

## 11. An Aesthetics of Absence: *Don Giovanni* at Drottningholm, August 2016

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Expectations are usually high when an audience takes their seats in the ‘candlelit’ auditorium of the Drottningholm theatre from 1766. The candles are of course not real candles, but the famous electric Drottningholm candles with flickering flames, invented in the 1960s specifically for this theatre. Irrespective of the kind of performance they have come to see, the atmosphere of this historic room holds the audience in its grip. They watch the curtain with the portrait of Queen Louisa Ulrika, represented as the goddess Minerva and combined with the queen’s name cipher; they observe the musicians in the orchestra pit, eagerly awaiting the knocking on the stage floor that will announce the beginning of the performance.

In August 2016 the spectators entering the auditorium to see Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni* noticed that the curtain was already up – they immediately saw performers on the stage. The performers were sitting at four dressing tables placed along the sidewalls of the proscenium arch. The tables were equipped with antique mirrors and candles, thus alluding to the time when this theatre first was used. The costumes of the performers too were reminiscent of the late eighteenth century, marking the period during which this opera was written (1787). The performers moved about, spoke to each other, adjusted small details of their costumes in the same way that Ariane Mnouchkine had let her actors create an atmosphere of theatricality in the 1980s. We, the audience, understood that the singers on stage were not there as private persons but were rather performing the performers. I was wondering what kind of performers I had in front of me: were they representing themselves in today’s world or were they acting as singers from the time of Mozart, or were they maybe acting

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as travelling performers of a *commedia dell'arte* troupe? The latter association was brought to mind because of the movable podium or box that occupied the entire stage of the Drottningholm theatre.

### The box on the stage

Instead of the usual perspectival set of flat wings, the spectators saw a podium, about one metre high, with stairs on each side of the front (Fig. 1). The depth of the podium stretched from the first to the fourth pair of wings and was almost as wide as the proscenium. On the podium was some scaffolding made of 14 beams about four metres high and connected with a horizontal construction, from which movable curtains were hanging. These hangings were meant to indicate night – they were dark blue with signs of stars in the manner of a Baroque sky map.<sup>1</sup> The curtains could be pulled aside and several times during the performance they were torn down and carried away by the singers. There were two opening sliding ‘doors’ at the front of the podium that enabled the performers to creep in under the podium and hide from other characters.

In some ways, this podium was reminiscent of the stage that travelling *commedia dell'arte* troupes would have brought along. And this indeed was part of its stated purpose: it was to be moved to Paris for performances in Versailles. The original Drottningholm stage could not be seen. The designer Antoine Fontaine did not even make use of the wings and/or the backdrop as a background; absolutely nothing of the Drottningholm stage was visible except for the flies that were hanging high above the box on stage. Initially the box was closed by a whitish-grey curtain that could be opened in the middle.

The prelude came to an end when the conductor Marc Minkowski appeared in the orchestra pit. He wore a black shirt, as all the musicians did. This made them ‘invisible’, i.e. not part of the stage action, as the musicians tend to be when dressed in colourful coats and

1. According to the programme notes.



**Figure 1.** Act 1 finale from *Don Giovanni* by W. A. Mozart. From left: Chiara Skerath (Zerlina), Marie-Adeline Henry (Donna Elvira), Jean-Sébastien Bou (Don Giovanni), Krystof Baczyk (Masetto), Robert Gleadow (Leporello), Stanislaus de Barbeyrac (Don Ottavio), Ana Maria Labin (Donna Anna). Director: Ivan Alexandre. Stage design and costumes: Antoine Fontaine. Drottningholm Palace Theatre, 2016. Photo: Mats Becker ©. License: CC BY-NC.

powdered wigs. Nevertheless, this conductor was very visible. He stood with his back right in front of the royal chairs and his fierce gesturing demanded the attention of the audience.

All the characters disappeared, except for Leporello, played by Robert Gleadow, who waited for the emphatic chord that opens the

overture. In fictional terms, Leporello is waiting for Don Giovanni who, somewhere behind the curtains, has his rendezvous with Donna Anna. Gleadow's enactment of Leporello's impatience and boredom created more associations with the *commedia dell'arte*. He treated the audience to a special *lazzo* when he placed two chairs in front of each other and tried to find a lying position on them in order to get some sleep. At the end of the overture, he fell off the chairs, and still stretched out on the floor began his grumbling aria, 'Notte e giorno faticar'. The Canadian baritone Robert Gleadow proved to be the real entertainer of this production.

