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“Sensuousness, Immediacy, and the Eternal in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*: Kierkegaard's Philosophy  
of Music”

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## Introduction

In the earliest years of Soren Kierkegaard's life as a writer, we find his aesthetic writings. *Either/Or* was his second major work, the first published under a pseudonym. In this two-volume, 800 page tome, Kierkegaard presents two embodied archetypes, the first of these being the aesthetic man, and the second being the ethical. Instead of admitting to be the real author of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard concocted an elaborate story to explain its origin in the book's preface. Allegedly, *Either/Or* is simply a compilation of old papers, discovered in the secret drawer of an antique desk by the fictitious Victor Eremita. According to Victor, the papers appeared to contain the writings or unpublished manuscripts of two very different authors. Since neither author was there to claim the writings as his own, Victor decides to publish them as the anonymous works of 'A' and 'B'.

As is quite common for Kierkegaard, we see a distancing of this author from his work. In this particular text, this distancing occurs in a three-fold sense. First, *Either/Or Part I* is the work of another, the aesthetic 'A'. Secondly, the author of *Either/Or II*, author B, the ethical man, serves as critic and vindicator of 'A'. Thirdly, this is all represented to the reader through a fictitious editor, Victor Eremita, who has loosely put together these manuscripts in the order he believes they might go. As is obvious, Kierkegaard is interested in detaching himself somewhat from his own works, due quite probably to a strong belief in the power of indirect communication as a means of drawing the reader into the truth.

Anyone who has read Kierkegaard knows that over the broad scope of his writings, his three stages of existence, the aesthetic, ethical, and religious, play a crucial role. The majority of this paper will focus on the aesthetic stage and some concluding reconciliatory comments will be made concerning its relationship to the religious stage. Although I will presuppose a certain amount of knowledge from the reader concerning these three stages, I would like to point out one very critical and often misunderstood aspect of the three stages. It must be recognized that none

of these stages possesses its own independent existence. Neither are these stages to be understood as varying degrees of consciousness. Instead, they are "parts of a conceptual scheme," and one only reaches the final, religious stage when their accidental characteristics are taken up together as a whole. In other words, one does not move from the aesthetic to the ethical stage by forgetting aesthetics and giving oneself over to ethics. The aesthetic is taken up and appropriated under the authority of the ethical. And in the final and most important religious stage, one has not abandoned one's love of aesthetic beauty or one's dedication to living the ethical life. Matter of fact, both of these things acquire much more significance when one can understand them Christianly, committed under the Lordship of Christ. Although in *Either/Or Part I* Kierkegaard will unpack the characteristics of only one of these three stages in isolation, the reader must always keep in mind that all three stages in the end exist as integrally related, serving as the "revelation of a predicate, so that all the predicates rush down into the wealth of the last stage, since this is the real stage" of immediacy.<sup>1</sup>

### **A Portrait of the Aesthete**

In *Either/Or Part I*, we find the portrait of the unnamed aesthete, 'A'. This portrait is brought about through a collection of essays, the writings of a refined lover of the aesthetic, holding up such things as beauty, pleasure, passion, love, and despair as life's ultimate treasures. This aesthete is neither ethical nor religious, but is amoral, highly spirited and deeply reflective, taking the utmost delight in expressing the objects of his love and despair throughout his writings. The inward life of the aesthete is best revealed in the opening section of the work, entitled *Diapsalmata as se ipsum*. In this seemingly random series of succinctly summarized reflections, we begin to uncover the feelings of melancholy, anxiety, skepticism, ironic wit, and romantic passion

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<sup>1</sup>Kierkegaard, Soren. *Either/Or*, Part 1, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 45-135, 73.

that manifest themselves and permeate the thought life of the aesthetic man. He says of his melancholy:

In addition to the rest of the numerous circle of my acquaintances, I still have one intimate confidante—my melancholy. In the midst of my joy, in the midst of my work, she beckons to me and calls me aside. . . My melancholy is the most faithful mistress I have known; what wonder, then that I love in return.<sup>2</sup>

Along with his joy and wonder at the sublimity of his world, 'A' obviously suffers much sadness, and yet he clings to this sadness as that which reminds him that he is living in the very fullest sense, experiencing every emotion known to man.

