

A BETTER ORDER FOR "FIGARO"?

It is tantalizing for Mozartians that we should have so little direct information about the genesis and evolution of Mozart's three famous collaborations with Da Ponte compared to the bountiful evidence surrounding *Idomeneo* or *Die Entführung*. For example, although much scholarly discussion has revolved around the way Da Ponte and Mozart compressed two of Beaumarchais's acts into their third act of *Le nozze di Figaro*, there is still no incontrovertible evidence to support – or to refute – the ingenious Moberly/Raeburn thesis of 1965.¹ These two argued that the Countess's aria "Dove sono" (No. 20) was repositioned after the Sextet (No. 19) only at the last minute, principally to allow Francesco Bussani, who played both Bartolo and Antonio in the original production in 1786, to change costumes between scenes 8 and 9. Alan Tyson showed in 1981 that there is no evidence in the autograph score to support this hypothesis;² but that in turn begs the question as to whether the autograph score was ever used by Mozart as a performing score.

Behind these two sequences – the traditional printed order and the Moberly/Raeburn proposal – there stands, conceivably, a third, original order. It is significant that Da Ponte developed the Countess's recitative and aria and her previous conversation with Susanna from a small scene at the end of Act II of Beaumarchais's play; in other words, originally it may have preceded Susanna's encounter with the Count. Quite possibly, Mozart in his earliest stages of planning set "Dove sono" in C major to open the act to be followed by the A minor opening of the Susanna/Count duet, thereby balancing the A minor Fandango and C major chorus which bring the act to its close. The remaining numbers then follow a key scheme which is exactly the reverse of the opera's opening five numbers: A, D, F, B flat, G in Act III corresponding to the G, B flat, F, D, A of Act I. Clearly the Countess's scene in its present form can no longer be repositioned to open Act III, but if this was its original place it perhaps explains the uncertainty about its placing later in the act.

Faute de mieux and in the interests of greater dramatic coherence we have opted in this recording for the Moberly/Raeburn order on the following grounds:

- (1) By introducing the Countess earlier in the act, her natural anxiety to hear the outcome of Susanna's interview with the Count is more plausible. Her "exit" aria is juxtaposed with that of the Count, but his "exit" is nullified when the aria is set cheek by jowl with the Sextet – and precedes the comic complexities of the rest of the act.
- (2) It makes the Countess's personal "journey" clearer: midway through "Dove sono" she resolves to take on the challenge of saving her marriage. The next time we see her her mood has changed: now she is able to be lighthearted, plotting with Susanna the rendezvous in the garden.
- (3) It allows Susanna plausible time after "Dove sono" to get the money from the Countess (to save Figaro from marrying Marcellina) before entering with it in the Sextet. (In the traditional order, quite apart from the puzzle of where Susanna gets the money from, it is most peculiar that she says she is off to tell the Countess of Figaro's parentage but then waits until scene 10 to do so.)
- (4) It allows the Count to preside over Figaro's trial, whereas in the traditional order this takes place offstage, apparently, and in great haste, between Figaro's exit in scene 3 and scene 5.
- (5) It allows a credible lapse of time to occur between the scene where Barbarina tells Cherubino she is going to dress him up as a girl (scene 7) and the moment when Antonio warns the Count that he has spotted Cherubino's clothes in his cottage (scene 9).

Adopting this sequence for Act III is fairly common practice nowadays, but what of Act IV? So far there has been surprisingly little scholarly investigation of this more problematic act, although it is clear from the autograph score that Mozart had second thoughts over its order and contents, and in particular over the placing of the arias for Figaro (No. 27) and Susanna (No. 28). In the libretto, Figaro's scene "Tutto è disposto" (scene 8) is placed directly after Basilio's aria (No. 26) and is in turn followed by a short recitative (scene 9) and Susanna's scene "Giunse alfin il momento" (scene 10). Then comes a further short recitative (scene 11), including a strophe of Cherubino's Canzonetta leading to the Finale. Mozart's key scheme is as follows:

G	Marcellina's aria (No. 25) [not performed here]	E flat	Susanna's Rondo "Non tardar, amato bene" later replaced by "Deh vieni" in F (No. 28)
B flat	Basilio's aria (No. 26) [not performed here]	B flat	Cherubino's Canzonetta strophe
E flat	Figaro's aria (No. 27)	D	Finale (No. 29)