Don Giovanni appeared through the curtain of the podium, followed by Donna Anna, and finally by the Commendatore. The duel that, according to the libretto, Don Giovanni initially refuses to fight, occurred behind another curtain, invisible to the audience, so that we could not know whether Don Giovanni was acting in self-defence, or if he murdered the Commendatore in cold blood when he was challenged. The recitatives were sung within the stage box until Don Giovanni jumped down onto the proscenium and disappeared from the stage with Leporello.

### Box effects

Already at this early point of the performance the effects of this 'box on stage' were observable, and they would become increasingly noticeable as the evening progressed. The box clearly disturbed the visual experience of the stage as well as impacting the audial conditions of the theatre. In other sections of this anthology the different options offered by conservative, historically informed (so-called HIP) productions, and by the director-dominated *Regietheater* are discussed, and some theoretical tools offered.<sup>2</sup> The model of Aesthetic Historicity directs historiography and practice towards the differences between the then and the now. It enables traces of the past to be used to create contemporary performances that take advantage of historical knowledge

2. See 'Aesthetic Historicity' (chapter 3), and Magnus Tassing Schneider, 'Contemporaneity in Historically Informed Performance' (chapter 4).

to revive artefacts and works from earlier periods. Well aware that there are no ideal solutions, it is obvious that every period has to find ways of reconciling the past with the present as a particular gift to artists and audiences. The 2016 *Don Giovanni* production provides a useful illustration of the difficulties that arise when the given conditions of a historical theatre are ignored.

The original preserved eighteenth-century stage machinery and thirty complete sets of flat wings and backdrops make the Drottningholm theatre unique in the world, which raises the question of whether one can feasibly mount a production in which neither the wings nor any *changement à vue* are displayed. There have in the past been directors who have treated the Drottningholm stage in ways that are hardly in concord with the historicity of the theatre. In recent years we have seen a stage stripped bare of the flat wings,<sup>3</sup> or the original wings substituted by black- or white-painted wings,<sup>4</sup> or practicable doors that have been screwed right onto the stage floor,<sup>5</sup> or the backdrop and the wave machine removed to allow for a view of an empty corridor.<sup>6</sup> There is probably a temptation for modern opera directors to prove that productions at Drottningholm need not follow the given historical stage arrangement, and to transform it into a ‘postmodern’ conundrum. Whatever we might think of these experiments – some applauding the fresh attitude, others finding it an inappropriate use of the old theatre – there was in these earlier productions at least some nod towards the history of the existing stage. Even though the directors were anxious not to create a ‘museum’ they were aware of the specificities of the space they were working in. This awareness was lacking in the construction of the box that Marc Minkowski, stage designer Antoine Fontaine, and director Ivan Alexandre had created. The Drottningholm stage in this production was completely invisible.

There were two motivating reasons for constructing this box. Over three consecutive years the same set was to be used for the production of the three operas with Lorenzo Da Ponte’s librettos set to music by Mozart. In 2015, the box for *Le nozze di Figaro* was decorated with

3. The second act of Mozart’s *Mitridate*, 2014.

4. The beginning of Mozart’s *Idomeneo*, 2014.

5. Domenico Cimarosa’s *Il matrimonio segreto*, 2013.

6. Jean-Philippe Rameau’s *Zoroastre*, 2006.

white curtains, in the 2016 *Don Giovanni* the curtains were changed to night-blue, while in the 2017 *Così fan tutte* they featured motives of playing cards. In effect this meant that the Drottningholm stage was hidden for three years, including the anniversary of the theatre in 2016.<sup>7</sup> The other reason for the box was its mobility. Marc Minkowski wanted to travel with the production to the Royal Opera of Versailles, where he conducted his own orchestra. All three productions were moved to Paris and other locations. They were designed and intended for global commercial consumption and became an enormous financial success. The box stage was a packaged commodity containing a homogenised opera product, stripped of any character and differences that a local stage might require. The Drottningholm stage paid the price. To me the box was a poor solution to both the three-year cycle of the Mozart-Da Ponte operas and to the question of mobility. Any theatre space other than Drottningholm would have been more suitable and preferable for such a ‘boxed’ production.<sup>8</sup>

The visual unity of the Drottningholm theatre relies on an exact balance between stage and auditorium. The chairs for the king and the queen constitute the absolute centre of the house. During the reign of Gustav III (1771–1792), the court aristocracy sat in hierarchical order behind the king, while the stage displayed the fictional order of the world, strictly symmetrical with a perspectival point in the distance. The stage mirrored the auditorium. Today, the hierarchical order is decided by the price of the tickets, but the harmony between stage and auditorium is still experienced by spectators and artists. The box weighed down the stage and unbalanced the distinct symmetry of the room.

