

11 · GOLDONI, *DON GIOVANNI*,  
AND THE *DRAMMA GIOCOSO*

It has long been argued whether the appellation *dramma giocoso* applied to *Don Giovanni* by Da Ponte carried any meaning. Was it just a commonplace expression indistinguishable from opera buffa? At least during one phase of operatic history, represented by Goldoni's brilliant series of Venetian librettos from the 1750s, *dramma giocoso* took on a specific complexion that forecast in an almost uncanny way some ingredients that later went into *Don Giovanni*. Even so, there is no denying that poets, including Goldoni himself, often used the term *dramma giocoso* loosely, as the rough equivalent of opera buffa.<sup>1</sup>

Carlo Goldoni had become Italy's leading playwright by the mid-eighteenth century. After he returned to his native Venice in 1748 he began coining a new kind of libretto for comic opera. It was he who, with the help of Venetian musicians like Galuppi, created the buffo finale, that long chain of unbroken action and music to enliven the act ending—an invention of epochal importance for all opera that followed.<sup>2</sup> Earlier Neapolitan comedies showed him the way to a certain extent, particularly with regard to plot and intrigue. But no librettist before him had taken so much interest in character, or in the clash of social classes on the stage. And no one had brought to the lowly task of writing comic librettos so much wit or verve. Goldoni cultivated many types of comedy, for both the spoken and lyric stage. The one that interests us here represents, along with the buffo finale, his greatest contribution to opera.

In several librettos written around 1750, Goldoni combined character types from serious opera (*parti serie*), usually a pair of noble lovers, with the ragtag of servants, peasants, and others (*parti buffi*) who populated his unalloyed comic librettos.

Revised from *Musical Times* 120 (1979).

1. Pointed out by Kunze, *Don Giovanni vor Mozart*, p. 58.
2. See Hertz, "Creation of the Buffo Finale."

Sometimes he also added roles that were halfway between the two in character (*di mezzo carattere*). His name for such an amalgam, applied fairly consistently from 1748 on, was *dramma giocoso*.<sup>3</sup> It summed up the ingredients quite well, inasmuch as *dramma* by itself signified at the time the grander, heroic world of opera seria, while *giocare* means to play or frolic, also to deceive or make a fool of. "A frolic with serious elements" would be one paraphrase of *dramma giocoso*.

Goldoni was quite aware of the novelty and originality of what he had created, and to leave no doubts in the minds of others, he spelled out his paternal claims in the prefaces to some of his librettos. In 1752, prefacing *I portentosi effetti della madre natura*, he wrote: "These *drammi giocosi* of mine are in demand all over Italy and are heard with delight; noble, cultivated people often attend, finding in them, joined to the melody of the singing, the pleasure of honest ridicule, the whole forming a spectacle rather more lively than usual. . . . Although serious operas are imperfect by nature and comic ones even more so, I have striven to make them less unworthy."<sup>4</sup> Two years later he embroidered on these ideas in the preface to *De gustibus non est disputandum*: serious opera has its faults, he says, but so does comic, especially in those authors who pay insufficient attention to plot, intrigue, and character. If the drama is a little on the serious side, it is condemned for want of levity; if it is too ridiculous, it is damned for want of nobility. Wishing to find a way to content everyone, but finding no models anywhere, he was forced to create them himself.<sup>5</sup> The six years from 1749 to 1754 were decisive in his reform of the comic libretto. Within this period he wrote a dozen *drammi giocosi*, of which three are somewhat known even today because Haydn later set them to music: *Il mondo della luna*, *Le pescatrici*, and *Lo speziale*.

