

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart

Essays on his Life and his Music



Edited by
STANLEY SADIE

CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD

1996

Mozart, Da Ponte and the Ensemble: Methods in Progress?

TIM CARTER



TRADITIONAL approaches to issues of tonality and structure in the three Mozart–Da Ponte operas have come under criticism in recent years. The long-range tonal planning and tonal resolutions conventionally extolled in commentaries on these works have been shown by James Webster often to be little more than none-too-analytical wishful thinking. And judging by recent remarks from Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, even Mozart's much vaunted use of the structures and dynamics of sonata form in his ensembles is coming under threat.¹ The Act 2 finale of *Le nozze di Figaro*, once, nay still, thought an epitome of the *opera buffa* finale, is proving particularly vulnerable to this post-modernist dismembering of conventional views of Mozart. There, as is well known, Mozart writes an eight-section finale designed on a clearly conceived, or so we think, tonal scheme, starting in E♭ major and moving to B♭, then jumping to G and returning to E♭ via a descending circle of fifths. It has been relatively easy to dismantle earlier attempts to construct large-scale sonata-form, even symphonic, patterns between the various sections of this finale.² But the apparent claim that the long-range tonal processes involved here, and their ultimate 'resolution', have little relevance to our perception, such as it is, of the musical and dramatic structure cuts closer to the bone. Similarly, the straightforward observation, too long coming, that the apparent tonal resolution and closure of the finale scarcely squares with a drama that is essentially open-ended—all ends in doubt and confusion for Figaro, Susanna and the Countess—strikes at the heart of cherished beliefs about Mozart and the supposed fusion of music and drama in his operas. The argument is sealed by the fact that the Act 2 finale of *Figaro* is fundamentally atypical of Mozart's other finales, and indeed, as John

¹ The key articles are C. Abbate and R. Parker, 'Dismembering Mozart', and J. Webster, 'Mozart's Operas and the Myth of Musical Unity', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, ii (1990), 187–95 and 197–218. Both owe a debt to J. Webster, 'To Understand Verdi and Wagner We Must Understand Mozart', *19th Century Music*, xi (1987–8), 175–93.

² See the summary of such accounts in Webster, 'Mozart's Operas and the Myth of Musical Unity', 205–6.

Platoff has shown, of late eighteenth-century *opera buffa* finales in general:³ it can scarcely be a paradigm of all that is good about Mozart's finale-technique, despite all attempts (from Lorenzo da Ponte's own *Memoirs*, I suspect, to the most recent literature) to grant it such status.⁴ Moreover, given that it is, at least in part, the supposed symphonic quality of the Act 2 finale that has granted it so privileged a position in the literature, this leads to a broader observation about conventional approaches to Mozart: they too often reflect an analytical, or sometimes not so analytical, orientation predicated upon models derived from instrumental music. But opera is opera, not symphony or concerto, and must be judged on its own terms, using new methods of analysis the precise formulation of which is one of the key tasks of modern-day opera studies.

Of course, we do not need modern commentators to tell us that: I would argue that Mozart himself learns and presents much the same lesson in his compositional voyage from *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786) through *Don Giovanni* (1787) to *Così fan tutte* (1790). Less than four years separates the first performances of these three works, yet as always with Mozart, a mere four years marked an astonishing growth in self-awareness and compositional control. Da Ponte, too, clearly changed his notion of how operas work, whether as a result of his own development as a librettist or in response to clear directions from the composers with whom he worked. We are indeed dealing here with the progress of poetic and musical methods. As I shall attempt to show, we are also dealing with changing perceptions of how to handle musical progress through one or more dramatic actions.

The issue can conveniently be explored through Mozart's use of sonata forms in through-composed ensembles:⁵ I leave aside the question of sonata forms in arias, and sometimes duets, that (usually) involve text repetition—the issues here are somewhat different, and the forms themselves often hark back to older da capo and binary-form archetypes.⁶ What concerns me here, then, is when Mozart decides, or not as the case may be, to graft sonata-form structures and articulations upon texts that *per se* neither require nor necessarily prompt the application of the formal and expressive strategies normally associated with these forms.