Despite his tendency toward despair, epistemological uncertainty, and ironic detachment, 'A' is quite optimistic and confident in his love and commitment to at least one thing: the delight of music, and more specifically, the absolute, immortal beauty of Mozart's opera, *Don Giovanni*. Scottish theologian Francis Watson speaks of this in his *Theology and Music*:

Music affirms nothing. It does not solicit belief, and it therefore leaves no room for doubt. It offers a way of escape from the vicious circle of the opinions and counter-opinions of philosophers and theologians. It simply *plays*, and it is for that reason that the skeptical A can affirm it.<sup>3</sup>

Watson's statement reveals how the very essence of musical expression speaks to A's heart and mind. Some may doubt that one so anxious and restless as A could sustain such a constancy in his devotion to music. This unbridled passion for music is not an exception or inconsistency among A's perpetual mental torments of unrest, melancholy, and skepticism, but instead music is for A one of the greatest expressions of his own existence, and this is exactly why he loves it.

### **Mozart, the Immortal**

A's unconditional love of Mozart's music is expressed from the very beginning of *The Immediate Stages of the Erotic* or *The Musical Erotic*, the second section among eight in *Either/Or Part I* and the subject of this paper. He professes sentimentally that Mozart is like no other; his work belongs among those few we may call 'classics'. According to A, Mozart has achieved his

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 13.

<sup>3</sup>Watson, Francis. "Theology and Music." *Scottish Journal of Theology*, no. 51(1998): 439.

immortality by discovering the recipe for an authentic classic work and then has found its proper expression in his opera, *Don Giovanni*. As author A describes the seductive power of Mozart's music and the depth and extent of his own love for it, we already begin to anticipate the metaphoric analogy Kierkegaard will draw between the enchanting allure of Mozart and that of the persona of Don Juan, the main character to Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. Just as every female victim of Don Juan's sensuous power is held captive in her uncontrollable desire and infatuation, so also A is held captive by Mozart. A confesses, "I am like a young girl in love with Mozart, and I must have him in first place, cost what it may."<sup>4</sup> Now, the reader may wonder: What is nature of this strange love A claims to have? What good does A hope to accomplish in himself by means of an infatuation? But A's answer to all these questions is far from satisfying. His love for Mozart does not cultivate the character or inspire great deeds, but instead strips him of his reason, happiness, and dignity as an individual. 'A' himself admits that this love that has taken over his entire self is nothing less than torture, a giving over of every last ounce of self-respect. All that he loves of himself is that which Mozart has made him to be.

But, this seeming imprisonment of his will and reason does not seem to bother A at all; he persistently suffers and sacrifices himself for the glorification of his divine, immortal hero. Even more, although A recognizes that he obviously seems to be caught in a lifelong web of infatuation for another that is in reality beyond reach, he holds the belief that this is inconsequential. All he knows is that even if he were never to truly acquire the object of his desire, he will not have passed through life without true passion, and this passion is something few men ever possess for anything throughout their entire lives.<sup>5</sup> As he ponders his own passion, A speaks at once to both himself and Mozart, his master:

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<sup>4</sup>Either/Or I, 46.

<sup>5</sup>Passion is a theme that shows up everywhere among the large corpus of Kierkegaard's works. Although it finds its embodiment in different characters and for different reasons, it is clear that underlying every passage is the firm belief that passion is an essential aspect of what it means to be truly human. It is also a characteristic that Kierkegaard sees little of in the people of his own age. Men acquire new earthly and even heavenly treasures everyday, and yet lack any personal, subjective, impassioned interest in these treasures. The most lamentable thing

"Thou, to whom I offer thanks that I did not die without having loved, even though my love became unhappy, Is it strange then that I should be more concerned for Mozart's glorification than for the happiest moment of my life, more jealous for his immortality than for my own existence?"<sup>6</sup>

No matter how much the significance of his own life is swept away, A still has an enduring love for Mozart that is inexhaustible, irreplaceable, and incommunicable. He laments that he cannot express the extent of Mozart's genius in words. Nevertheless, A knows that he must speak of his love, and attempt to prove why Mozart's work truly deserves a seat among the immortal classics.<sup>7</sup>

### Aesthetic Methodology

Now, before we proceed to investigate the central content of *Immediate Stages of the Erotic*, we must briefly examine the authorial intention and larger context behind this essay. Moreover, we must ask ourselves how much we as readers can trust the legitimacy of A's critique. Essentially, can we really expect to receive an honest evaluation of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* from one as infatuated as 'A'?