The high point of Goldoni's long collaboration with Galuppi came in their *dramma giocoso* *Il filosofo di campagna* (1754). The comedy has two noble lovers, Eugenia and Rinaldo, listed in the libretto as *parti serie*. They both require high voices, as would be the case in serious opera, and singing techniques beyond the average in comic opera. Rinaldo, like Eugenia, is a soprano. Although he was played by a woman in the original production, it was not uncommon for such parts to be taken by castratos, those cynosures of opera seria; in fact, it was the rule in Rome and the Papal States, where women could not appear on the stage. Neither Rinaldo nor Eugenia participates in the concerted finales at the ends of the first and second acts; these are reserved to the five *parti buffe*. But they are compen-

3. Kunze (*Mozart's Opern*, p. 326) gives an account of Goldoni's mixing of seria with buffa parts beginning with his 1748 adaptation of the Neapolitan comedy *La maestra* by Antonio Palomba.

4. "Questi giocosi Drammi per Musica sono in oggi per tutta l'Italia desiderati, e con piacere intesi, e le persone nobili e colte v'intervengono frequentemente, trovando in essi alla melodia del canto unito il piacere dell'onesto ridicolo, il che forma un divertimento assai più allegro del solito. Spero che anche V. E. vorrà compiacersene, e troverà con che appagare il nobil genio e l'ottimo gusto di cui va adorna; poichè, quantunque i Drammi per Musica, e molto più i Drammi Buffi, opere siano di lor natura imperfette, ingegnato mi sono di render questo meno indegno di essere dalla Nobiltà compatito, e da V. E. principalmente protetto"; Goldoni, *Tutte le opere* 10:1157. The *eccellenza* who received this dedication was Signora Catterina Loredan Mocenigo.

5. The preface is quoted at length and accompanied by the original Italian text in Chapter 5.

sated in the length and earnest tone of the solo music Galuppi gives them, particularly Rinaldo, who sings an aria in act 1 about vengeance that would be quite at home in one of the composer's serious operas. An Allegro in common time, like the vast majority of serious arias, it has the requisite form (five-part da capo structure), technical demands, and orchestral elaboration. Ex. 11.1, from the middle of the piece, will convey the nature of the difficulties encountered. The kind of high, legato singing required here is not made any easier by the diminished-seventh leaps, the syncopations, and the chromatic line. In act 2 Rinaldo sings an equally formidable aria, "Perfida, figlia ingrata," which, being in c minor, sounds a very somber note within the generally comic proceedings. While the *parti buffe* were given simple strophic songs of folklike nature, or at the most short binary airs, Galuppi pulled out all the stops of his heroic style for the *parti serie*, which required great voices like those in opera seria. Goldoni's remark about the importance of singing in the *dramma giocoso* has particular relevance to these roles, for they allowed the humbler audiences and smaller theaters of comic opera to taste some of the vocal delights of the grand manner.

Two years after *Il filosofo di campagna*, Goldoni wrote *La buona figliuola* (Parma, 1756), which was destined to surpass all his other librettos in the influence it wielded. Niccolò Piccinni made the classic musical setting for Rome in 1760. Here the noble lovers (*parti serie*) are Marchesa Lucinda and Cavaliere Armidoro. Lucinda's brother, the Marchese, is in love with a girl beneath his station, Cecchina (a character derived ultimately, by way of several intermediate stages, from Richardson's Pamela)—who turns out in the end, after having gone through the opera as a gardener's assistant, to be nobly born after all. Both these parts are *di mezzo carattere*, and Cecchina's introduces a new strain into comic opera, one that is best called sentimental. The remaining four characters are pure buffo types.

Again, neither of the seria singers appears in the act finales. Their musical style would not be appropriate there in a context of simple, songlike ditties and rapid dialogue exchanges. The Marchese, a baritone, participates in the finales, as does Cecchina. Part of his *mezzo carattere* function is to be at home with both the chattering servants on the one hand and his ostentatiously pretentious sister and her lover on the other—indeed, to function as a bridge between them, as does Cecchina. The Marchese's liaison with the gardener's assistant holds Armidoro back from marrying the beautiful Marchesa; in the first aria he expresses his disdain

EXAMPLE 11.1. Galuppi, *Il filosofo di campagna*, "Taci, amor"

Allegro  
RINALDO

O — pre-n - de - te, pre-n - de - te l'im - pe - gno i — miei — tor - ti

EXAMPLE 11.2. Piccinni, *La buona figliuola*, No. 11



at the thought of possibly being related to a commoner, with emphasis on the insult this would represent to his honor and glory. (Goldoni, a commoner himself, is surely poking fun at social pretension here.)