The need for an adequate typology of Mozart's ensemble sonata (and other) forms has

³ J. Platoff, 'Tonal Organization in "Buffo" Finales and the Act II Finale of "Le nozze di Figaro"', *Music & Letters*, lxxii (1991), 387–403; idem, 'Musical and Dramatic Structure in the Opera Buffa Finale', *Journal of Musicology*, vii (1989), 191–230.

⁴ Da Ponte's well-known statement about the problems of designing a finale is found most easily in E. J. Dent, *Mozart's Operas: a Critical Study* (London, 1947), 104–5; for an earlier version, see D. Heartz, 'Constructing *Le nozze di Figaro*', *JRMA*, cxii (1987), 77–98, at p. 77. These remarks clearly seem to evoke the Act 2 finale of *Figaro*.

⁵ For present purposes, I see no point in indulging in the customary equivocation over terminology (sonata form(s), sonata principle, sonata style . . .?). However, my use of the term 'sonata form' is made bearing in mind all the usual, and well-founded, caveats concerning structural processes and stylistic paradigms in lieu of formal moulds.

⁶ See J. Platoff, 'The Buffa Aria in Mozart's Vienna', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, ii (1990), 99–120; M. Hunter, *Haydn's Aria Forms: a Study of the Arias in the Italian Operas Written at Esterháza, 1766–1783* (diss., Cornell U., 1982); eadem, 'Haydn's Sonata-Form Arias', *Current Musicology*, nos. 37–8 (1984), 19–32.

not yet been met by the literature. But criteria for the identification of sonata forms can, with good authority, be established upon the notion of tonal dissonance and resolution, supported (and this is essential) by appropriate articulations and gestures. A stable prolongation of the tonic is followed by a prolongation of a dominant (or some other key) stabilized through tonicization (e.g. via V of V), followed by a return to the tonic that is somehow articulated as a significant structural point (e.g. by means of a dominant-pedal retransition), and a succeeding tonic prolongation with recapitulatory tendencies resolving the preceding tonal dissonance. To adopt Schenkerian terminology, the whole movement must also unfold an interrupted background structure: thus the recapitulation, whether or not it involves thematic recapitulation, should re-establish the head-tone of the fundamental line. Three things are apparently optional within Mozart's operatic (and some other) sonata forms, dependent in part on the content and disposition of the text: a transition or bridge passage between the tonic and dominant areas of the exposition, a development section, and a thorough thematic recapitulation—none is crucial to the form. But the movement should employ the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic gestures conventionally signifying the separate constituent parts of a sonata form within the Classical style.⁷ Not surprisingly, a good number of movements within the Mozart–Da Ponte operas fulfil enough of these criteria to warrant their analysis in terms of one or other of the sonata forms available to Mozart. More interestingly, as we shall see, some other movements often identified as being in a sonata form by modern commentators signally fail to meet these conditions and thus must embrace some other kinds of formal structure.

Sonata forms were by no means exclusive to instrumental music,⁸ and Mozart had already used them in operatic arias and ensembles before *Le nozze di Figaro*. But failing evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that the intense exploration of sonata forms (and indeed of a number of other tonal, structural and textural paradigms) in *Figaro* at least partly reflects the richness of Mozart's recent instrumental experience: as Webster has reportedly pointed out, *Figaro* certainly seems 'more instrumentally conceived'.⁹ The composer's perception of the value of sonata forms in such a context—other than as an interpretatively neutral mode of construction—presumably involved precisely the issues identified in the literature today: the ability of the exposition's tonal dissonance to establish some kind of dramatic dissonance to be resolved (or not as the case may be) later in the movement. The clearest example in *Figaro* is the Act 2 trio 'Susanna, or via sortite' (no. 13), a straightforward sonata without development with, to boot, a clear thematic recapitulation (dominant material in the exposition is transposed to the tonic in the recapitulation).

⁷ For gestural signification, see the preliminary but important remarks in V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: a Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton, 1991), which also has relevant things to say about (post-)Schenkerian approaches to the repertory.