The Drottningholm theatre is famous for its sightlines. These depend in part on the unusual seating arrangement – with benches parallel to the footlights on the raked floor – which allows all spectators an unimpaired view of the stage. No columns, no balconies, no seats to the sides of the auditorium, from where only half of the scenery would be visible. This exceptional seating has its equivalent on stage, where the flat wings create the dynamic perspective of fictional

7. The Friends of the Drottningholm Theatre valued the anniversary sufficiently to commission and finance a new opera, *Rokokomaskineriet* (The Rococo Machinery), in which the theatre plays the leading role. The text was written by Tuvalisa Rangström and the music by Jan Sandström.

8. As Per Feltzin mentioned in his radio review (15 August 2016), the same production could just as well have been given at Södra Teatern, a Stockholm theatre from 1852 that has been modernised numerous times.

spaces, whether it is a hall in a castle, a pleasant garden, or a cave in the Underworld. The harmony of the stage decorations implies an amazing potential for the positioning of characters. The symmetry of the sets empowers the performers and their fictional characters; it both directs their relationships and enhances the attention of the spectator.<sup>9</sup> The eighteenth-century stage conventions took advantage of such powerful positionings. Although we would not wish to slavishly imitate these historical arrangements, it seems mandatory for any director to take time to find the particular spots on stage that give the best projection into the auditorium.

It is clear that the ‘Da Ponte box’ gave extremely limited access to the advantages and potential of the original Drottningholm stage. The singers had two basic acting areas: the floor of the proscenium arch and the upstage podium. The acoustic differences between these spaces will be commented on below. Because of the box, the blocking and the singers’ positioning on stage created numerous problems; the singers were constantly climbing up and down the stairs that connected the two areas – some more agile singers even jumping down – which involved movements away from the footlights, up onto the podium, further back on the podium and its textiles, and back again down to the footlights. While the theatre was built for movements running parallel with the footlights, in this production the main direction of the blocking was upstage and downstage. Furthermore, as most of the movements were carried out at a high speed, the main impression of the performance was a continuous, exhausting ‘up-and-down’. Mozart’s characters were not even allowed to stand still during their arias; instead, they moved from one place to another. The space under the podium, reached through the sliding doors, added to the up-and-down impression of the movements.

Regarding the colours of the costumes, the set designer had chosen to restrict the colours to black, grey, brown, and white. The exception to these ‘natural’ colours was Don Giovanni’s brownish-red coat, although he rarely wore it. In addition, the materials of the dresses

9. For a more extensive report on the research group’s workshop at Drottningholm, which exemplifies these characteristics of the stage, see chapters 2 and 3 in this volume: Meike Wagner, ‘On a Praxeology of Theatre Historiography’, and Willmar Sauter, ‘Aesthetic Historicity’.

were predominantly cotton and wool, i.e. materials that absorb the light rather than reflect it. Consequently, the stage light had to be bright, requiring added spotlights, despite the nocturnal setting of much of the plot. Even in this respect the historical balance was lost, with the gentle candle-imitating light of the auditorium and the now stark light beams on stage.<sup>10</sup>

### Space and resonance

The box on the stage also had serious consequences for the vocal delivery of the singers. The Drottningholm stage is itself an extremely sensitive sound system. Any experienced singer who has worked at Drottningholm will immediately confirm this. There are so-called sound spots from which the voice carries out into the auditorium, whereas other positions on stage are difficult. The proscenium arch functions as an amplifier of the voice, while the flat wings swallow the sound before it reaches the audience. This means that the further back the singer stands, the louder the voice has to become to compensate for the inherent acoustic. If the singer is unaware of these conditions, the voice will sound weaker. Similarly, when a singer turns to another person on stage the sound ends up in the wings. When a singer – or an actor, for that matter – moves too close to the footlights, the amplifying effect of the proscenium arch is lost, and the voice drops into the orchestra pit.

The box at Drottningholm further complicated these given material conditions of the stage. While the wooden podium could function as an extra resonance chamber, this was counteracted by the textiles of the box. And although we could not see the flat wings on the stage, they were still there, absorbing the sound waves. Thus, the positioning of the singers on stage would become essential for the acoustic success of the production.