First, in regards to the broader authorial intent, we have a much more difficult task than one might think. Due to Kierkegaard's authorial method of indirect communication throughout most of his writings, he appears at times to be inconsistent, fragmented, and unsure. But, as Kierkegaard himself reveals at the end of his career, his project was actually intricately planned from the start. In his journals he explains:

My contemporaries cannot grasp the design of my writing. *Either/Or* divided into four parts or six parts and published separately over six years would have been all right. But that each

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for Kierkegaard is that men can call themselves Christians, forgiven and redeemed by Christ, and yet possess neither the dedication nor the love for God that an aesthete like 'A' can possess for a mere mortal composer.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>7</sup>Before going on, Author A reveals his own humility and intellectual honesty in this exposition, asking himself whether his love of Mozart is naive or misguided: "Perhaps I have been a little too hasty, . . . I do not know; but this I know, I have not hurried in order to enjoy the pleasure of speaking, I have not hurried because I feared someone more capable than myself might anticipate me, but because I feared that if I kept silent, even the stones would cry out in Mozart's honor, and cry shame to every human being whom it has been given to speak." Knowing that he does not intend nor have the capacity to win the reader over to his side through rhetoric or systematic proof, he is heavily convicted that he must speak the truth and his commitment to truth, and this is what propels him forward. (Ibid., 70)

essay in *Either/Or* is only part of a whole, and then the whole of *Either/Or* a part of a whole: that, after all, think my bourgeois contemporaries, is enough to drive one daft.<sup>8</sup>

So, not only must his essay on Mozart's *Don Giovanni* be read in the context of the entirety of *Either/Or*, but more importantly, one must read this essay within the context of his entire corpus of works. In a hermeneutical task as difficult as this, one must be slow to draw far-reaching conclusions and, even more importantly, be satisfied with a final interpretation that is anything but certain.

Concerning the legitimacy of 'A' 's, and more broadly, Kierkegaard's critique of *Don Giovanni*, questions have been raised by many critics, some believing Kierkegaard to be so blinded by his own philosophy that he fails to recognize Mozart's own intentions, and others believing Kierkegaard to be reducing and even mocking the life of the aesthete so that he can later glorify the anti-art religious man. But, these criticisms are not as well-founded as they may seem. One must first understand Kierkegaard's aesthetic methodology before making such a judgment. Musical and mythical figures spring up throughout much of Kierkegaard's works, usually bringing along with them a dramatic and poetic significance, thus illuminating and incarnating the central theme of the text. In other words, the musical and mythical figures are not merely ornamental decoration, but serve rather as embodied portraits containing the very essence of Kierkegaard's philosophic and religious thought. This is indeed the case with *Don Giovanni*.

While Mozart's Don Juan may express more religiosity and ambiguity than Kierkegaard's amoral, purely aesthetic rendition, Mozart's intent may not rightly have the last word within the context of *Either/Or*. Kierkegaard did not necessarily intend to give an "objective" view of Mozart or his music, but instead it seems that he sought to draw his readers into A's subjective, aesthetic perspective of the world. We must see the opera through the eyes of the true, authentic aesthete, and in this way, gain access into the aesthetic existence which Kierkegaard

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<sup>8</sup> Kierkegaard, Soren. *Journals*, VII 1 A, 118.

seeks to represent. The aesthete, worshiping sensuousness and beauty as his ultimate god, will mythologize and idealize the arts, and this must not come as a surprise or pose a problem for the reader. Kierkegaardian scholar Dr. Martin Yaffe elucidates the way in which the reader must appropriate Kierkegaard's essay:

To idealize here means to consider Mozart's opera in the light of its highest possibilities as known to the interpreter, whether or not those same possibilities are known as such to the author whose work is being interpreted. Idealization . . . seems a necessary consequence of aesthetics, . . . namely, that art is self-expression rather than "imitation" or self-understanding.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that Kierkegaard has a loftier view of aesthetics than that school of thought which affirms art's primary purpose to be "imitation" of life rather than "self-expression" of life. Art as self-expression can communicate not only the actuality or reality of its object, but also its "highest possibilities", those possibilities whose ideality can only be found in the mind of man, since he is made in the image of God. When we understand Kierkegaard's approach within this framework, it seems quite possible that he might even understand Mozart better than Mozart understood himself.