⁸ For the likely operatic origins (at least in part) of sonata form, see C. Rosen, *Sonata Forms* (New York, 1980), 27–68. Rosen is the scholar who has most consistently, and brilliantly, argued for the place of the sonata style in Mozart's comic operas; see his *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (London, 1971), 288–325.

⁹ Platoff, 'Tonal Organization', 402 n 23.

The textual prompt for the return to the tonic at the recapitulation is the Count's second command to Susanna, 'Dunque parlate almeno'; the exposition therefore concerns the Count's order that Susanna should come out of the dressing-room, then the Countess's veto, and the recapitulation, Susanna being ordered at least to speak, again vetoed by the Countess.

In fact, such literal thematic recapitulation is uncommon in Mozart's operatic sonata forms:¹⁰ witness perhaps the most interesting example in *Figaro*, the Act 3 'recognition' sextet, 'Riconosci in questo amplesso' (no. 18). This sextet, reportedly Mozart's favourite piece in *Figaro*,¹¹ is often cited as paradigmatic in accounts of the opera. However, few commentators have noted that Da Ponte's text falls into three clear sections by virtue of the two chief structural features under his control, line-length (and therefore poetic metre) and the periodically recurring masculine rhyme. These sections mirror the three stages of the dramatic action: Marcellina and Bartolo's reconciliation with Figaro (plus the Count and Don Curzio's initial amazement and annoyance) in eight-syllable lines with '-ir' endings; Susanna's entrance with the dowry and her drastic misreading of the situation in eight-syllable lines with '-à' endings; and Marcellina's explanation of the situation to Susanna and her subsequent reunion with Figaro and his newfound parents—with the Count and Don Curzio left grumbling on the sidelines—in six-syllable lines with '-à' endings.¹² Mozart again constructs a sonata without development to match the dramatic dissonance introduced by Susanna's entrance (which heralds the dominant area of the exposition) and its subsequent resolution when all is explained. However, the change of line-length from eight- to six-syllable lines means that material designed for the eight-syllable lines of the exposition is unsuitable for the six-syllable lines of the recapitulation. Mozart therefore recasts Marcellina's opening statement ('Riconosci in questo amplesso') at the beginning of the closing section ('Lo sdegno calmate, / mia cara figliuola'), placing her first theme in the orchestra: not only do the words 'no longer fit' (to quote Rosen)¹³—nor does their metre.

Whether for this or for other reasons, the rest of the recapitulation, while satisfying the conditions for a recapitulation established earlier, contains little direct thematic repetition from the exposition: such repetition appears only (but significantly) at the level of the motif on the one hand and in terms of deeper middleground strategies on the other. This raises rather tickly questions about what makes a recapitulation a recapitulation, but, as I have already suggested, it does not necessarily affect the status of the sextet as some kind of sonata-form movement. However, the use of a sonata form here is all the more striking given the structural implications of Da Ponte's text. A shift in line-length is at least an invitation to the composer to shift into a new musical section contrasted in tempo, metre and phrase structure (it is these textual cues, in part, that prompt the sectional finales so typi-

¹⁰ But see the discussion of the Act 1 trio 'Cosa sento! tosto andate' (no. 7) in T. Carter, *W. A. Mozart: 'Le nozze di Figaro'* (Cambridge, 1987), 88–104.

¹¹ According to Michael Kelly's *Reminiscences*, ed. R. Fiske (London, 1975), 131–2. For the Act 3 sextet and sonata form, see Rosen, *The Classical Style*, 290–5.

¹² The point was first discussed in Carter, *W. A. Mozart: 'Le nozze di Figaro'*, 84.

¹³ *The Classical Style*, 294.

cal of *opera buffa*).¹⁴ That Mozart resists the invitation suggests a significant allegiance to the structural and dramatic merits of sonata forms.

