

DT501/1 History of Music: Classical/Romantic

Dr Adrian Smith

Lecture 7: Opera/Vocal Music (2)

Mozart's Early Operas



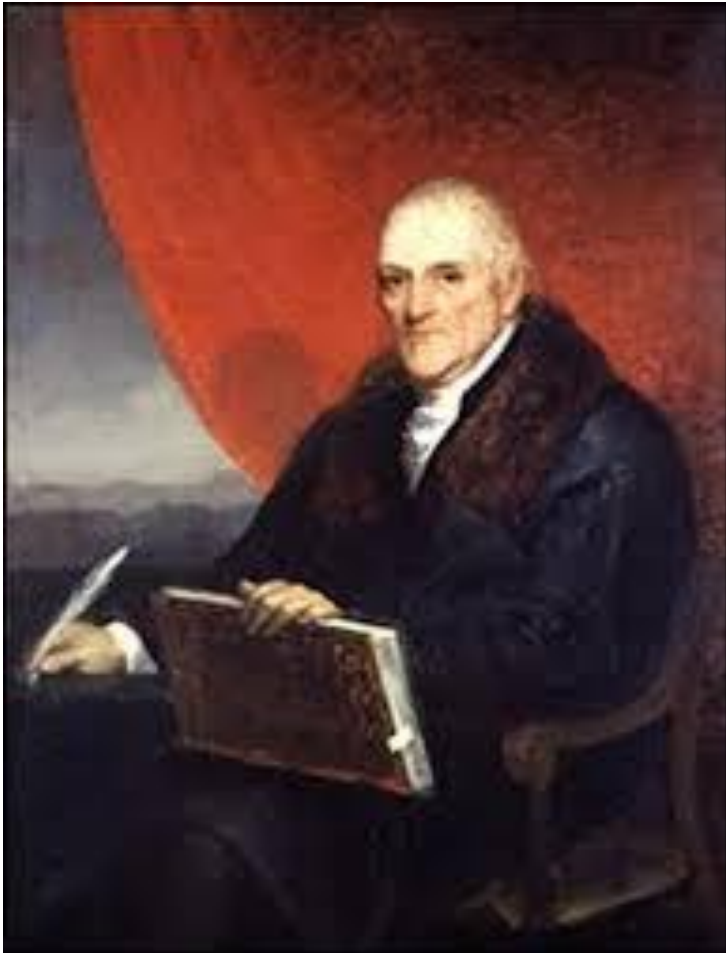
- Composes his first opera *Apollo et Hyacinthus*, a Latin intermezzo, at the age of 11.
- By 1779 he had composed 12 operas in three of the major genres of the time: Italian *opera buffa* and *seria* and German *singspiel* (German comic opera with spoken dialogue).
- Although little in these operas is original, this experience allowed him to gain mastery and internalise all the conventions associated with these three genres.

Mozart's Operatic Maturity



- With *Idomeneo* (1780) modelled on aspects of Gluck's reform operas, Mozart completes his assimilation of all the genres then available.
- *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782) establishes Mozart's reputation in Vienna.
- His culminating achievement are the three Da Ponte operas
 - *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786)
 - *Don Giovanni* (1787)
 - *Così fan tutti* (1790)as well as *The Magic Flute* (1791) and his final opera *La Clemenza di Tito* (1791).

The 'Da Ponte' Operas



- Lorenzo Da Ponte (1749–1838) was appointed poet to the court theatre in Vienna replacing Metastasio who had recently died.
- Born to Jewish parents who converted to Catholicism, he became a priest, took a mistress and had two children. Was subsequently banished from Venice.
- His librettos developed the model set in motion by Goldoni with highly differentiated characters and fast-paced finales which provided Mozart with ample compositional opportunities.