The legitimacy of the aesthetic critique may also be simply defended on the grounds that often a lover sees more than any other 'objective' observer in very essence of his beloved. More succinctly, the virtuous and loving intent behind the author of the critique may allow him to see far more beauty than the skeptic who merely looks for blemishes. Kierkegaard's aesthete, and Kierkegaard himself, maintain a genuine sense of honesty and humility when pursuit of the truth is involved. As he begins his philosophic task involving the musical and artistic significance of *Don Giovanni*, 'A' promises,

I commit all endowments of my mind and soul; guard the questing thought that they may be found worthy of the subject; fashion my soul into a harmonious instrument, let the soft breezes of eloquence blow over it, send the refreshment and blessings of fruitful moods; . . . you powerful spirits, you who know and understand the hearts of men, stand by me that I

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<sup>9</sup> Yaffe, Martin D. "An Unsung Appreciation of the 'Musical-Erotic' in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*: Hermann Cohen's Nod toward Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*." *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or Part I*. ed. by Robert L. Perkins. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1995, 87.



may catch the reader, not in the net of passion, nor by the artfulness of eloquence, but by the eternal conviction.<sup>10</sup>

Not only does 'A' seek to maintain his own personal epistemic authenticity and humility, but he also asks the same of his audience. Kierkegaard often uses pseudonyms precisely because it invites, and even demands, the participation of the reader, as he is drawn in and allowed to experience the truth within the poetic narrative, parable, or imaginative world which Kierkegaard constructs through his archetype. With music, a medium which can hardly be experienced by means of philosophic language, this indirect method is particularly important. 'A' reveals the difficulty and determination of his task as he explains,

I shall ferret out the musical in the idea, the situation, and so on, distilling its very essence, and then when I have made the reader so musically receptive that he seems to hear the music, although he hears nothing, then I shall have completed my task, then I become mute, then I say to the reader as to myself: listen.<sup>11</sup>

Author A, in an attempt to develop his philosophy of music through Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, is careful not to cross into the foreign, abstract territory of the musical, a realm which is directly inaccessible to the medium of language. Instead, 'A' wants to familiarize himself with music on its own terms and within its own limits, and he must therefore humbly remain within the realm of thought and language, only bringing the musical to light in its relation to language. In this way, he hopes to both allow the music to maintain its mysterious beauty and to "persistently tempt the musical forth, . . . always circumscribing more and more closely the region where music has its home."<sup>12</sup> 'A' has presented himself with a difficult task, one which he knows will never be made fully complete within the constraints of language. For he laments that a truly musical experience, one which results in a revelation to his audience, can only truly occur through music itself, and therefore, his efforts alone will always remain ultimately inadequate. Since language is limited from the start, all that is said may only find its significance in him who has "heard the music and who constantly continues to hear it. For him it may perhaps contain a single suggestion which may influence him to hear it again." (73)

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<sup>10</sup>Either/Or I, 85-86.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

## Union of Form and Content

Now, as we turn to the essential object of 'A' 's critique, we must ask, what makes Mozart so immortal? And further, why does this only occur within *Don Giovanni*, instead of all Mozart's works? We find our answer on the first page of *Immediate Erotic Stages*, where A proclaims that Mozart's music finds its ultimate seat among the classics in its perfect joining together of two things which belong together, finding application in a higher realm, in the world of ideals. This connection is not accidental nor a fated, "lucky conjunction of the different forces in the game of life."<sup>13</sup> 'A' finds a delight to the soul and sacred joy to behold the union of those two things that belong together: form and content. The fortunate artistic masterpiece involves two factors: emphasis on the quality of the artist and on the quality of the subject matter, and most importantly, a genuine interrelation or perfect harmony which reverberates between the two. According to 'A', it is in this ideal relation which we find the recipe for "every art we call classic."<sup>14</sup> That which places the opera of *Don Giovanni* above all the rest is its absolute relationship between idea (subject) and form (medium).

As we looks closer at this union, we find that the form finds its ultimate expression in the musical, and the content finds it in the idealized power of seduction, sensuousness, and desire as it is embodied in the mythical character of Don Juan. In other words, Mozart achieves harmonization of form and content because sensuousness, defined by 'A' as the temporality and immediacy of desire, can only be adequately expressed in music.<sup>15</sup> We will now turn to examine the exact nature of music as an aesthetic form and Don Juan as its aesthetic content.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Kierkegaard says in his journals that in this essay he wanted to use a variety of erotic moods, and these he "linked to

### Music as a Perfect Aesthetic Form

Following closely in Hegel's footsteps, 'A' believes that sensuousness as a principle must give the credit of its very existence to the arrival of Christianity in the Middle Ages. He explains:

Since the sensuous generally is that which should be negated, it is clearly evident that it is posited first through the act which excludes it, in that it posits the opposite principle. . . Christianity is spirit, and spirit is the positive principle which Christianity has brought into the world. But when sensuousness is understood in its relationship to spirit [i.e. as its contrary], it is clearly known as a thing that must be excluded, it is determined as a principle, as a power.<sup>16</sup>

Here, 'A' is speaking of the dualism posited between worldly flesh and Godly spirit by the Christianity of the Middle Ages, a dualism which 'A' credits as evoking the vitality and power of sensuousness and the erotic to life in its very exclusion from its prior moral and religious domain.