Perhaps the chief problem of using such forms for the opera composer is precisely the recapitulation: even granting freedom in terms of the extent of thematic recapitulation required—this freedom is often crucial given the new text and new dramatic situations—the requirement of tonal resolution creates potential problems when a movement is not dramatically closed, with tensions left unresolved (this is akin to the problem of the end of the Act 2 finale). Typically, the most straightforward example of a sonata-form ensemble in *Figaro*, the Act 2 trio, is perhaps the most problematic in this light: at the end of the trio, Susanna remains ostensibly shut in the dressing-room, and the Count and Countess are still at loggerheads—nothing has been resolved. One might argue here, and in the Act 2 finale, that Mozart compensates by maintaining other kinds of instability (rhythmic, textural, dynamic) through to the end of the movement: more subtly, it is also possible that the unusually literal thematic recapitulation in the trio paradoxically undermines our assumption of resolution by emphasizing the deadlock on stage. But whether all this is enough to weaken the apparent tonal and structural closure remains matter for debate.

This may simply be an unavoidable problem with any free-standing movement—and not just one in a sonata form—within a larger-scale structure: the movement cannot but end in the key it began. Moreover, there is no doubt that there are situations where dramatic closure or resolution, if only temporary in scope, can indeed be married with demands that are more intrinsically musical. In such cases, Mozart can happily continue to explore sonata forms in an operatic context. One such example is the Act 1 quartet from *Don Giovanni*, 'Non ti fidar, o misera' (no. 9).¹⁵ The dramatic issue here is whether Donna Anna and Don Ottavio are to believe Donna Elvira's dire warnings about Don Giovanni: at first they are inclined to side with Giovanni's claim that Elvira is mad—they have no reason to mistrust him—but her persuasion leads them to reconsider their position ('Incomincio a dubitar', 'I begin to have doubts', they say) and ultimately to convert to her cause. Da Ponte's text again uses changes of line-length to prompt a sectional ensemble, in this case in three clearly distinguished parts moving from seven-syllable through ten-syllable to eight-syllable lines (changes in masculine rhyme from '-or' through '-ar' to '-à' produce a subsidiary articulation).¹⁶ Once more, however, Mozart opts for a single-movement structure: a long tonic period with statements by all the characters (Anna and Ottavio sing together), a transition (clearly articulated as such) beginning at Elvira's 'Ah non credete al perfido', a long dominant prolongation focussing predominantly on V of V (Anna and Ottavio's 'Certo moto d'ignoto tormento'), a middle section with two-line

¹⁴ See the discussion of general principles in Carter, *W. A. Mozart: 'Le nozze di Figaro'*, 75–87.

¹⁵ Julian Rushton discusses the quartet in terms of sonata form in his *W. A. Mozart: 'Don Giovanni'* (Cambridge, 1981), 92–9; Webster would seem inclined not to analyse it thus, judging by his comments in 'Mozart's Operas and the Myth of Musical Unity', 200–1.

¹⁶ The text begins with alternating seven-syllable *versi sdruccioli* and *versi tronchi* (with the accent on the antepenultimate and last syllable respectively and thus with eight/six actual syllables per line) for Elvira and Anna/Ottavio. Perhaps significantly, Giovanni enters with straightforward *versi piani*.

statements from each character (beginning at Ottavio's 'Io di qua non vado via') and some shorter exchanges, modulating and leading to dominant preparation for the clearly articulated recapitulation (at Elvira's 'Non sperarlo, o scellerato'), which is a stable tonic prolongation and also repeats material from the exposition (the cadential tag closing each of the opening statements)—again there are further significant motivic and middleground parallelisms. The recapitulation is also a clear moment of dramatic and musical resolution. The quartet meets all the conditions established above for the identification of a sonata form, and in a strikingly thorough way, the absence of a clear-cut thematic 'second subject' and the inclusion of a rather leisurely development section notwithstanding. Indeed, Mozart significantly plays the quartet off against the form: notice how the first statement of Giovanni's final quatrain 'Zitto, zitto, che la gente / si raduna a noi d'intorno') is placed not at the beginning of the stable recapitulation, as the structure (but not the content) of the text would suggest, but instead in the unstable retransition immediately before it.