Piccinni sets the text to an Allegro spiritoso in D major, the heroic key par excellence, and gives Armidoro plenty of scope to display his *virtù* in the traditional way—coloratura runs and arpeggios to convey *gloria* and *onore*. (Hints of “Or sai, chi l’onore” to come, in *Don Giovanni*, abound here.) The aria goes up to high C and includes a substantial middle part in a contrasting tempo and meter before returning to the common time of the first part, da capo. The Marchesa is not to be outdone: she sings a rage aria in which she invokes the Furies to a vigorous motif and energetic rhythm (Ex. 11.2). Mozart’s outraged women are hardly more furious than this (compare Electra, Vitellia, the Queen of the Night—and also Anna in “Fuggi, crudele, fuggi!”). Like most seria lovers, these two seem to be playing a game by assuming various traditional poses, in this case the prima donna’s typical high dudgeon. They convey not so much their love for each other, which is never fulfilled, as their exalted reactions to the subject of love. The poet most responsible for creating this state of affairs was Metastasio.

With Piccinni’s 1760 setting of *La buona figliuola*, most of the musical elements of the *dramma giocoso* in its specific sense were in place. The touchingly sentimental made inroads here that marked the entire next generation. Johann Adam Hiller, writing in his weekly newsletter on music, summed up Piccinni’s contribution with considerable insight in 1768 as he described the mixture of seria and buffa parts in Italian comic opera:

Now Piccinni dominates the comic stage and seems, through the great quantity of his operas, to be nearly exhausting the possibilities of innovation in that department. Not so simple melodically as Pergolesi, less comical than Galuppi and Cocchi, he seems more inclined to the naive and the tender. He has pieces as touching as we might hope to hear in a serious opera, at least in one by an Italian. Lest it should be thought that the serious opera is quite forgotten, the Italians now never fail to introduce in their comic operas a pair of serious characters who would prompt as much yawning as the others do laughter, were it not that their somewhat better style of singing attracts a modicum of attention.<sup>6</sup>

6. *Wöchentliche Nachrichten und Anmerkungen, die Musik betreffend* 3/8 (22 August 1768); translated by Piero Weiss in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, ed. Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (New York, 1984), p. 282. A decade after Hiller wrote this, the poet Giovanni Battista Lorenzi claimed that he had invented something new by combining comic and serious elements in *L’infedeltà*



The categorical "never fails" is an exaggeration: many Italian operas remained entirely comic. Nevertheless, it was astute of Hiller to single out the pair of serious characters and the more demanding level of singing associated with them as the outstanding feature of newer Italian comic opera.

Mozart joined the ranks of composers working in Italian opera that same year, 1768, with his setting of the *dramma giocoso* *La finta semplice*. The libretto was one of Goldoni's last, dating from 1764, after he had left Venice for Paris. Revised slightly for Vienna by Marco Coltellini, it offered sparkling finales but few seria elements. Goldoni's model was Philippe Néricault Destouches's *La fausse Agnès, ou Le poète campagnard* (1734), a comedy that was well known in Italy. The role most susceptible to seria treatment was that of the leading woman, the Hungarian Baroness Rosina, who plays the feigned simpleton of the title. Mozart set her "Senti l'eco" in act 1 (No. 9) to an elaborate two-tempo aria of the *ombra* type, in E-flat with both horns and English horns. He allows her ample coloratura passages as well. In act 2 he gives her a stunningly beautiful aria in E major, "Amoretti" (No. 15)—the ancestor of Mozart's later "gentle breezes" numbers in the same key (e.g., "Zeffiretti lusinghieri" in *Idomeneo* and "Soave sia il vento" in *Così fan tutte*).