Thus, we discover the very origin and nature of Don Giovanni, a mythical character of the Middle Ages. He is flesh incarnate, the anti-Christian principle of sensuousness which is posited by Christianity, arriving on the scene at the very same moment it is excluded. At this point, we not only find the essence of Don Juan, but most importantly, the essence of music itself according to 'A'. While music can express many things, all expressions which are not absolute sensuousness must be dismissed as mere peripherals and unnecessary functions. As the absolute subject of sensuousness,

Don Giovanni's constant, restless movement from one seduction to the next is the perfect image or metaphor for the essence of music. For this reason, 'music has always been an object of suspicion from the standpoint of religious enthusiasm'. In general, 'the stronger the religiosity, the more one renounces music and stresses the importance of words'. Music, then, is the art of the sensuous, the art of seduction.<sup>17</sup>

The immediate, spiritually qualified, must fall inside or outside the spiritual sphere. If

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Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Essentially they belong to the imagination and find their satisfaction in music." *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 164 [43 IV A 223].

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 59-60.

it falls inside, the immediate may find its expression in the musical, but this immediacy cannot be the *absolute subject* of music, because the music itself is alien in the spiritual sphere, and only serves as a prelude which is constantly being annulled or negated. By lying inside the spiritual sphere, immediacy need not be expressed in music because in order for it to become spirit, it must be expressed in language.

So, immediacy must turn to find its absolute expression outside the sphere of the spiritual. Lying outside the spiritual sphere, immediacy is expressed in music, and only in music. Language has no jurisdiction over immediacy outside the realm of the spiritual. Immediacy necessarily becomes sensuous, and this only arises with Christianity.

### **Don Juan as Ideal Aesthetic Subject**

As we turn to examine the persona of Don Juan, I would like to briefly point out how even before *The Immediate Erotic Stages*, in the *Diapsalmata*, we already discover a weakness in A's aesthetic wanderings, a weakness which can only be remedied by Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. In this section, 'A' admits that his deepest desires yearn for a means of making his fleeting, temporal desires eternal. An aesthete is captivated by the moment, but this moment is constantly passing away, and this causes repeated rushes of despair, times in which 'A' fears he will run out of these precious aesthetic moments which supply the substance and quality to his life. For example, the initial moment of falling in love is suggested as the highest point of life for 'A'. Long-term, committed relationships and the comforts of marriage mean nothing to him. Once the initial moment of falling in love has passed away, nothing substantial is left, and he must move on to another lover. But this obviously creates a problem, because this single, immediate moment of the erotic cannot be sustained. It has no history and no future and is fated to continually seek repetition.

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<sup>17</sup>Watson, 441-442.

Where will 'A' go to find eternal rest in the moment? According to 'A', this sustaining power can only be found in a classical, musical work, because in this way the temporal idea can be made eternal in history, allowing the erotic to find an ideal timelessness, living continually in the eternal, present moment. Thus we arrive at *The Immediate Stages of the Erotic* with the answer: the opera of *Don Giovanni*, a musical masterpiece in which the most abstract idea can be expressed artistically is the spirit of sensuality. Don Juan is the absolute embodiment of the spirit of sensuality, and thus the opera, as a classic work, gives the abstract idea of sensuousness a sustaining history in the character of Don Juan.

Now, the reader must not make the common mistake of thinking of Don Juan as an actual human being. 'A' 's intention is to present him instead an infinite, daemonic desire and sensuous genius. His life is an ideal, an ideal whose expression in music allows 'A' to find temporary fulfillment. Don Juan's entire life is consumed with a striving toward and consuming of all romantic, sensuous possibilities, the constant act of possessing the greatest expression of femininity in every woman, taking part in the immediacy of erotic passion without end.<sup>18</sup> He is unreflective, amoral, and loyally devoted to one pleasure: sensuousness. He is every aesthete's ideal man.

