to listen to the music that corresponds to each scene, then imagine how it could influence the actors' performances and lead to a text that would suit it.

### **This work requires the director and the musician to work closely together.**

A.R.N.: I could only do this with Johannes. I need someone I've worked with before, someone I can trust, whose pleasure at working together on such a project I can imagine. This is why we chose a project that's a challenge not only for me, but for the musician as well.

### **In the different projects you've worked on together, we can see how closely music and performance are tied. Music accompanies certain scenes in a way that makes it possible for strong images to appear and grab the audience.**

A.R.N.: My imagination is at its best when I'm listening to music. I always try to use it as if it were an additional actor. It's the same for scenography. Everything that's on the stage counts. And just like an actor should think about how he's going to play a scene, a musician has to think about how he's going to play music. What's weird is that, when you see a set, you don't necessarily think about a specific music, but when you hear music, it's always associated to an image. That's why music is so strongly linked to what we see on the stage.

### **Usually, there's a great freedom when it comes to choosing the music of a show. Since this project is based on a Mozart opera, you automatically enter a much larger critical field. How are you going to deal with all the expectations that come with working with the Mozart canon?**

Johannes Hofmann: The pressure at first was huge. That is, until I read Mozart's letters and realised what kind of a man he was. That's when I realised I could feel free to use his music any way I wanted, that I didn't have to fulfill the usual expectations. That's what Mozart did throughout his life. The music will be chosen based on how well it works with our direction choices, not based on any preconceived notion. Of course, people can have expectations, but our show should be coherent. Even if everyone wants to hear something different.

A.R.N.: People who have specific expectations are a problem in and of themselves anyway. I would like nothing more than never to have to hear again, "Things should be like this, otherwise it doesn't work." I want the audience to come to our shows, watch them, enjoy them. And if they don't enjoy them, then they don't.

### **What makes Mozart unique?**

J.H.: Mozart could be very serious—otherwise he never could have written the *Requiem*—but he also knew how to be free, something he'd always aspired to. He was a child prodigy, a star from a very early age. He knew that. At some point in his life, he probably was somewhat arrogant. Which isn't all that surprising, given that everyone kept telling him that he was the best musician in the world. But at the same time, composing made him so happy, and he had such a lust for life, that he never really "lost it." It's apparent in most of his letters.

A.R.N.: Mozart liked to play games. He saw further than any of his contemporaries, and his music sees further still. [...]

J.H.: Mozart, when he composed a piece, was at first most mindful of melody, and not of chords or mathematics, like Bach. His pieces are all real melodies, based sometimes on only a couple of tones at first. That's why his music is so sensual.



**Don Giovanni, like all classic plays, belongs to a very specific genre.**

[...]

A.R.N.: It's an *opera buffa*, a comedy. And Mozart and da Ponte gave it a certain depth.

**How does one, as a musician, approach one of Mozart's operas, in which the text often tells a very different story from the music?**

J.H.: My music teacher always said, "If you want to learn something about music or about a composer, do not read books about him, but books by him, or even more simply the music he wrote." When I listen to music, I always hear someone else's interpretation, but when I read sheet music, I can picture what I'm going to do with it myself. That's why I began by sitting down at a piano for four days, to play, as best as I could—I'm not a pianist—the score again and again, from beginning to end, sometimes slowly, sometimes fast.

**Can one approach Mozart's music differently on a theatre stage than one would on an opera stage?**

J.H.: What we're doing is neither an opera nor a musical. What we're doing is theatre. [...]

A.R.N.: We could have decided to adapt Molière's play instead. But we decided to use Mozart to tell about this character of Don Giovanni, of Dom Juan. Mozart gives us the best material to do that, it made sense to use it. We thought singing should be an important part of this project as well. It's singing that gives music its divine character, not only the quality of a conductor's interpretation.

J.H.: You experience music much more strongly when you practice it yourself.

A.R.N.: We realised right away during rehearsals that acting and singing at the same time brings an incredible energy, opens up many possibilities. An actor feels it in his or her body.

**Who is Don Giovanni? A famous seducer, of course, but also an anarchist, a champion of freedom.**

J.H.: That's why I wanted to do this opera. Because of Mozart's freedom, and that of Don Giovanni. He was the first composer to say, "I'm leaving the court, I'm becoming an independent artist." And of course because of his music as well.

A.R.N.: Yes, parallel to the question of seduction, it's also about the freedom of humanity. We no longer have to break free from moral constraints. Today, we have to break free from our own expectations in life. Break free from those expectations and see what happens. It might just lead to something new.

J.H.: Don Giovanni's sexuality is a metaphor for his own limits and expectations being put to the test. "*Viva la liberté !*"

A.R.N.: Long live freedom. With those words, he questions an entire society, and shows it new paths to follow.

J.H.: He invites everyone, nobles, peasants, and he says, "Come to my castle." Once there, everyone, regardless of social status, sings together: "*Viva la liberté !*" All while the French Revolution was going on. It's quite the statement!

A.R.N.: The main question isn't whether he's the greatest seducer of all times. He probably doesn't care. When he finds himself in those situations, he probably can't help himself, he has to act the way he does. What really matters to him is that everyone should be able to go with everyone, that freedom should be total.

**Does he want to live or die?**

A.R.N.: I think he wants to die, or rather, that he is alright with the idea of dying. He isn't suicidal or depressed, but he knows that he's mortal and that he therefore can decide, to an extent, when to bow out...

J.H.: I believe there also comes a point where he thinks he's had a long and good life.

A.R.N.: In the opera, he raises his hand towards Death to say, quite simply, "I won't let you say I'm a coward!"

He seeks to be close to death in order to enjoy love more intensely, to get as close to possible to the divine in things and to glimpse, beyond the orgasm, knowledge.

Excerpts of an interview with Antú Romero Nunes and musician Johannes Hofmann conducted by Sandra Küpper for the creation of the show at the Thalia theatre, January 25, 2014.

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