The singers were placed by the director in one of four or five positions. The best position was definitely in the middle of the proscenium

10. In chapter 6, 'Materiality in Action', Petra Dotlačilová presents the results of the project's workshop devoted to costumes and candlelight.

arch, approximately where the stage curtain would go down. Here the singer could make full use of the proscenium's amplifying effect. If the singer got closer to the footlights, the voice became weaker. When Leporello began the opening aria in this position, he spoke almost privately to the audience. Don Giovanni, performed by Jean-Sébastien Bou, moved into this position during one of his arias and as a result his voice changed colour completely. The effect was even more difficult for the audience when the performer stood on the side of the proscenium rather than in the middle. All in all, the proscenium was the preferable position when compared to singing from the podium.

As long as a singer stood right at the front of the podium, the sound projection was fairly satisfactory. Don Ottavio, sung by Stanislas de Barbeyrac, took up this position where he remained standing throughout his long aria in the second act and therefore managed to stay in contact with the audience. Donna Anna, performed by Ana Maria Labin, likewise sang her arias from this point, receiving enthusiastic applause. In line with the first pair of movable wings, this position usually guarantees high sound quality and direct contact with the auditorium.

Clearly the situation became more complicated the further back on the podium the singer appeared. This was made especially difficult because the voice was muffled by all the surrounding textile curtains and by the painted wings to the side, and because the performer could not hear the orchestra properly. This made the singer utterly dependent upon the conductor. This lack of coherence between singer and orchestra was often audible, and it was visible throughout in the conductor's exaggerated gestures towards the stage.

Mozart's opera is full of ensembles which are extremely sensitive to the positioning of the singers. Several duets used a constellation with one singer standing on the proscenium, and the other one standing on the box. During the duettino 'Là ci darem la mano' and its preceding recitative, Don Giovanni began on the proscenium, while Zerlina remained on top of the podium. There was no contact between them

and their voices had very different sound qualities. Don Giovanni then moved up to the podium, the voices became more equal, but there was still no contact between them. Don Giovanni moved down to the footlights, where his voice dropped, but then he returned to the podium to hold Zerlina's hand.<sup>11</sup> A similar discrepancy between various sound qualities could be observed in trio sections where the singers were placed on and off the podium, both far upstage and very close to the footlights. In these scenes, the orchestra tended to play too forcefully, which meant that the upstage figures were marginalised acoustically as well as visually.

These examples serve to illustrate the visual and audial difficulties caused by the boxed stage. The choice of putting a box on the Drottningholm stage was not only a matter of taste. It significantly disrupted and reduced functions embedded in this particular theatrical space.

### Stage equipment

The sliding doors in front of the podium enabled characters to crawl under the podium and hide from other characters on stage. This raised the questions of which characters should crawl in there and what they were doing there.<sup>12</sup> The first time the sliding doors were opened, Don Giovanni and Zerlina were hiding there because Donna Anna and Ottavio were looking for him. We do not know what Don Giovanni and Zerlina were doing in their hideout, but they were there for quite some time. Two different considerations seem to be relevant here. Firstly, the space under the podium was a confined room with no exits other than through the sliding doors. This was in sharp contrast to the eighteenth-century stage: the spectator has no idea where the character is going when a person exits between two flat wings; we do not know what happens behind the wings. Whereas in the case of the podium and the sliding doors it was obvious that Don Giovanni and Zerlina had to stay close to each other. Leporello and Donna Elvira

11. See chapter 2, 'On a Praxeology of Theatre Historiography', for Meike Wagner's analysis of a performance of the same duettino during one of Performing Premodernity's workshops.

12. I am following the actions on stage, not Da Ponte's libretto.

were involved the next time the sliding doors were opened. Leporello, who very much wished to be like his master – something he states several times in the course of the story – had exchanged coat and hat with Don Giovanni. In order to get rid of Donna Elvira, Leporello had to pretend to be her lover, her Don Giovanni. When she came down from the podium and threw herself into Leporello's arms, he was quick to open the sliding doors and disappear with her. Again, the couple spent a long time in the confined room.

The sliding doors were therefore not a simple device for hiding characters; they added strongly to the characterisation of the persons who disappear. This is not the place for an analysis of the characters of this performance. Let these examples suffice as a pointer towards the significance of the podium's construction for the interpretation of the opera's characters. What was implied as ambiguous erotic games behind the flat wings of a historical theatre, were now turned into trivial statements by the box.

