15 | Buffo roles in Mozart's Vienna: tessitura and tonality as signs of characterization

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From an early stage in his operatic career Mozart was concerned to fit arias to his singers as a tailor fits a suit: "Wolfgang refuses to do the work twice over and prefers to wait for [the primo uomo's] arrival so as to fit the costume to his figure."[1] No doubt he also wanted his ensemble writing to fit the singers; and no doubt Salieri, Paisiello, and Cimarosa felt the same. Over the course of a work composed for virtuosi, if not in its every section, an eighteenth-century composer would normally aim to display the performer's strengths to the full. But composers also welcomed their operas being transferred to other theatres, as when Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni* were performed in Vienna. For this to work, the music must be aimed at *voice types*, which, in the new production, could be appropriately matched to the music already written. It appears, therefore, that voice types, if not individual singers, and the way in which they are exploited, are a significant variable which should affect opera analysis and particularly the analysis of character.

The singers known to Mozart whose music uses the bass clef are variously described in modern reference books as bass, baritone, or bass-baritone.[2] A contemporary might prefer to distinguish singers as buffo and serio – Mozart referred to Francesco Benucci not as the bass but as "the buffo."[3] Distinctions could be blurred: among

1 Leopold Mozart, letter of 24 November 1770 (*Letters*, p. 171; *Briefe*, vol. 1, p. 405). The occasion was an opera seria, *Mitridate re di Ponto*, but the principle holds for opera buffa.

2 See Owen Jander, Lionel Sawkins, J. B. Steane, and Elizabeth Forbes, "Baritone" and "Bass" in Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London: Macmillan, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 323 and 339.

3 Letter of 7 May 1783; quoted in the final paragraph of Daniel Heartz's essay in this volume. It is notable that the letter precedes by three months the Viennese premiere of Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.

tenors, Michael Kelly was not only buffo; Antonio Baglioni created Mozart's Ottavio and Tito; Vincenzo Calvesi as Ferrando could act the sentimental lover in a buffo context.[4] The Vienna company could normally field three or four male buffo singers, with at least three distinct possibilities of range which today would be called tenor, baritone, and bass. I have taken data mainly relating to three singers, Stefano Mandini, a singer whose great Mozart role (Conte Almaviva) we would now classify as baritone, and two classifiable as basses, Francesco Bussani and the nonpareil Benucci. Baritone roles suggest a lighter vocal coloring, in contrast to the bass: less than in tenor-bass duets (Ferrando and Guglielmo), but still noticeable with, for instance, the composer and the poet in Salieri's *Prima la musica* or the duets of Don Giovanni and Leporello (much of the slapstick humor of their exchange of clothes depends on their voices *not* being naturally alike).[5] The list of roles (see Table 15.1) is selective, but it includes some not created by these singers. Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* is included for its well-attested influence on Mozart.[6] *Don Giovanni* is included because Mozart wrote it for the singers he had heard in the Prague *Figaro*, who took over roles created by the Vienna singers; the duet "Per queste tue manine" (K. 540b) was written for Benucci, who sang Leporello in Vienna. When Mozart composed *Don Giovanni* he must have had a future Vienna production in mind, and he was surely unaware that

4 On singers see individual entries in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*; Peter Clive, *Mozart and his Circle: A Biographical Dictionary* (London: Dent, 1993); and articles by Bauman, Gidwitz, Campana, and Heartz in *EM* 19 (1991), 557–90.

5 In a surprising internal contradiction in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (see note 2 above), "Baritone" (p. 323) has Figaro, Leporello, and Guglielmo "often considered baritone roles," adding that "heavy baritone would not seem tautologous" (presumably meaning not an oxymoron). "Bass" (p. 339) has Almaviva, Giovanni, and Guglielmo as "nominally for bass" but "now regarded as equally baritone" roles; characters of lower station (Leporello, Figaro) "are essentially *basso buffo* roles."

6 On Mozart's debt to Paisiello, see "Constructing *Le nozze di Figaro*," in Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, pp. 133–55. Figaro's music in Mozart owes something to Benucci's role, Bartolo, in *Il barbiere*, as noted by Heartz, pp. 145–46 (see also John Platoff, "The Buffa Aria in Mozart's Vienna", *COJ* 2 [1990], 103 and 112), but also something to Figaro's, sung in Paisiello by Bussani.