To sum up, Mozart's opera finds its fullest expression and embodiment of immediacy in the character of Don Juan. The single concern of Don Juan's life is to sustain the erotic through time and give immediacy a history. Further, as an opera, *Don Giovanni* concerns itself with representing Don Juan through music, which is furthest removed from language, and therefore the most abstract medium. As we read the passage below, it becomes obvious how much 'A' believed the passion and movement of Don Juan and the musical parallel the lives of all men who seek repeated aesthetic fulfillment:

Let us look as how they fling themselves from one pleasure to another: their password is variation. Do they desire something that is always the same? On the contrary, they want

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<sup>18</sup>"In each woman he desires the whole of femininity, and in this lies the sensuality idealizing power with which he at once beautifies and overcomes his prey." Ibid., 105.

something that is never the same. In other words, they desire many different things, and he who wants in these circumstances is not only innerly dispersed, but also divided. He desires one thing, and then yearns for the opposite, since the unity of pleasure is a chimera and an illusion: his aim is diversity of delights. When someone has pleasure at his service, he goes calling for something new: change, movement, variation.<sup>19</sup>

What better expression can the aesthete find than that of Don Juan through the medium of music?

Author A sees no other that compares.

## Don Giovanni

After uncovering the figure of Don Juan, we will now illuminate the quality of his existence within Mozart's musical creation. We find this in the way that the content, or words and the form, or music, of the opera is able to at once express both the finite and the eternal.

Essentially, as a classic, *Don Giovanni* fuses together time and eternity.

First, temporality is found in both music and words. In music, the melody emerges and expresses itself only as sequence of notes, requiring time. One cannot freeze a musical masterpiece and observe or enframe it like a painting or sculpture. Through words, a concrete reality is established of a temporal entity. Language is itself a temporal medium.

But, alongside this temporality, the eternal also finds its place within the form and content of the opera. The content is the idea which is intrinsically an abstraction suited only to eternity or timelessness since it is pure possibility. Thus, the idea, not being bound *by* time, allows the classic work to endure *through* time.

The entire opera consists essentially of the expression of one, single idea, and thus one will find that the opera always implicates a dramatic, gravitating necessity toward this single idea as its center. As we have said, this idea is the sensuous, characterized by desire, and this desire must be expressed in a very specific way. As 'A' reflects on how *Don Giovanni* compares to Mozart's other operas, he considers the fact that Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and *The Marriage of Figaro* also represent desire, but their version of desire is never truly satisfied, and thus never

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<sup>19</sup>Kierkegaard, Soren. *Un discours de circonstance*, vol. 13: 30.

brought into eternity.

In order to reveal how desire finds its truest expression in *Don Giovanni*, 'A' presents these three operas as three immediate stages of consciousness, all seeking desire, all aspects of the same conceptual scheme, coming together through metamorphosis, on the way to the last stage.<sup>20</sup> As 'A' explains the movement between these three stages, it seems that he also explains the movement through the three stages of existence, where one finds that only in God can one's desires and possibilities be satisfied.

In regard to the task of sustaining the immediate within the eternal, Mozart is far more successful in his opera, *Don Giovanni*, than is the product of his genius, the character of Don Juan. While Don Juan persistently and continually seeks repetition, multiplicity, and continuity of the erotic moment, his task is never finished. His life is a task which never fully finds its fulfillment, while Mozart's task is indeed successful. In his opera, Mozart is able to not only embody the spirit of sensuality in Don Juan, but also eternally sustain the immediate erotic through the medium of music. This operatic masterpiece achieves the authentic connection of form and content, the requirement of a classic work, and in this connection, music reveals itself as the perfect medium through which the harmonization of immediacy and immortality can find its fulfillment. Only in the opera, *Don Giovanni*, does Mozart achieve his immortality.

Author 'A' succeeds in expressing valid reasons for his privileging of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* as one of those few classics unifying form and content in both temporality and the

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<sup>20</sup> In the first stage, man's desire seeks its object as an ideal, and therefore desire is always stuck in a contradiction: while desire is dreaming, it is in full possession of its object, but is not really consciously desiring, only dreaming. And yet, if desire does indeed awaken, its object vanishes because this ideal only exists in his dreams. Thus, desire is left alone, and the man of the first stage can never consciously reach the point of desiring.

Now, the desire of man in the second stage seeks the particular, but only under the qualification and context of the manifold, and thus, once again we find a contradiction: the object is perceived in its manifold, but as desire seeks its object within this manifold, it remains alone in a deeper sense, having no object, and so without a true object, it cannot yet be determined as desire.