As a stage figure Don Giovanni was rather marginalised in this production. It is no wonder, therefore, that both the ending with the stone guest and the final scene proved to be very conventional: the 'bad guy' Don Giovanni was punished for his sins. In his pre-performance introduction, Magnus Tessing Schneider had spoken about the parody of church music at the opera's conclusion, but in this production, there was nothing grotesque about either the music or the marble statue. The only grotesque aspect of the ending, albeit unintentional, was Don Giovanni's descent into hell: in a theatre full of trapdoors, Don Giovanni on the podium had to be hidden away behind a large grey-beige cloth.

## Aesthetic choices

Mozart's music was certainly a sensuous experience for many listeners. Some of the arias in *Don Giovanni* have become hits in the world of classical music. The story of Don Juan has fascinated

writers and composers ever since the early seventeenth century. Modern research suggests that Mozart and Da Ponte were aiming at a new interpretation of the myth, away from sins and punishment and towards the bright vision of the Enlightenment.<sup>13</sup> The music speaks of this light, Don Giovanni dreams/sings of liberty, and Zerlina breaks the ties of rural conventions.

Very little of the enlightened venture of *Don Giovanni* was to be found in the box that the French team had placed on the Drottningholm stage. What kind of aesthetics did this stage represent? As mentioned above, the podium stage with its textile curtains was reminiscent of the mobile stages taken from place to place by travelling *commedia dell'arte* troupes. There are paintings from the seventeenth century that depict this type of provisional stage in the marketplaces of rural towns. There were other elements in the performance that strengthened the association with Italian comedy. First and foremost, Robert Gleadow, who turned his Leporello (i.e. 'little hare') into an entertaining Arlecchino figure, full of life, quick, and constantly on the move. He also moved the plot forward. Another *commedia* aspect was the mobility of the stage actions, the climbing of stairs, the crawling under the podium, the jumping and fighting on stage. Although these continuous movements might have been tiring at times – for both performers and spectators – they linked the performance to a *commedia* tradition (which, as far as we know, Da Ponte disliked). However, *commedia dell'arte* was colourful, whereas *Don Giovanni* at Drottningholm was colourless.

The black-brown-grey-white colour scale was as far away from *commedia* as it is possible to go. It was like a print rather than a watercolour. The French production was eclectic when compared to the *commedia* tradition. Elements of travelling theatre were also brought to mind in the curtains with the star maps and a sketch of Don Giovanni's castle. The costumes to some extent related to eighteenth-century fashion – maybe this was intended to reflect Mozart's

13. See for instance Magnus Tessing Schneider, *The Original Portrayal of Mozart's Don Giovanni* (London: Routledge, 2021): <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429281709> (accessed 23 March 2023).

time, but it turned out to contribute little to the characterisation of the persons wearing them. The production was neither historically informed nor did it historicise the myth.

Contemporary elements were mainly accounted for by Leporello. He had the catalogue of Don Giovanni's 2065 lovers tattooed on his body. To show this he had to strip naked, even showing his buttocks to the audience. Later, when he attempted to quit his employment at the beginning of the second act, he had changed into contemporary jeans, sneakers, and a bright T-shirt. When he came back to continue in the service of Don Giovanni, this gave him another opportunity to strip down to his underpants before he redressed in the historical costume. The loose hairstyles of Donna Anna and Zerlina were a concession to the twenty-first century – historically, the loose hair would indicate that they were insane. Maybe even the sessions under the podium and their lack of ambiguity could best be understood from a modern conception of morality, although I find this a dubious argument. Did these elements of today's lifestyle turn the production into a modern performance? I would say, on the contrary. Aesthetically I was mostly reminded of what was not there – an aesthetics of absence.

We saw a traditional, storytelling opera which, in an eclectic way, combined elements from various times and styles. Was this merely a matter of taste? Was it up to the spectators to judge? I would say: yes and no. Every spectator could of course make up her or his mind – like it, like parts of it, or even dislike it. The audiences of the three performances of *Don Giovanni* that I attended behaved as one might expect. They laughed at Robert Gleadow's *lazzi* as Leporello from the very start when he skilfully tumbled down between the two chairs in full accordance with the music. Yes, this was funny, indeed, and nobody could resist his charming performance. There was some mumbling on the benches close to me when he turned his tattooed buttocks to the auditorium, but it was still nice entertainment. That his striptease in front of Donna Elvira could be regarded as a kind of molestation

was probably missed by the majority of the spectators. The *commedia*-inspired actions concealed a number of interpretative complications, not least from a feminist point of view, but it created a 'feel-good' atmosphere in the auditorium. In the end, the audiences applauded with enthusiasm – but to put that applause in context, I have never seen a Drottningholm audience that did not applaud a performance enthusiastically. The happiness and gratitude for having experienced a performance in this historic theatre always moves, often overwhelms, the spectators.