Table 15.1. *Roles examined*

	Benucci	*Bussani*	*Mandini*
Paisiello: *Il barbiere di Siviglia* 1783 (Vienna)	Dr Bartolo	Figaro	Conte Almaviva
Mozart: *Lo sposo deluso* 1783–84	Bocconio	Pulcherio	Asdrubale
Mozart: additions to Bianchi: *La villanella rapita* (1785)		Biaggio	[Pippo played by Paolo Mandini]
Salieri: *Prima la musica* (1786)	Maestro di musica	[director]	Poeta
Mozart: *Le nozze di Figaro* 1786	Figaro	Dr Bartolo and Antonio	Conte Almaviva
Mozart: *Don Giovanni* 1788 (Vienna)	Leporello	Masetto and Commendatore	[Don Giovanni: Albertarelli]
Mozart: *Così fan tutte* 1790	Guglielmo (officer)	Alfonso ("philosopher")	
Cimarosa: *Il matrimonio segreto* 1792	Count Robinson	[did *not* sing Geronimo]	

Mandini would leave Vienna early in 1788: though created in Prague by Luigi Bassi, the role of Giovanni is perfectly tailored for Mandini.

To focus my argument, which is based on incomplete, but still profuse and potentially conflicting data, I shall first pose three problems relating to these singers' roles within Mozart's output, and return to them by way of conclusion.

The first problem concerns *Lo sposo deluso*. As is well known, Mozart attached the names of singers to the roles of this unfinished opera buffa. Benucci as Bocconio presents no problem; the pretentious bourgeois wanting to marry late in life is a stock buffo type like others in Benucci's repertoire, notably Paisiello's Bartolo. But the other male singers are notated in the tenor C-clef. Don Asdrubale is assigned to Benucci's sparring partner, Stefano Mandini, and Pulcherio to Francesco Bussani. Their most celebrated Mozart roles are respectively Almaviva and Bartolo, both notated in the bass clef. Mandini played Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, nominally a tenor role later taken over by Michael Kelly. But this role lies low for a tenor, and is of remarkably narrow range. Mandini did not have to extend down far to remain Almaviva in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. In the progress from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* to *Le nozze di Figaro*, Bussani and Benucci exchanged personalities. The title-role in Paisiello's opera is clearly inferior to that of Bartolo, whereas Mozart's Bartolo is a comparatively minor figure; so Benucci as *primo buffo* became Figaro. Analysis of the most celebrated music composed for them by Mozart suggests that as voice-types Benucci and Bussani were virtually indistinguishable: Bartolo's aria in *Le nozze di Figaro* would have suited Benucci to perfection. So why does Bussani appear in *Lo sposo deluso* apparently as a tenor?

The second problem concerns the key of Masetto's aria "Ho capito, Signor, si." In the context of Mozart's normal habits, the previous recitative, by cadencing in D major, prepares for an aria in G or, marginally less likely, D; but the aria is in F. Such a contradictory harmonic situation does not occur elsewhere in *Don*

Giovanni.[7] Because the paper suggests a later date of composition than the rest of Act I, Alan Tyson suggested that an aria in G major may have been intended, and the piece "transposed down to suit the singer." Daniel Heartz makes it clear that there is no evidence for this.[8] In any case "Ho capito," with a range of one octave, is within the scope of almost any male singer, whether in F or G. Elsewhere Masetto ranges a third higher and a third lower (i.e. from A to e^1), and the singer was expected to double the Commendatore. Masetto, in fact, though created in Prague by Giuseppe Lolli, appears a typical Bussani role. But the case remains odd; why should Masetto, of all people, occasion a harmonic non-sequitur?

The third problem concerns Guglielmo, a role created by Benucci. Mozart wrote a grand aria for him in Act I, "Rivolgete a lui lo sguardo" (K. 584), but removed it from *Così fan tutte*, entering it separately in his catalogue with the legend "für Benucci". The obvious explanation for this change of mind is probably the best; "Rivolgete" is far too long for its dramatic context.[9] The replacement is clearly superior as a vehicle for getting the outraged sisters off the stage before the brilliant laughing trio. The omission leaves Guglielmo with two arias, but the Act I substitute, "Non siate ritrosi," is tiny, and, unusually, is in the same key as the other, "Donne mie la fate a tanti." Why should Mozart thus short-change his leading buffo?

