

Berwick-upon Tweed Educational Association

'An Introduction to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*'

By Dr Richard Moore, creative writer and lecturer, Newcastle University

Tuesday 1st August 2017 10am – 1.00pm

Content of Study Morning

There are various versions of the story of *Don Giovanni* but the basic outline remains the same. In Mozart's 'Don Giovanni' the title character (Don Juan in Spanish) is a legendary, fictional libertine, derived from a play but possibly based on a real figure.

The first written version of his legend was published in Spain in about 1630 as an original play by Tirso de Molina. In this play Don Juan is identified as the very devil, a 'man without a name' who must eventually pay for his sins. Bad actions have retributive consequences and in the end death makes us all equal. Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is a dangerous sexual predator, but not the devil himself. If he were, being removed to hell would hardly be a punishment. But he is devilish in his amoral self-concern and ruthlessness to the consequences for others. Mozart's opera was premiered in 1787 and the final version, including two new arias, appeared in 1788.

The story of the opera will be explained in the course of the study morning and will include substantial DVD excerpts. Essentially it is a piece in which the Don systematically seduces three women, the main impetus being the killing of the father of one of them in a duel. The comic element is supplied partly by sheer exaggeration, though there is sometimes a slightly uneasy blend of humour and menace. By the final movement the mood is ominous and leads to a distinctly Gothic climax.

It could be argued that *Don Giovanni*, though musically magnificent, is not a perfect work. The balance of comedy and menace can be difficult to sustain and the action is rather long-drawn-out. Nonetheless, the merits outweigh the defects. Gustave Flaubert called *Don Giovanni*, along with *Hamlet* and the sea, 'the three finest things God ever made'. On the study morning we shall have a chance of entering this hallowed creative world and realising that, whatever the limits of the libretto, the music is indeed an echo of the divine.

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The cost of the study morning is £9.00 including refreshments. The study morning will be held at the William Elder Building, 56-58 Castlegate, Berwick-upon-Tweed.

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or complete the attached slip and post to Alison Tymon at 25 Meadow Grange, Berwick TD15 1NW (team@berwickea.co.uk or 01289 305842) together with a cheque payable to 'Berwick-upon-Tweed Educational Association'. Your booking will be confirmed once the Bookings Secretary has received your payment.

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Cheque enclosed to the amount of £_____ (Giovanni)