In 1774, Mozart was commissioned to set the *dramma giocoso* *La finta giardiniera* for Munich. In the libretto (an anonymous and clumsy offspring of *La buona figliuola* that has been attributed to Giuseppe Petrosellini), Pamela/Cecchina has become the feigned gardener Sandrina—actually the noble Violante in disguise, estranged from her lover Belfiore, who believes her dead. These are *mezzo carattere* parts. The seria lovers are Arminda and Ramiro, both sopranos, and Ramiro, correspondingly, has the most coloratura singing in the opera. Arminda establishes her credentials as a seria character with a very long rage aria in g minor, *Allegro agitato*, at the beginning of act 2. Yet they take part in the finales and in this respect and others are less set apart than earlier *parti serie*.

Lest the reader think that these distinctions as to type of dramatic role and vocal character are mere historical musings, it will be well at this point to quote the master himself. In a letter of 7 May 1783, Mozart informed Leopold of his plans for a new opera. *Die Entführung* had been produced the previous year, and he was now burning to show the Viennese what he could do in Italian opera. Leopold was urged to approach the Salzburg poet who had written the libretto for *Idomeneo* about writing a new comedy with seven characters.

The most necessary thing is that the story, on the whole, be truly *comic*, and, if then it were possible, he ought to introduce *two equally good female roles*; one must be *seria*, the other *mezzo carattere*, but both roles must be absolutely equal *in quality*.

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*fedele*, a "commedia per musica" set by Cimarosa for Naples in 1779. When Haydn set the same libretto as *La fedeltà premiata* a year later, it was styled a "dramma pastorale giocoso." See Andrew Porter, "Haydn and 'La fedeltà premiata,'" *Musical Times* 112 (1971): 331–35.

But the third female character may be entirely buffa, and so may all four male characters, if necessary. If you think that something can be done with Varesco, please discuss it with him soon.<sup>7</sup>

Without so much as a story line to set off his imagination, and no particular singers in mind either, as far as we know, Mozart has begun the act of creation. His first thoughts are of vocal-dramatic types, and specifically of the interaction of three kinds of female role. And where do these thoughts eventually lead? They reached fruition neither in the abortive plans of 1783–84, nor in *Figaro* of 1785–86, which does not have a truly seria part. Rather, this line of thinking is prophetic of *Don Giovanni*. The greatest seria role in all Mozart is surely Donna Anna, who is matched in a *mezzo carattere* role of equal weight and excellence, the sentimental Donna Elvira. The trio is rounded out, the spectrum of womanhood rendered complete, at least in this opera, by the crafty but sympathetic peasant girl, the buffa Zerlina.

Da Ponte stated in his memoirs, some forty years after the fact, that it was he who suggested the Don Juan legend to Mozart. The unlikelihood of this claim should have caused suspicions long ago. Mozart was always searching for a story that would be perfect for the music he wanted to write. He scoured printed librettos from numerous sources to this purpose. In the case of *Don Giovanni*, we now know that the Prague management proposed to him a libretto that had been put on at Venice just a few months earlier. He then got Da Ponte to redo it. Once the work was under way, most of the decisions as to treatment were made by Mozart, not Da Ponte. It is perfectly clear from his letters to Leopold concerning the creation of *Idomeneo* and *Die Entführung* that Mozart made his librettists do his bidding, down to the tiniest details of the prosody required by the music he had in mind.

Don Juan on the stage, spoken or lyric, was the opposite of a novelty. The Spanish playwright Tirso de Molina started the vogue in the early seventeenth century. Molière took up the subject in his *Le festin de pierre* (1665), a prose comedy that introduces the characters of Donna Elvira and a peasant couple as victims of Don Giovanni. Boucher illustrated Molière's play superbly in 1749, showing a cowering servant and defiant Don Juan at the tomb (Fig. 26). Goldoni treated the subject in an early play, *Don Giovanni Tenorio, o sia Il dissoluto* (1736); his legacy is a Donna Anna who is betrothed to Ottavio against her will. Several Italian operas on the subject appeared in the following two decades. The direct model on which