These problems bear closely on my particular preoccupation, which is the association between tessitura and characterization. Mozart's choices of range and tessitura within a vocal line function

7 Normally in *Don Giovanni*, recitative cadences occur in the same key as that of the ensuing set pieces or its dominant; more rarely, as before the inserted aria "Dalla sua pace," its subdominant. The same is generally true of the Mozart-Da Ponte operas, and indeed the whole repertory.

8 "Ho capito" was written down on Prague paper: see Alan Tyson, "*Le nozze di Figaro*: Lessons from the Autograph Score," *MT* 122 (1981), 456–61, and (without, however, any suggestion of transposition to suit a singer) "Some Features of the Autograph Score of *Don Giovanni*," *Israel Studies in Musicology* 5 (1990), 11–12; Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, pp. 176–77.

9 Heartz reaches this conclusion in "When Mozart Revises: Guglielmo in *Così*," in Sadie, *Wolfgang Amadè Mozart*, pp. 355–61; see also Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, p. 243.

rhetorically like other more familiar variables such as topics and instrumentation. In his major study of Mozart's arias, James Webster has already drawn attention to the significance of vocal high points.[10] Exactly how these signs function may depend upon the individual performance, but should not vary widely if the appropriate voice type is selected for the role (the question of including performance variables in an analytical discussion cannot be considered here). In addition, range and tessitura certainly have a bearing on the vexed question of Mozart's choice of keys, especially for arias. It may not always be possible to decode these signs with precision, but I suggest they play a significant role in enhancing our sense of Mozart's characters; or in Peter Kivy's terminology, in *animating* characters.[11] Kivy has claimed that at best, musical beauty creates the illusion of animation. He rests his case on a persuasive critique of comments which claim powers of animation for music, but which are, in fact, essentially founded on the libretto. Kivy calls "characterization" what music can undoubtedly evoke through topical allusion, for instance, or by tempo and modal distinctions; music can produce a two-dimensional characterization – his term – but not, he claims, that three-dimensionality which he calls animation.[12] In short, Kivy suggests, music can create types, but not characters; which is why I think his terminology should be revised. Henceforward when I say characterization I mean what Kivy means by animation: the creation of personality rather than mere typicality in the humans within the fictional world of an opera.

There is no reason to exclude any variable in a demonstration of music's powers of characterization, but particular value may be

10 Webster, "Analysis," pp. 166–69 and passim.

11 Peter Kivy, "How did Mozart do it," in *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 160–77. On characterization see also Kivy, *Osmin's Rage: Philosophical Reflections on Opera, Drama, and Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), particularly pp. 263–75; Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*.

12 This formulation owes something to a classic discussion of characterization by E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*.

attached to elements which can be shown (statistically or otherwise) to be *not necessarily or intrinsically conventional*: shown, in fact, to be elements of compositional *choice*. These certainly include the style and tonality of arias. Salieri's comments are revealing: in settling down to convert a libretto into an opera, "I decided first on the key appropriate for the character of each vocal piece."[13] I agree with John Platoff that his laying out of tonalities implies not a formal intention, but rather a characterizing intention.[14] Keys are chosen partly by conventional associations, and by the requirements of the appropriate instrumentation; but these elements themselves contribute to the dramatic goal which, in part, is characterization.

But the choice of key must also depend on the desired voice type, and in Mozart's case on the range and tessitura of particular singers. Bussani or Lolli could probably have sung Masetto's aria as much as a third higher or lower, but a wider-ranging aria is less susceptible of transposition, and may only be singable in one key or those semitonally adjacent to it. The relation of key to tessitura is associated with stress points in the voice, usually high and low pitches whose function will vary according to key. For example, the sisters' arias in *Così fan tutte* alternate high and low tonic and dominant: "Come scoglio" gives Fiordiligi a high tonic, $b\flat^2$, "Per pietà" a high dominant, b^2; whereas for Dorabella the key of B flat has a high dominant, f^2, with climactic uses of its upper neighbor g^2 and its

13 Quoted Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, p. 139 (German translation of Salieri's original, p. 154).

