

Mozart and the Moravians: Mozart Reception in Transatlantic Context

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Beginning in the 1730s, members of the German-Moravian church established communities across the Atlantic world. From Pennsylvania, New York, and North Carolina, to England, St. Thomas, Suriname, and the West African coast, Moravians carried with them their unique form of evangelical Christianity and, perhaps most importantly, the cultural traditions of the German-speaking world, including vocal and instrumental art music. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century visitors to Moravian communities often noted that Moravians performed sophisticated and thoroughly modern instrumental and vocal works in worship services and other sacred contexts. Moravians believed that music, rather than spoken language, could most powerfully convey theological truths, and approached their spirituality principally through music. With little separation between the sacred and secular, all musical activities, even the performance of secular art music, became religious pursuits.

While much of the art music performed in Moravian communities was composed by the Moravians themselves, a significant number of pieces were musical borrowings, re-texted *contrafacta* by well-known composers such as Haydn, Mozart, and Graun. Mozart's motet "Ave verum corpus" was a popular choice, given its already existing Christian context. However, the sacred re-texting of secular scenes from operas such as *Così fan tutte* ("Secondate, aurette amiche/Deinem Heiland, Zion preise") and *Die Zauberflöte* ("Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen/Schallt unsere Dankes frohe Lieder") was also quite common. Interestingly, late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century archival records from Moravian communities demonstrate that the Moravians were adapting Mozart's operas within ten years of their premieres. Through a sophisticated network of port facilities on each side of the Atlantic, as well as privately-owned transport ships, including the *SS Harmony* and *SS Irene*, Moravians imported the latest musical manuscripts, instruments, and European-trained composers and musicians to the far reaches of the Atlantic world.

This paper will explore the ways that Mozart's works were circulated, adapted, and performed in Moravian communities across the Atlantic world. For what purposes and in what contexts did the Moravians repurpose Mozart? What kinds of inter-textual and inter-musical meanings can be gleaned from these *contrafacta*? Who heard and performed these works in mission communities, such as the Mohican and Delaware communities in Pennsylvania and New York? What inter-cultural or cross-cultural meanings did Mozart *contrafacta* have for Germanborn Moravians, as well as native musicians and audiences? What can these *contrafacta* teach us about the transatlantic reception and performance of Mozart's works in general? For the Moravians, transference of music and instruments to each mission community allowed missionaries and native-born congregants alike to experience the musical culture of the Germanspeaking world even on the peripheries of the West Indies, the coast of North Africa, or the wildlands of Pennsylvania. In the words of one Moravian source, congregants were to feel "every where at Home."