7. "ich möchte gar zu gerne mich auch in einer Welschen opera zeigen. — mithin dächte ich, wenn nicht Varesco wegen der Münchener opera noch böse ist — so könnte er mir ein Neues buch auf 7 Personen schreiben. — basta; sie werden am besten wissen ob das zu machen wäre; er könnte unterdessen seine gedanken hinschreiben, und in Salzburg dann wollten wir sie zusammen ausarbeiten. — das nothwendigste dabey aber ist, recht *Comisch* im ganzen. und wenn es dann möglich wäre 2 *gleich gute frauenzimmer Rollen* hinein zu bringen. — die eine müsste *Seria*, die andere *Mezzo Carattere* seyn — aber *an güte* — müssten beide Rollen ganz gleich seyn. — das dritte frauenzimmer kan aber ganz *Buffa* seyn, wie auch alle Männer wenn es nöthig ist. — glauben sie dass mit dem Varesco was zu machen ist, so bitte ich sie bald mit ihm darüber zu sprechen"; 7 May 1783 (Mozart's emphasis).



FIGURE 26

Boucher: Dom Juan and his  
servant at the tomb



Mozart and Da Ponte worked was *Don Giovanni, o sia Il convitato di pietra: Dramma giocoso in un atto*, first performed at Carnival season in Venice, February 1787. (Da Ponte scrupulously avoids any mention of this work in his memoirs.) The poet was Giovanni Bertati, much maligned by Da Ponte as we have seen, but one of the most sought after librettists at Venice following Goldoni's departure, and the author of the excellent book to Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* (1792). Giuseppe Gazzaniga, a prolific and highly esteemed opera composer, wrote the music. It must have reached Vienna at once too, because several signs in Mozart's score indicate that he was aware of it.

Being in a single act, the Venetian opera was only half the length of its famous consequent. Even so, it provided Da Ponte with the situations, and sometimes even the language, for much of his libretto: up to scene 14 in act 1 and from the cemetery scene to the end of act 2. It also dictated the ingredient that makes the work a true *dramma giocoso* in the specific sense: two noble lovers of the seria stripe, Donna Anna and Duca Ottavio (a tenor); and it gave a relatively complete characterization of Donna Elvira. Mozart and Da Ponte improved on the model in several ways. They reduced the ladies from four to three (a Donna Ximena is deleted, or rather her role is conflated with the remaining female parts). Similarly, they reduced the servants who sang solo parts from two to one (Leporello). By cutting down on the number of roles, they eliminated all but one of the doublings in the model (Masetto and the Commendatore). Most important for the continuity and interest of the drama, they enhanced the role of Donna Anna and extended it over the whole opera. Her thirst for revenge now becomes the driving force that unites the work and propels it to the inevitable catastrophe. The original Spanish concept of retribution emerges much more clearly as a result.

It would be a mistake to underrate either Bertati or Gazzaniga just because Mozart so far surpassed them. He profited from both, and from their failings as well as their strengths. It was poor dramaturgy to have Anna disappear from the cast after the first scenes. Very impressive in Gazzaniga's score, in contrast, is the death of the Commendatore, set to expressive harmonies, including the Neapolitan sixth, in the remote key of e-flat minor. Mozart did it differently, but Gazzaniga's expert use of the Neapolitan served as a reminder—if any were needed—of a potent harmonic resource. Following the calamity there comes with lightninglike rapidity the broadest kind of farce. Leporello asks in recitative, "Who is dead, you or the old man?"—a line taken directly from Bertati. In receiving so rude a shock (like a slap in the face, in fact), we are reminded that this is no tragedy, but a comedy with seria parts woven into it. The abrupt turn also presages the levity of the final ensemble, which follows the parallel but far more protracted death of Don Giovanni. This event, a most necessary one for purging society of his seductive and destructive force, has to be celebrated at length. And so it is in both operas. Yet whereas an almost pagan hedonism overcomes the earlier work at this point, its successor remains relatively sober and ends with the moral, sung to a fugato.

