

Der Arzt der Sobeide (Sobeide's Doctor)

Comic opera in a prologue and two acts.

Text by Fritz Zoref · Opus 4 · 1917

Instrumentation	Soli: 6 sop,4 alt,3 ten,2 bar,2 bass; Mixed Chorus; Children's Chorus; Orch: 3(picc),2(cor),2(D-cl,bcl),2(cbn); 4,3,3,1; hrp; timp; perc; strings; 4 scenes
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Duration	full evening minutes
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Publisher	Universal Edition (1919)
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Availability	score and parts available for hire
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First performance	Breslau 2/11/1919 (cond.Prüwer; prod.Runge)
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About the work	"Here all the virtues are combined which reveal the master of his craft. A lavish richness of melodic ideas permeates the whole work, naturally underlining and enhancing the lyrical episodes with special emphasis, carried along by a harmonic freedom which, in spite of all its boldness appears completely unforced. The sense of a vitalising rhythm, preventing the occurrence of any dead moments, is particularly successfully developed. Behind the natural flow of the parts, especially the singable vocal lines, is concealed a deceptively easy, mature, technical artistry . . ." [Georg Jensch: Volkswacht (1919)]
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Further Details

Der Arzt de Sobeide

Hans Gál

Comic Opera in a Prelude and 2 Acts. Libretto by Fritz Zoref.

Published by Universal Edition, Vienna, 1919, as Opus 4

Completed in 1918 while Gál was serving in the First World War, building a railway in the Carpathians.

First performance: Breslau, 2.11.1919. Conductor: Julius Prüwer.
Production: Runge.

Place of action:

Prelude: A busy square near one of the city gates of old Granada.

Act 1: The house of Don Pedro

Act 2, Scene 1: A courtyard in the old town

Act 2, Scene 2: In and around a harem in a Moorish tent

Time of action:

Middle of the 16th Century

Characters:

Juan Sanchez de la Mancha (tenor)

Annita, his betrothed (soprano)

Don Pedro, doctor, her father (baritone)

Paquita, Annita's maid (soprano)

Don Miguel de Zuelos, an adventuring hidalgo (tenor)

Lopez, his servant (bass)

Jacinto, barber-surgeon to Pedro (baritone)

Sobeide (soprano)

Zuleima, companion to Sobeide (soprano)

Fatima, companion to Sobeide (alto)

Ali, a eunuch (soprano)

Nahena, a quack dealer (alto)

A young dandy (tenor)

Another dandy, his friend (bass)

A fruit woman (alto)

First urchin (soprano)

Second urchin (alto)

Children, townsfolk, harem women, slaves, eunuchs

Orchestration:

3 flutes (3 also piccolo)

2 oboes (2 also oboe d'amore)

2 clarinets in B flat and A (1 also D-clarinet, 2 also bass clarinet)

2 bassoons (2 also contra-bassoon)

4 horns

3 trumpets

Bass tuba

Harp

Timpani

Percussion

Strings

On stage: organ or harmonium

Plot:

Set in 16th century Spain, in Granada, in a colourful, exotic world of Moors and Christian knight-adventurers, 2 love plots interwoven with intrigues, adventures, mistaken identities; a cloak and dagger drama with a whiff of the poetic atmosphere of the Arabian Nights; a burlesque romantic comedy, with stock comic situations, reminiscent of 'Cosi' and 'Don Giovanni', which comes to a climax in the Finale of the 2nd Act, starting with a love duet between the Moorish slave-girl Sobeide and the knight-adventurer Don Miguel, who has entered the harem disguised as a doctor (called to tend the ailing Sobeide), and then bringing to a head all manner of confusion as Juan also arrives at the harem disguised as a doctor, followed by the real doctor, Pedro, while Nahena, the quack dealer,

who has engineered the whole plot, brings along Juan's betrothed to compound his discomfiture.

Musically, this offers scope for extended ensembles (quintet and sextet with chorus), combining the ecstasy of the lovers with the wry admission of the losers that theirs was the 'wrong medicine'.

Formally, the opera is structured as a sequence of strongly contrasted numbers, with a continuous progression and alternation of musical 'scenes'. The orchestra has a predominantly accompanying function, except in 2 fairly extensive orchestral interludes (which became popular concert pieces, as did the Moorish love-song, sung by Sobeide with women's chorus).

[cf. Waldstein, 1965: pp.22-3]

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