The only unusual feature of this scheme is the original juxtaposition of two arias in E flat but this does not affect the order in which they appear. Mozart appears to have been sticking to this scheme when he wrote the linking recitatives: after the scene between Basilio and Bartolo (which he numbers scene 6, as there was no Cavatina for Barbarina at that stage) he writes: *dopo l'aria di Basilio viene scena 7^{ma} ch'è un Recitativo istromentato con aria di Figaro* ("after Basilio's aria comes scene 7, which is an accompanied recitative [followed by] Figaro's aria"). Similarly, at the end of the recitative between Susanna and the Countess (numbered scene 9 in the autograph) he writes: *Segue Recit: istromentato con Rondò di Susanna* ("There follows an accompanied recitative with Susanna's Rondo"), referring to the original E flat aria which survives in sketch form. However, by the time he came to compose "Deh vieni" – which, judging from the surviving sketches must have been towards the end – Mozart had changed his mind: on the last leaf of the aria he wrote: *Manca il Recitativo istromentato di Figaro avanti l'aria No. 30* ("Figaro's accompanied recitative before the aria No. 30 is lacking"). If this is taken as a reminder to himself that he had yet to compose something, but not for that particular place in the opera, then it would be unique: all the other notes of this kind, as with those already cited, refer to arranging the separate component parts into a coherent sequence. Undoubtedly this indication at the end of Susanna's new aria was written after the contrary indication (cited above) in Basilio's scene; and, sure enough, when all the separate elements of the opera were paginated (by Mozart?) and bound, Figaro's aria was placed after that of Susanna. Can we really believe this was a mistake by Mozart? It makes no sense whatsoever to infer, as Alan Tyson does, that this might reflect an earlier ordering of the act.¹ So why is it always performed before "Deh vieni"? Significantly, neither the "Recitativo istromentato" in question nor the recitative including Cherubino's Canzonetta found their way into the autograph score in Mozart's hand ("Tutto è disposto" was written in by a copyist). Furthermore, the opening of the final recitative ("Perfida, e in quella forma"), which is totally absent in the autograph score, seems a very untypical and inadequate response by Figaro to what he has just heard Susanna sing. Perhaps Mozart fully intended at this late stage to write a different accompanied recitative to replace "Tutto è disposto" with words more appropriate to the aria's new position. If so, with the libretto already printed, did he have trouble in persuading Da Ponte to make a significant last-minute alteration? At all events it seems to be the libretto that has led scholars to ignore hitherto the evidence of the autograph score with respect to the order of these arias.

Alas, it is impossible with the surviving material to reconstruct Mozart's "ideal" Act IV. Clearly the opening words of Figaro's recitative "Tutto è disposto" only make sense when placed before "Deh vieni", yet the dramatic gain in placing Figaro's aria "Aprite un po' quegli occhi" as a sequel and violent reaction to Susanna's ravishing nocturne "Deh vieni" – which he supposes to be evidence of her infidelity – is too great to lose.

The solution we adopted for this recording, proposed by Nicholas McNair, one of the two répétiteurs working on the production, was to divide "Tutto è disposto" at its halfway point. The first half, in which Figaro ponders the events of the day, ends with an F major chord, and his reproachful "Oh Susanna, Susanna" becomes a cry of surprise as he hears her laughter and runs to hide. Susanna now enters with the Countess (dressed as Susanna) and Marcellina, and sings the following recitative, "Signora, ella mi disse", and then her aria "Deh vieni". The end of Susanna's aria and Figaro's wounded reaction to it, "Oh Susanna, Susanna, quanta pena mi costi!" (in other words the second half of "Tutto è disposto"), dovetails perfectly and leads to his explosive aria "Aprite un po' quegli occhi". Once recovered from the initial shock, those familiar with the traditional order will perhaps feel inclined to recognize the heightened pathos and dramatic verisimilitude of this sequence – not Mozart's own, but one that may well be closer to his initial concept than the standard version normally performed.

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¹ Robert Moberly and Christopher Raeburn, "Mozart's Figaro: the Plan of Act III", *Music & Letters* 66 (1965), 134–36

² "Le nozze di Figaro: Lessons from the Autograph Score", *The Musical Times* 122 (1981), 456–61

³ *Ibid.*