Finally, in the third stage, the last and fullest of the three, we find no contradiction because in Don Juan, desire is both intensely and extensively determined as absolute. This occurs through an immediate synthesis of the first and second stages, so desire not only has its absolute object in the particular, but it also desires the particular absolutely. In this way, desire reaches its existence as principle, spiritually determined in its exclusion from spirit. It is not anxious, despairing, nor seeking without resolve, but rather stands victorious and triumphant in its irresistibility

eternal. Even more, Mozart's opera most clearly expresses the immediate consciousness and existence of the true aesthete. But, this life of the aesthete only finds perfection as an ideal, never as an actuality. Kierkegaard himself admits in his journals that even "Don Juan has melancholy, an enthusiasm that deprives him of his understanding, a dreaming, almost insane fantastic gorging;" just as the rest of the archetypes in *Either/Or Part 1*, his life is one of "sheer, ungoverned passion."<sup>21</sup> The aesthetic sphere lacks any dominant center of gravity, any real self, because the aesthete's interaction with his world is like "a piece wandering to find its key, never quite establishing any orientating tonality"<sup>22</sup>; nevertheless, he lives and strives for this possibility, seeking but never establishing a stability, harmony, authority, or self. Although the aesthete finds temporal delight in such "homeless, absent wandering"<sup>23</sup>, it continually falls apart, and all possibility dissolves into discord, despair, and even death. For the aesthete, becoming a self entails finding a home, a contextual familiarity, a *telos*, and a narrative center of gravity. Finally, this process necessitates a giving of oneself over to the truth, a receptive shaping of one's self and existence within this truth, and a lived out passion purely motivated toward appropriating this truth in all that one is and does. Where does one find this truth? For Kierkegaard it is in Christ and his redemptive power. But, if this philosophic approach to music has been put forth by the amoral, non-Christian aesthete, how does Kierkegaard's own philosophy of music look when redeemed through Christ? This is the question to which we will now turn.

### **Theological Implications**

There is a deep distrust of the power and sinful temptation of music throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition. John Calvin was among those skeptics, warning that it is only within

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and daemonic, sensuous nature. It is in this stage that we find the true exclusively musical, sensuous genius manifested in the figure of Don Juan.

<sup>21</sup>Kierkegaard, Soren. *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 162. [43 IV A 213]

<sup>22</sup>Mooney, Edward F. "Music of the Spheres: Kierkegaardian Selves and Transformations," *International Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XXXII, No. 3 Issue No. 127 (September 1992) 358.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.



the confines of authentic Christian worship that music can be "free from vicious attractions, and from that foolish delight by which it seduces men from better employments and occupies them in vanity."<sup>24</sup> Biblically, this is not entirely inaccurate. Music finds its origin in Genesis 4.21. This verse tells us that the first musical instruments were invented by a descendant of the unregenerate murderer and enemy of God: Cain. This account certainly does not intend to imply that music is inherently ungodly or the root of evil, but we can recognize that music can be taken up by the fallen, vain, unrighteous man and serve as the tool of rebellion, 'freeing' one in the pursuit of sinful, animalic pleasures and idolatry.

This is not music's only role in the Bible. It most often serves as celebratory of God's goodness, as affirmation or negation of reality, and as consolatory to the saddened or disillusioned individual. Regarding music's celebratory role, we see in 1 Samuel 18.6 how David and King Saul are greeted by the women "from all the cities of Israel" as they return after the defeat of Goliath. They were "singing and dancing, . . . with tambourines, with *joy*, and with musical instruments."<sup>25</sup> This musical and lyrical reception of the women displays how music can express and convey an attitude of joy, thanksgiving, and honor. We see an additional role of music in 1 Samuel 16.14-23, where King Saul is being unceasingly terrorized by an evil spirit from the Lord. His servants, being advised by God, go to seek out a man who is beautifully skilled in playing the harp, so that his music may soothe and refresh Saul's soul. Upon the recommendation of one of the young men in the King's court, David is summoned to play his music for the King, and his remedy proves to be highly successful. After that, "whenever the evil spirit came to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him." Here, through the beauty and power of music, Saul is freed from the confining persistence of mental torment, and he is restored as this negativity inside of him gives way to consolation and transformation.

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<sup>24</sup>Calvin, John. *Genesis* (1554), ET 1847, repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965, 1.218.

<sup>25</sup>1 Samuel 18.6 (New American Standard).

Consolation is not consolation if it is offered cheaply and easily. It must acknowledge the negativities to which it seeks to respond, and Christianity must transform those negativities. A purely musical consolation, with no significance beyond the sensuous, belongs within the aesthetic life. The music that may on other occasions enable us to dance over the face of the abyss, like Don Juan, here offers a temporary solace in the face of the abyss whose negativities we cannot deny. The alternative is to conclude that the indeterminate, partial consolation offered by music is at least distantly related to a greater and final comfort stemming from an ultimate reality understood not as abyss but as the God acknowledged in Christian faith.