This quartet is perhaps the finest example in *Don Giovanni*, maybe in all three operas, of a carefully handled sonata form working in tandem with the dramatic situation. But there are other, seemingly less felicitous cases. For example, one might view the Act 2 trio for Elvira, Giovanni and Leporello, 'Ah taci, ingiusto core' (no. 16), as a rather shallow example, for all Joseph Kerman's fervent advocacy.¹⁷ The rather too literal adherence to a sonata-form model, with Giovanni's C major serenade as a middle episode, flies in the face of significant dramatic dissonance and resolution, and indeed potentially debases the currency of the form both through what is surely a palpable retreat behind convention and through the essentially duplicitous stage action (with Elvira seduced by Leporello in disguise). It is striking that the very next ensemble, the Act 2 sextet, 'Sola, sola in bujo loco' (no. 20), adopts somewhat different principles. This sextet stands in a similar position to the Act 3 sextet of *Figaro*, but whereas there Mozart had produced a tautly conceived sonata-form movement, here he writes a more sectional structure. For once, too, the partitions implied by Da Ponte's verse (shifting from eight- to five-syllable lines and back) are at least partly heeded (but Mozart introduces a subsidiary section at the entrance of Ottavio and Anna). The model here is that of the finale,¹⁸ and moreover one with sections that can be tonally open rather than closed (the latter is typical of *Figaro*).¹⁹ The result is a more progressive structure that can respond more quickly and flexibly to the shifts in the action. Also, although there is tonal closure in the final Molto allegro, with gestures reminiscent

¹⁷ *Opera as Drama* (New York, 1956), 80–4. This trio occupies a similar position to 'Ah, chi mi dice mai' (no. 3) in Act 1; there, however, Mozart constructs a trio off his own bat, including Giovanni and Leporello's recitative verse in Elvira's aria. (The other obvious example of Mozart constructing an ensemble from recitative verse is the quintet 'Di scrivermi ogni giorno', no. 9, from Act 1 of *Così fan tutte*.) In 'Ah taci, ingiusto core', the text is in seven-syllable lines throughout.

¹⁸ As Rosen points out in *The Classical Style*, 296–302.

¹⁹ In *Figaro*, the individual sections of the finales tend to be tonally 'closed'. However, the Act 1 finale of *Don Giovanni* contains sections that begin and end in different keys in response to the drama; this becomes something of a norm in *Così*. For the general issues, see Platoff, 'Tonal Organization' and 'Musical and Dramatic Structure'.

of the closing sections of the Act 2 finale of *Figaro*, it is scarcely presented as a serious resolution.

The transfer of finale-type techniques to mid-act movements raises questions of dramatic pacing and, more intriguingly, of generic propriety;²⁰ but it also suggests Mozart's eagerness to explore realistic alternatives to sonata-form organization. Indeed, his new-found commitment to looser, more progressive structures is strikingly illustrated in the Act 1 sextet of *Così fan tutte* ('Alla bella Despinetta', no. 13), which again is in clearly defined sections (this time, three) contrasted by tempo and/or metre. But Mozart's strategy here is all the more striking given that Da Ponte's text is, for once, not sectionally structured: it is consistently in the regularly rhymed eight-syllable lines that dominate the concerted numbers in *Così* (and, moreover, with a single masculine '-or' rhyme).²¹ Precisely where Da Ponte provides a text prompting a single-section movement (in fact, just what the composer needed for the Act 3 sextet of *Figaro*) and where Mozart could—and, had this been *Figaro*, surely would—have exploited some kind of sonata form, the composer instead adopts a multi-sectional format. If Da Ponte ever became vexed at the seeming unpredictability of Mozart's handling of his carefully structured texts, it would have been with some justification.