14 I am grateful to John Platoff for sending me in advance of publication the draft of a chapter in his study of Viennese opera buffa concerned with tonal organization. Part of this material has appeared as "Myths and Realities about Tonal Planning in Mozart's Operas," *COJ* 8 (March, 1996), 3–15. Webster discusses the characterizing significance of keys in "Analysis." For divergent views on tonal organization in Mozart's *opere buffe* see Siegmund Levarie, *Mozart's "Le nozze di Figaro": A Critical Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); Tim Carter, *W. A. Mozart: "Le nozze di Figaro"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Andrew Steptoe, *The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1988); Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, pp. 148–50; Webster, "Mozart's Operas and the Myth of Musical Unity," *COJ* 2 (1990), 205–16; Julian Rushton, "Mozart," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol. 3, p. 95.

neighbor $a\flat^2$; g^2 is the high point of her E flat aria, where it is the mediant. The great Benucci role, Figaro, includes three arias, in F, C, and E flat, differentiated in range as well as key. In "Se vuol ballare," Figaro only occasionally hits the high tonic f^1: the aria is more concerned with the high, but not strained, dominant pitch, c^1, and its upper neighbor d^1. The arpeggio melody of "Non più andrai" sails up to the major mediant, e^1. This accords with the positive subtext of the aria: Figaro's plans are maturing, he is even enjoying himself. But in "Aprite un po' quegl' occhi," Figaro's spirits are cast down. The highest note is the regularly available tonic, $e\flat^1$, but rather than use it as a glorious climax, as in "Come scoglio," Mozart treats it as a frequent point of stress, with, in the coda, heart-stopping falls to $d\flat^1$. This music would lie high for Benucci in F, and perhaps in E; it would be less effective in D, although Benucci possessed the requisite bottom G. Other reasons militate against D major for Figaro here, including the presence of two angry D major arias earlier in the opera (for Bartolo and the Count). In all these arias, if tonality is chosen for its contribution to affect, that contribution is intimately associated with matters of range and tessitura.

It is necessary to distinguish these terms, particularly as Webster, in his otherwise comprehensive discussion, does not.[15] Range is the distance between bottom and top notes; tessitura is where the voice lies within that range, and should be defined as the part of the voice most persistently exploited.[16] Range and tessitura are readily distinguished by looking at the "Benucci" and "Mandini" roles, if they may be so termed, in *Don Giovanni*. In the C major sections of the first finale their *range* is the same: c to e^1. Leporello reaches the top in the "Viva la libertà" fanfare (m. 387), following Giovanni's lead, and then in unison with Giovanni but in opposition to the other characters (m. 550). Elsewhere Leporello is

15 Webster, "Analysis," p. 170, where the "tessitura" of the Countess's arias is described in terms of range, i.e. the distance between top and bottom notes. Tessitura and range are not included in the list of variables on p. 131.

16 See Owen Jander and J. B. Steane, "Tessitura," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol. 4, p. 703.

persistently heard *below* Giovanni, even though Mozart assigned the lowest bass-clef line to Masetto (the "Bussani" role). Leporello's tessitura is therefore lower. The same difference in tessitura is apparent in the buffo duets "Eh via buffone," in which they share material, and "O statua gentilissima," where the material is markedly individualized. Nevertheless their frequent coupling and sharing of pitches has led to misunderstanding of the distinction between Giovanni and Leporello as voice types.[17]

The difference between range and tessitura derives from a conflict between the physical possibilities of a voice type and the general widening of ranges characteristic of eighteenth-century virtuoso singing. In *Don Giovanni*, all three bass-clef singers move freely through the major ninth c to d^1; in D major and G major they occupy mainly the d–d^1 octave. Their upper range is not much different: all three go to e^1. What mainly distinguishes them is extension downwards: Masetto to G, Leporello twice to F.[18] But Giovanni lacks low notes; exceptionally, in the quartet, he descends to B♭, but usually he goes no lower than c.[19] In ensembles his higher range derives from his aristocratic right to sing above his servant, but a higher tessitura is equally evident in his arias. The question is mildly confused in *Le nozze di Figaro* by the extension downwards of the Mandini role to A, and the extension upwards of the Benucci role to f^1, although Figaro's f^1 occurs only as a bell tone (No. 2) or an

17 James Parakilas points out that Giovanni was taken over early in the nineteenth century by tenors such as Garcia and Nourrit. After a baritone period typified by Verdi's first Iago, Victor Maurel, the role has been adopted by basses such as Pinza and Raimondi. "The Afterlife of *Don Giovanni*: Turning Production History into Criticism," *JM* 8 (1990), 251–65. *The Viking Opera Guide*, ed. Amanda Holden, (London: Viking, 1993) lists Giovanni as bass or baritone, but Almaviva (who goes lower) as baritone; "baritone" in *The New Grove* (see note 2 above) has Giovanni "perhaps" but is unequivocal about Almaviva. Both dictionaries appear to be concerned with modern rather than historic practice.