The Development of *Opera Buffa*

- By the 1750s *opera buffa*'s increasing sophistication and its appeal to the emergent middle classes made it a rival to *opera seria*, a genre it would subsequently overtake in popularity.
- Its transformation was brought about largely through the efforts of the Venetian playwright Carlo Goldoni who elevated the genre from the purely farcical by incorporating elements of true social comedy which covered a wide range of human emotions.
- In addition to the stock buffo character, Goldoni invented the *mezzo carattere*, who combined elements of the serious and comic.
- Through his collaboration with the composers Baldassare Galuppi and Niccolò Piccinni, Goldoni established a model for opera buffa whereby a plot is set in motion, ends up in a tangle (*imbroglio*) before eventually being unravelled.
- This dramatic model had formal implications for opera most notably in the invention of the 'chain finale'.

The Buffo Finale

- Both the imbroglio and the subsequent unravelling become the focus of chorus or elaborate ensemble pieces in which all the characters participate.
- This structure sets up dramatic climactic points which are driven by the orchestra maintaining a continuous forward momentum, stringing together a series of numbers without recitatives.
- These are known as 'chain finales' which take place towards the end of the act.
- The importance of this innovation lies in the fact that now the action on stage, rather than just simply sentiment, becomes the focus of musical depiction.
- Often the penultimate scene of the opera concludes with a duet of reconciliation between the principle characters (a convention that has its origins in the now obsolete intermezzo).

Da Ponte on the importance of the finale

The finale, chiefly, must glow with the genius of the composer, the power of the voices, the grandest dramatic effects. Recitative is banned from the finale: everybody sings; and every form of singing must be available – the adagio, the allegro, the andante, the intimate, the harmonious and then – noise, noise, noise; for the finale almost always closes in an uproar [...] in it the whole power of the drama is drawn or ‘pinched’ together [...]. The finale must, through a dogma of the theatre, produce on stage every singer of the cast, be there three hundred of them, and whether by ones, by twos, by threes or by sixes, tens or sixties; and they must have solos, duets, terzets, tenets, sixtyets...

Don Giovanni: Background and Conception

- Commissioned in 1787 for Prague following the triumphant success of *Le nozze di Figaro* in the city the previous December.
- The commission was intended to be performed on the 14 October for a visit to Prague by the Archduchess Maria Theresa of Austria, niece to the Emperor Joseph II.
- Mozart had began working during the Summer and left for Prague on the 1st of October.
- The opera could not be completed in time for the visit and *Le nozze di Figaro* was substituted instead.
- After several postponements the opera was eventually premiered by Mozart himself on 20th October 1787 at the National Theatre in Prague. (Legend has it that he only completed the overture on the day of the rehearsal)
- Premiere in Vienna was less successful owing to the fact that the Viennese audiences found the subject matter incomprehensible.

Don Giovanni

Three questions for interpretation

- The mixture of comic and serious
 - how do these elements mutually complement one another leading to a more complex perspective on the opera's moral subject matter?
- Mozart's musical characterisation
 - how does Mozart portray characters who are multi-dimensional through music?
 - pay particular attention to how Mozart manages to differentiate characters even when they are singing simultaneously in ensembles.
- Mozart's style and compositional ability
 - how does Mozart's facility in musical characterisation relate to his overall style?

Overture

- Influenced by Gluck's practice of integrating the musical content of the overture with the drama that follows.
- The overture is an *Andante* (slow intro)– *Allegro* (full sonata form with development)
 - the slow introduction in D minor laden with seriousness prefigures the music of the stone guest in the Act II finale.
 - the upbeat allegro in D major contains typical buffo overture material of fanfares, scurrying motives and tremolo accompaniment figures.
- Both the tragic and the comic are present in the mood.
- The overture's coda contains no final cadence, instead Mozart devises a transition which leads directly into the *introduzione* in F major.

Act 1, Introduction

Molto Allegro

2 Flauti

2 Oboi

2 Fagotti

2 Corni in F

Molto Allegro (Vorhang auf)

I Violino

II Violino

Viola

Donna Anna

Don Giovanni

Komtur
Il Commendatore

Leporello

Violoncello

Contrabasso

Ob.

Fag.

Cor. in F

I

Viol. II

Viola

L.

Vc.

Cb.