Where does this leave sonata forms? The obvious answer is that they become just one of several structural possibilities for mid-act ensembles. But one can perhaps go further and argue that, in *Così*, their presence signifies not seriousness and dramatic weight, as had been the case in *Figaro* and at least Act 1 of *Don Giovanni*, but instead some manner of conventionality and/or overstatement, if not duplicity. The sequence of numbers opening *Così* is revealing in this context. The first three trios, each striking in its brevity, demonstrate a notable reluctance to embrace sonata-form models. Indeed, they are each reluctant even just to modulate to the dominant: the remarkable absence of tonicized dominants here is in part a matter of pacing as the action continues swiftly from one movement to the next. The pace then slows with the duet 'Ah guarda, sorella' for Fiordiligi and Dorabella, which displays some outward features of sonata-form organization but more in line with aria-based models (and the 'recapitulation' is made up of a faster Allegro). However, formal compression returns with Don Alfonso's 'Vorrei dir, e cor non ho' (no. 5), an aria (although it scarcely merits the name) the brevity of which is typical for this character (perhaps because of the limited vocal abilities of the first Don Alfonso, Francesco Bussani). Only with no. 6, the quintet 'Sento, o dio, che questo piede', do we reach a movement that can reasonably be said to articulate one of Mozart's ensemble sonata forms in a characteristic

²⁰ See Dent, *Mozart's Operas*, 138, for the notion that 'Sola, sola in bujo loco' might indeed have been a finale within a three- or four-act (rather than two-act) *Don Giovanni*; and K. Küster, *Mozart: eine musikalische Biographie* (Stuttgart, 1990), 304–5, for its status as a 'mock finale'.

²¹ The relative metrical simplicity of Da Ponte's libretto for *Così* may only partly reflect his changing notions of what Mozart required from a libretto: instead, Da Ponte seems deliberately to be evoking strong resonances of Metastasio (witness the predominant eight-syllable lines and, in general, the strikingly regular rhyme schemes) and other classical literary traditions. This, plus the strong pastoral overtones, makes *Così* Da Ponte's most profoundly Arcadian libretto, the full ramifications of which may not have been perceived by a composer raised in a very different cultural climate.

way. The text is again consistently in eight-syllable lines (with a single masculine '-ar' rhyme). In the tonic area, Guglielmo and Ferrando announce their impending departure; in the dominant area, Fiordiligi and Dorabella ask that death release them from their distress; and, following a typical retransition, the recapitulation focusses on the moral, 'So destiny defrauds the hopes of mortals' ('Il destin così defrauda / le speranze de mortali'). One might choose to interpret this quintet as a highly serious moment, perhaps the first such moment, despite the evident duplicity (at least on the part of the men) in the action. But in the context of the preceding absence of weighty dominant articulation, the strong move to the dominant here, and its tonicization through V of V and even the flat submediant and dominant minor, smacks of overstatement, to say the least.²² So, too, does the unusual repeat of the retransition and recapitulation.

Of course, it is dangerous to argue the interpretative significance of sonata-form structures in an opera that thrives on ambiguities of meanings and structural duplicity.²³ But my reading of the Act 1 quintet finds at least potential confirmation in two parallel episodes in Act 2, Guglielmo's seduction of Dorabella and Ferrando's of Fiordiligi. Guglielmo and Dorabella's duet 'Il core vi dono' (no. 23) is clearly in a sonata form (it also has an unusual repeat within the final section similar to the Act 1 quintet), whereas Ferrando and Fiordiligi's 'Fra gli amplessi in pochi istanti' (no. 29) displays Mozart's alternative of sectional organization. But by common critical consent, Guglielmo's seduction of Dorabella is of less dramatic and emotional weight, both for the characters and for the audience, than the new relationship forged between Fiordiligi and Ferrando.

'Fra gli amplessi' is one in a series of A major seduction duets: witness 'Crudel, perchè finora' (no. 16) for the Count and Susanna in Act 3 of *Figaro* and 'Là ci darem la mano' (no. 7) for Giovanni and Zerlina in Act 1 of *Don Giovanni*. It has some structural parallels with them, but its dramatic significance is surely more profound, so much so that Ferrando (unlike Guglielmo) has not the heart to throw his duet back in Fiordiligi's face in the Act 2 finale. Her opening statement in A major leads to what seems to be the start of a transition passage (or so its gestures suggest), but this is interrupted by Ferrando's entrance in E minor and then a crucial shift to C major lasting some 33 bars prior to a passage acting as dominant preparation for A (the similarities and differences with Susanna's introduction of C major in 'Crudel, perchè finora' are striking). Ferrando then plights his troth in a new section, an A major Larghetto, and the two characters unite in a final Andante. Again, the sectional partitioning overrides Da Ponte's verse (in eight-syllable lines throughout).

