

In *Don Giovanni*, what is perhaps Mozart's best-known opera, there exist two distinct endings, a phenomenon not entirely unknown during the composer's time, but one that invites the obvious question: Why did Mozart decide to include alternate endings for *Don Giovanni* when he did not do the same with his other famous operas, *Die Zauberflöte* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Another question, and one not so obvious, is: Why was Mozart himself uncertain as to which of the two endings to choose, as is evidenced in his correspondence with Lorenzo Da Ponte, the opera's librettist? A common answer is to treat both these questions as one: Mozart was uncertain as to which ending to provide, so he wrote both endings. Such a reply ignores an important consideration: Why did Mozart decide to provide these specific endings? Libard provides a reasonable answer: The traditional ending—in the sense that it is the one that was popular during the composer's day and continues to be so today—is clearly more palatable for audiences. The hero, Don Giovanni, is chided for his libertine ways and then the cast appears in tutti, bellowing a merry chorus as the curtain falls. The audience is left having a light dose of entertainment, which, after all, was the aim of many of the operas of Mozart's time. Fine, but then what of the tragic ending? Libard—trading the sensible for the pat—offers little more than that such an ending reflects the political climate of the day. This alternate ending—Don Giovanni is suddenly cast down to Hell, and instead of being redeemed, the hero emerges from the underworld chastened, and the curtain falls—was interpreted by the critics of the day as heavy-handed didacticism. While such a view is not entirely without merit—Mozart ultimately aimed to impart some lesson for his incorrigible Lothario—it still leaves the question unanswered as to why two endings and what exactly did Mozart aim to communicate that could not be housed in a traditional ending. One answer offered recently by musicologist Gustavo Lucien is that Mozart balked at including a traditional ending, feeling that it was incongruous with the serious tone of most of the opera. Indeed, *Don Giovanni* falls more under the rubric of opera seria than opera buffa, the latter typically featuring light endings in which the entire cast sings in an upbeat, major key. Da Ponte, however, insisted that forthwith casting Don Giovanni to Hell, and offering him scant opportunity for redemption, would likely leave the audience feeling ambivalent. Such an ending would also suggest that the librettist had been unable to think of a tidy resolution. Da Ponte, then, was not so much against a tragic ending as he was an abrupt tragic ending. Perhaps even Mozart was unsure of what to do with Don Giovanni once he was in Hell and may have even been working out a different ending, using the light ending as a stopgap till he achieved such an aim. In that case the fate of Don Giovanni can best be answered by the fact that Mozart—through debts, ill-health, and the composer's obligation to compose works for his patrons—was unable to return to a work he had tabled.