Was the audience cheated and deprived of the unique qualities of the Drottningholm stage? I can only refer to those friends and acquaintances who told me that they steered clear from these performances. This is especially true of those who had attended the previous production in this series the year before. These were not necessarily conservative 'museum' people. On the contrary, they love this theatre and enjoy performances when the stage machinery is put to work, displaying the wonders of another epoch. This is what makes the Drottningholm theatre so special to the majority, whereas theatrical experiments of the recent *Don Giovanni*-type can take place in many other locations.

The reviews tell their own story. Usually, the music critics of Drottningholm performances are predominantly interested in the interpretation of the music, the work of the conductor, and the quality of the singers. Some of them were impressed by Minkowski's 'fat' rendering of the score, a fashionable term applied to a recent international trend within the Early Music movement. They appreciated the singers in this ensemble which had been brought to Sweden from all corners of the world. But – and this is as exceptional as it is justified – they also criticised the performance on stage and in particular the box that prevented any view of the original sets. *Don Giovanni* was the second summer they saw this construction. This was too much, even for music critics. A few examples follow.

Erik Wallrup opened his review with these lines: ‘To begin with the double-edged final verdict: *Don Giovanni* at Drottningholm could have taken place on whatever stage around Europe. The unique opera house turns 250, but instead of using the fabulous stage machinery, instead of opting for an opera that is related to this site, this is the second part of a Mozart trilogy with libretti by Da Ponte, in which a wooden stage erected on the middle of the stage conceals all the old treasures’.<sup>14</sup>

His colleague at *Dagens Nyheter*, Johanna Paulsen, also commented on the stage. ‘The stage designer Antoine Fontaine’s simple street-theatre stage has its charm. But not when one has access to a fully functioning stage machinery which is not used at all. Furthermore, this makes a shallow and whimsy impression’.<sup>15</sup>

Hanna Höglund in *Expressen* wondered whether the French team wanted ‘to get free from the “idea” of the Drottningholm theatre’,<sup>16</sup> Claes Wallin in *Aftonbladet* mentioned ‘the big wooden box, a stage on the stage’,<sup>17</sup> and, as cited in note 8 above, Per Feltzin remarked on the radio that it would have been better to perform this *Don Giovanni* at Södra Teatern.

International voices also observed the difficulties of matching the two scenic spaces. Guy Dammann of *The Financial Times* remarked on the uneven acoustic quality in the delicate sound environment that Drottningholm offers. He wrote that ‘his [Don Giovanni’s] voice is matched by Robert Gleadow’s Leporello. The other soloists, perhaps partly through intention but also on account of the acoustic vagaries of the ancient theatre (which Alexandre seems worryingly ignorant of) are much less vividly drawn’.<sup>18</sup> These are just some voices among the many music critics who raised their voices against the negligence of the uniqueness of the Drottningholm theatre.

The reviews also made it obvious that productions such as the *Don Giovanni* in August 2016 were not just a scholarly problem; they had far-reaching artistic consequences. This concerned both the

14. Erik Wallrup, ‘Lika många skratt som rysningar’, *Svenska Dagbladet* (15 August 2016), 20.

15. Johanna Paulsen, ‘Skitig tyngd: Musikalisk glöd i sparsmakad *Don Giovanni*’, *Dagens Nyheter* (15 August 2016), 7.

16. Hanna Höglund, ‘Naket på slottet’, *Expressen* (16 August 2016), 6.

17. Claes Wallin, ‘Onödigt rolig förförare’, *Aftonbladet* (15 August 2016), 5.

18. Guy Dammann, ‘*Don Giovanni*, Drottningholm Opera, Stockholm, “Thrilling”’, *Financial Times* (17 August 2016), 27.

spatial alienation of the stage and the uneven acoustics that the singers had to struggle with. The interplay between an artefact such as the Drottningholm theatre and a well-known opera from the archive of the eighteenth century requires a delicate balance from today's artists and audiences. It would be wrong to measure the creative liberty of a director against a museum-like reconstruction; the latter is neither possible nor desirable. But the creative imagination of some directors seems to reach a limit when their production concepts fail to fit the stage. The Performing Premodernity research project attempted to combine academic and artistic research as it experimented with what makes sense and what fails when we go onto the stage of an old theatre. The sensitive environment of the Drottningholm theatre should be used only for productions that take advantage of its uniqueness – other productions should be shown elsewhere.