So indirect is this relationship to the source of consolation that many of those who find consolation in music would reject with incredulity the notion of an ultimate basis for consolation. Yet, such an interpretation of music becomes somewhat coherent in the light of faith in . . .

the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.<sup>26</sup> If, above and beyond the indeterminacy and questionableness of musical consolation, there is a true and final and absolute consolation in the God who has not remained aloof from us but has come to us as Immanuel, full of grace and truth, and who intends us to find consolation in this, then the fitful light of musical consolation takes on a new significance. In the light of the eternal light, it begins to shine more steadily. It becomes, whether implicitly or explicitly, a witness.<sup>27</sup>

If music truly does have the power to encompass, transform, and illuminate the true answer to the negativities of existence, then this consolation and comfort it seems to bring to the individual is genuine, and further, we may rightly expect to discover this witness of the Divine not only in His church, but also in the world, in His creation. The ultimate character and truth of the world must not be reduced merely to a sphere of fallenness, disbelief, and rebellion, but instead to very good creation of the Creator which has fallen, and is being lovingly redeemed through a divine saving action which never ceases. When one enters Kierkegaard's third, religious stage of existence, when one understands the world as thriving under the lordship of Christ, the church no longer becomes the only place in which His lordship may be found. This redemptive

understanding of the world can only be truly understood by the Christian, because despite the church's unrelenting attempt to transform secular culture, to the unbeliever, God's existence may be denied with little, if any resistance from others, and the aesthetic beauty of the world may be unreflectively and blindly taken for granted, even by the greatest artists and composers of our history. It is only by faith in Christ, that this otherwise hidden lordship of Christ over not only the church but also the world can begin to be uncovered and become unquestionably absolute.

## Conclusion

We cannot conclude from this theological approach that music indeed must inherently possess the illuminating power that may clearly provide the ultimate foundations of reality in the Christian faith. Yet, we may confidently conclude that music, indeterminate though it may be, does derive its light, beauty, power, and comfort to the individual from one, true, and eternal light which never dims nor fails to shine in the darkness. "The light becomes *sound* when, in Christ's proclamation, it takes the form of speech, and - indirectly and on occasion - it may become sound a second time, in the form of music."<sup>28</sup>

Watson describes music as a parable:

Music is, at best, *only* a parable; but it is, or may become, *truly* a parable. As a parable, it has an exterior form which locates it unproblematically alongside other 'secular' practices and disciplines. This exterior form can never be discounted; it never becomes transparent to an interior radiance, for it is precisely the exterior form - the empirically-existing practice of music - that constitutes the possibility of the parable. But for those with ears to hear, music may on occasion speak of that which lies beyond it; not of an undifferentiated and formless 'transcendence' but of the God who enacts and speaks comfort and consolation on behalf of his people.<sup>29</sup>

Just as Watson believes music to be a parable which speaks to that which lies beyond itself,

Kierkegaard's rendition of *Don Giovanni* from the eyes of the aesthete may also speak to what lies beyond it. For Kierkegaard, the immediacy of the aesthetic life and the music which it represents

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<sup>26</sup>2 Cor. 1.3(NAS).

<sup>27</sup>Watson, 460.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 461-462.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 462-463.

ends ultimately in futility, a striving after nothing, or a chasing after the wind. But, when the aesthetic life serves as a metaphoric pointer to the religious life which ultimately lies beyond it, one may understand all things within an entirely different framework. When one is saved in Christ, all is redeemed and futility no longer remains an impending force upon the individual.

But, one must ask, what then occurs to the value of music in this redemptive process if its beauty had been found in its perfect representation of the aesthetic life, the lowest of Kierkegaard's three stages? The answer to this question is not made explicitly clear by Kierkegaard himself and it remains in some ways an open question. But, upon my reading, I have come to believe that for Kierkegaard, immediacy does not disappear in the religious stage, but instead becomes what Kierkegaard calls a 'second immediacy', referring to a spontaneity and transfigured passion which is experienced after reflection upon God, when one no longer lives or thinks without the inward workings of the Holy Spirit. For Kierkegaard, this transformation makes all the difference. This is for him the authentic mode of existence, the spiritual, rather than sensuous, musical delight. In this way, it seems that the beauty of music may not only maintain all the passion, immediacy, and spiritedness that it had for the aesthete, but it may also be transfigured and brought to far greater transcendence as a divine delight. Only as a Christian can one actualize what for the aesthete was only a possibility.

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