Leporello

Kei-ne Ruh bei Tag und Nacht, nichts, was mir Ver-gnü-gen
 Not-te e gior-no fa-ti - car per chi nul-la sà gra-

Act I, Scene I, Introduction

- Like the finale, the *introduzione* in late 18th century opera contained continuous music with orchestra and fully composed pieces without recitative. Its function is to set the plot in motion.
- Listen to the musical characterisation of each character throughout the scene.
- Leporello's aria 'Notte e giorno faticar':
 - typical buffo tone set with leaping ostinato figure and scalar flourishes.
 - the refrain of this rondo aria turns more dignified when he reveals his desire to live the life of a gentleman. Horns mimic a hunting call (an aristocratic activity).
 - final cadence snatched away by a modulation to B-flat major.
- The appearance of Donna Anna and Don Giovanni.
 - music turns towards a more serious dramatic mood characteristic of *opera seria*, Donna Anna's signature music.

Act I, Scene I, Introduction

- Don Giovanni duplicity is captured musically by his ability to latch on to the style of whoever he happens to be cheating.
- Leporello's panic is reflected by his reversion to the stock buffo patter-singing of repeated triadic figures.
- example of Mozart's ability to differentiate his characters even in ensemble pieces.
- again the trio fails to achieve closure as tremolo violins in unison intrude upon the final cadence initiating a modulation to G minor.
- Trio for the Commendatore, Don Giovanni and Leporello
 - the trio in G minor cadences on D minor (the bearer of symbolic significance throughout).
 - the ensuing sword fight between the Commendatore and Don Giovanni depicted by rising scales and leaping octaves in the orchestra.

Act I, Finale

NO./SECTION	ACTION	KEY
16. Allegro assai	Duet, Masetto and Zerlina quarrel	C
17. (continued)	Don Giovanni enters, (Chorus of guests)	
18. Andante	Surprise seduction attempt (Don Giovanni, Zerlina, Masetto)	F
Allegretto	Trio (Don Giovanni, Zerlina, Masetto); trio exeunt	
19. (continued)	Maskers arrive (Donna Elvira and Anna, Don Octavio)	d
Minuet	Leporello invites in the maskers	F
Adagio	Trio, Maskers pray for vengeance.	Bb
SCENE CHANGE		
20. Allegro	Quartet (Don Giovanni, Leporello, Masetto, Zerlina)	Eb
Maestoso	Trio and Quintet (Maskers, Don Giovanni, Leporello)	C mod. V
Menuetto	Dance-Scene (builds to 3 superimposed dances in 3/4, 2/4, 3/8)	G
Allegro	Zerlina's scream	Eb, bb, c V/d
Andante	Confrontation	F → V
Allegro	Maskers threaten Don Giovanni (Ensemble finale)	C

Act 1, Finale: Superimposed dances

196

150

Orcheſter III
Orchestra III

Viol.

Vc.
e
Cb.

Orcheſter II
Orchestra II

Viol.

Vc.
e
Cb.

459 Orcheſter I
Orchestra I

Ob.

a 2

Cor. in G

a 2

I

Viol.

II

Viola

Vc.
e
Cb.

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Act II, Finale

NO./SECTION	ACTION	KEY
24.1 Allegro assai	Aria 'Già la mensa e preparata' (Don Giovanni)	D
24.2	Dinner music (Don Giovanni, Leporello, Musicians)	
a	<i>Una cosa rara</i> – Martìn y Soler	
b	<i>Fra i due litiganti il terzo gode</i> – Giuseppe Sarti	F
c Moderato	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	Bb
24.3 Allegro assai	Donna Elvira enters [trio with Don Giovanni and Leporello)	ends on V/d
24.4 Molto Allegro	Knocking on the door	F
24.5	Entrance of the stone guest	d
	Don Giovanni's damnation	d → D

Prescribed Listening

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Don Giovanni: Act 1, Scene 1 (as contained in the Norton Anthology)

Prescribed Reading

Section on Mozart's operas in the *Norton History of Western Music* (9th edition), pp. 552–556.

Read the description after the score in the Norton Anthology (7th edition), pp. 290–292.

Taruskin, Richard, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 485 –496.

For more detailed information consult Julian Ruston, *W. A. Mozart: Don Giovanni – Cambridge Opera Handbooks*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981).