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In the earlier opera more weight was given to Ottavio. After Giovanni and his servant leave the stage following the death of the Commendatore, Bertati brings on Anna and Ottavio. The corpse is removed, and Ottavio attempts to comfort Anna. She relates the midnight attack to him. Then she puts off Ottavio's marriage proposals on account of her grief and exits, leaving the stage to the tenor. His solo scene concludes with an old-fashioned metaphor aria about the lover's dashed hopes of entering port safely: "Vicin sperai l'istante d'entrar felice in porto." Neither the dubious taste with which Ottavio is made to verbalize his hopes regarding Anna nor the questionable propriety of parodying Metastasio so overtly ("Sperai vicino il lido," sings the hero in *Demofonte*) gainsays the dramatic effectiveness of the tenor's big scene. Gazzaniga responded with a spacious lyrical aria in two tempos, which was not old-fashioned in the least. Ottavio, because of this music, becomes a force, a personality to be reckoned with in the story. But his exit aria also stops the drama. Mozart and Da Ponte substituted the intensely moving duet in which Anna leads Ottavio into swearing revenge, an act that urges the drama forward. Once the moment for Ottavio's lyric outpouring was postponed, it proved no easy task to find another. The original solution was to defer his aria all the way to act 2, scene 10 ("Il mio tesoro"), but this is too late in the opera to give him much dramatic weight, and in any case, what he says is poorly motivated by the preceding action. For the Viennese revival of 1788, where the tenor was not up to singing "Il mio tesoro," Mozart substituted "Dalla sua pace," placing it in act 1, scene 14, where it is not any better motivated. Modern audiences usually hear both.

Ottavio and his peculiarities represent a legacy of the *dramma giocoso* in its specific sense. A decade earlier he would have been a soprano, not a tenor. By the 1780s tenors gradually began to replace sopranos as noble lovers even in the totally serious operas. In *Idomeneo*, for instance, the young prince Idamante was a castrato in the first production at Munich in 1781; for a performance at Vienna in 1786 Mozart adjusted and rewrote the part for tenor, also adding an elaborate concertante aria to strengthen the role and bring it up to parity with that of the heroine, Ilia, as we saw in Chapter 3. Despite these efforts, something of the recent and castrated past hangs over Idamante as a character type, one whose fate is beyond his control. It hangs as well over Don Ottavio. Not that he is effete; he is merely ineffectual. Having no decisive role in the outcome of the drama, he is made to exist solely at the whim of Anna ("on her peace depends my own"). The seria lover was in fact never much more than a peripheral figure in *dramma giocoso*, ever since Goldoni established the specific kind. He (or she) is there to display a voice type and kind of music associated with serious opera and so enhance the variety of the entertainment. The tenor's lyric aria fills this function admirably in both Gazzaniga and Mozart. Strange as it may seem, Giovanni, as well as Ottavio, was a tenor in Gazzaniga's score; there he sang a mellifluous love song that left its imprint on the terzetto in act 2 of Mozart's opera. By turning Giovanni into a baritone, Mozart was reverting to the traditional choice for a *mezzo carattere* male part, an inter-

mediate vocal type to match his intermediary social role—at home with both low born and high born (albeit a scourge to both in the case of Giovanni).