This fluid format offers a striking comparison with what might, in different circumstances, have provided a model for this duet, 'Ah taci, ingiusto core', with, for example, an

²² We may have already been given cause to doubt the seriousness of similar inflections: compare the middle section of Fiordiligi and Dorabella's preceding duet, 'Ah guarda, sorella', bars 56–65.

²³ The point is nicely illustrated by the conflicting messages read into the key of 'Sento, o dio, che questo piede', E♭ major. Andrew Steptoe (*The Mozart–Da Ponte Operas: the Cultural and Musical Background to 'Le nozze di Figaro', 'Don Giovanni', and 'Così fan tutte'*, Oxford, 1988, pp. 230–42) argues that in *Così* flat keys signify falsehood, insincerity and shallowness. At the same time, in the affective range of eighteenth-century keys, E♭ often indicates 'deeply felt utterances' (Webster, 'Mozart's Operas and the Myth of Musical Unity', p. 210), as several examples in *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* reveal.

opening statement for Fiordiligi in the tonic, Ferrando introducing the dominant, a middle episode for his appeal to her ('Volgi a me pietoso il ciglio'), and their final union as a recapitulation. 'Ah taci, ingiusto core' is all too obviously in a sonata form. But any attempt to analyse 'Fra gli amplessi' in such terms seems dangerously unfounded: in particular, to regard the C major section as some kind of 'substitute dominant', to quote Rosen,²⁴ is analytically implausible—again to use Schenkerian terminology, the C prolongation is a straightforward third-divider producing a middleground structure based on mixture. Such an interpretation also fundamentally misses the point: it is precisely the duet's emphatic resistance to any engagement with sonata form that produces its effect. Indeed, so progressive is Mozart's compositional strategy here that one wonders whether he knows precisely where he is heading as the composition unfolds: the retention of a three-sharp key signature for no less than 16 bars of the C major section is perhaps one of the most revealing of the several 'wrong' signatures in *Così*.²⁵ The free-flowing harmonic scheme, and the flexible formal structures, demonstrate a very different, and arguably more inherently operatic, solution to the problem of articulating drama through music.

If *Figaro* is an eminently 'instrumental' opera, *Così* is eminently 'operatic'. Many commentators have noted that, compared with *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, the subject matter and its handling in *Così* mark a return to *opera buffa* stereotypes: it is the most generically typical of Mozart's three collaborations with Da Ponte. Similarly, and for whatever reason, Da Ponte develops more straightforward, and less strongly interpreted, poetic structures in his libretto. In turn, Mozart's use of looser, more flexible structures may also reflect this reversion to genre. But it marks a significant step forward for the composer as he clearly develops his grasp of how operatic music works, and how it works differently from instrumental music. However, this poses distinct problems for modern analysts. The greater coverage allocated to *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* in the literature is not just because of their more sympathetic subjects: it also reflects the amenability of most of their musical structures (whether appropriately or not) to models developed for the repertory that has proved central to modern analytical endeavour, instrumental music of the Classical period. *Così* is without doubt less amenable to such models and has suffered accordingly. But if we change our approach to analysing opera to meet the profound challenges of *Così*, we may well find that it is one of the most liberating, and perhaps most significant, operas of the late eighteenth century.

²⁴ *The Classical Style*, 316; and see Steptoe, *The Mozart–Da Ponte Operas*, 237–42.

²⁵ For one example, see H. Keller, 'Mozart's Wrong Key Signature', *Tempo*, no. 98 (1972), 21–7 (discussing Act 1 scene xv, the second section of the Act 1 finale). There are a number of other intriguing examples in the Act 2 finale, in part because of the 'open' tonal schemes discussed in n. 19.