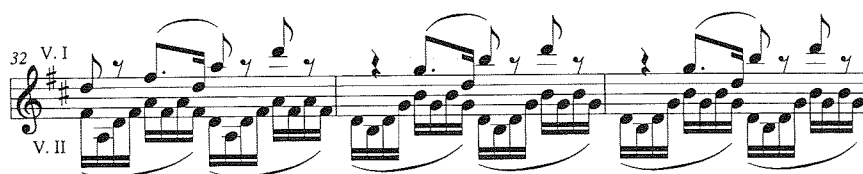
The preternatural brilliance of what Mozart wrought for Prague in 1787 can be observed nowhere better than in the great sextet of act 2, “Sola, sola in bujo loco.” Here it is a matter of throwing comic and serious into relief not in successive numbers, but within the same number. Elvira begins the piece in E-flat, singing rather simply of her hopes and fears, with well-founded misgivings about the man (the disguised Leporello, whom she takes for Giovanni) who has led her to this darkened courtyard. Leporello, on another part of the stage, is seeking the “damned door” through which to escape. The music slips several notches toward buffo style as he lapses into quick-note patter repeating “questa porta sciagurata,” at which point the audience usually titters. He finds the door just as the music finds its new destination: B-flat, the dominant. But the cadence is interrupted when an augmented sixth chord moves the tonality suddenly to D, the keynote of the entire opera, and always a matter of highest dramatic significance on its various returns throughout the work. Leporello is cut off from escaping. Trumpets and drums, the instruments of high estate, softly announce the arrival of Anna and Ottavio, who are dressed in mourning. By his music alone Mozart creates in an instant the whole world of these seria lovers. It moves in majestic, long-breathed phrases, over which Ottavio pours out the noblest of love songs, pleading with Anna to relent and give up her grieving. In accompanying him the first violins sound a bar-long rising figure in dotted rhythm against the incessant sixteenth-note motion of the seconds (Ex. 11.3). (Mozart had used a very similar orchestral texture a year earlier when rewriting the love duet in *Idomeneo*, at the point where Idamante enters.)<sup>8</sup>

Anna cuts off Ottavio’s beautifully delayed cadence. At the same time, she turns the music from D major to d minor (Ex. 11.4), a gesture that already tells us her answer is another refusal. She begins by singing a motif related to Ottavio’s melody, but related more closely still to the distraught line she sang when raging over the circumstances of her father’s death: “Fuggi, crudele, fuggi!” (Mozart uses the motif again when the three noble maskers approach the exterior of Giovanni’s palace in the finale of act 1.) Her melodic line is no less long-breathed than Ottavio’s and is supported by the same continuous orchestral texture. It grows more impassioned as she continues, the ornamental turns and wide leaps at “sola morte” becoming almost unbearably poignant. They are also very difficult to execute, requiring a perfect *sostenuto* in the high register and control between the registers. (Compare Ex. 11.1 above, where the same qualities of the seria style and even some of the same notes are in evidence.)

In the course of Anna’s lament the music moves from d minor down to the even darker realm of c minor. At the first “il mio pianto” Mozart resorts to a half-bar of Neapolitan sixth harmony as Anna works her way up to the melodic peak note, high A-flat. Her descent is partly chromatic, increasing the pathos, which reaches

8. See Ex. 3.7.

EXAMPLE II.3. *Don Giovanni*, No. 19



EXAMPLE II.4. *Don Giovanni*, No. 19

45 ANNA  
La - scia, la - scia al - la mia pe - na que - sto pic - co - lo ri -

49  
sto - ro, so - - - la mor - te, so - - - la

53  
mor - te, o mio te - so - ro il mio pian - to può fi -  
N6\_\_\_\_\_

57  
nir, il mio pian - - - to può fi - nir.  
N6\_\_\_\_\_

its most intense level with the entire bar of Neapolitan harmony before the cadence on "può finir." (To find another example in which d minor is replaced by c minor, we have only to look at the despairing Electra's first aria in *Idomeneo*.)

Both the descending chromatic line and the Neapolitan harmony have wide import in *Don Giovanni*. The first is associated repeatedly with Giovanni and the death that he first inflicts, later suffers. When the orchestra picks up the chromatic descent after Anna's cadence and starts repeating it over and over, like an obsession, poor, deluded Donna Elvira asks, "Where is my husband?" It is as if Don Giovanni were present—which he is in spirit if not in body, as the cause of everyone's woes. Even after he is dispatched to Hell at the end, his ghost still hovers above the chromatic descents in the voices before they drop out on the last pages of the score, leaving one last chromatic descent to be played softly by the orchestra alone (see Ex. 9.3). The powerful progression from Neapolitan sixth to tonic elaborates the tonal climax of the opening duet for Anna and Ottavio, and one is tempted to hear it as the crux of her personal tragedy. From the duet it was taken over as the climax of the slow minor section of the overture. Related to this is the music for the uncanny return of the Commendatore as the Stone Guest. Here, as always, Mozart marshaled his most potent resources, deploying them to the utmost dramatic advantage.