18 Optionally, just before the Commendatore enters; and in the piece written specifically for Benucci, "Per queste tue manine."

19 Parakilas (see note 17) gives Giovanni's range as G to e^1; but G is confined to a spurious passage in certain vocal scores (first finale, mm. 408–13, the opening strain of the Minuet).

indignant shout ("Se vuol ballare"). Nevertheless, in tessitura these roles are not the same at all.[20]

Tessitura should not be crudely represented by the median, the half-way point between the highest and lowest notes. Like range, on which it partly depends, it may vary in the course of a movement. Extension may run parallel with harmonic intensification, but harmonic intensification may occur without extension: the tessitura is not necessarily raised, for instance, by a modulation to the dominant. Extension of range sometimes accompanies a change in singing style. For example, it often occurs in what one might call the fanfare sections in the closing phase of an aria, where the voice tends to emphasize the notes of the tonic triad; this tendency is most marked in bass-clef roles in ensembles where the singer doubles the harmonic bass, but it also occurs in arias, even "Non più andrai" where the principal idea is already an arpeggio.[21]

Paisiello's Bartolo aria "Veramente ho torto, è vero" is a useful paradigm. In Webster's classification, it is a binary form with tonal return.[22] In the "exposition" the fully-closed tonic section, apart from two cadential uses of B♭, is confined to the range d–b♭.[23] In the dominant section, mm. 21 to 52, the same range is used but the tessitura actually sinks a little; the finely varied second part grows increasingly excited, but it is the fanfare, presented in patter singing, which takes off from the bottom of the register and rises to e♭^{1}; near the cadence the low A♭ completes the range of a twelfth

20 Mozart avoided the low A in writing for the original Giovanni; did Bassi find the bottom of Almaviva's role difficult? Mozart made no adjustments to the role for Vienna, but composed an aria for the Vienna Giovanni, Francesco Albertarelli ("Un bacio di mano," K.541), with the range B–e^1.

21 The fanfare coda is a phenomenon of bass-clef vocal music; it is not an aspect of the characterization of Giovanni, as Steptoe implies (*The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas*, p. 194). In ensembles, the bass naturally concentrates on dominant and tonic, but even in arias where the voice is the main melodic part final sections tend to privilege notes of the tonic triad.

22 Webster, "Analysis," p. 115, the example being "Aprite un po' quegl' occhi."

23 The Ricordi vocal score (edited by Mario Parenti, 1960) replaces both instances of B♭ by d, but earlier sources consulted confirm B♭, doubling the orchestral bass.

Table 15.2. *Arias in E♭ sung by Benucci*

	Key	Range	Tessitura as Pitch Center of Gravity (PCG)	
A Bartolo (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*)				
Aria: "Veramente ho torto"	E♭	A♭–e♭¹	below f♯	(11·87)
Section in tonic 1–20		B♭–b♭	f♯/g	(12·3)
Section going to V 20–34		d–b♭	f/f♯	(11·4)
Section in V 34–52		B♭–b♭	f/f♯	(11·5)
Reprise in tonic 52–72		B♭–b♭	f	(11·3)
Coda 72–end		A♭–e♭¹	f♯	(12·4)
B Figaro (*Le nozze di Figaro*)				
Aria: "Aprite un po"	E♭	B♭–e♭¹	above a♭	(14·3)
Section in tonic 1–14		d–e♭¹	below a♭	(13·8)
Section in V (a) 14–25		B♭–e♭¹	below a♭	(13·8)
Section in V (b) 26–47		e♭–e♭¹	a♭/a	(14·6)
Reprise in tonic 48–62		B♭–e♭¹	f♯/g	(12·5)
Coda 62–end		e♭–e♭¹	a/b♭	(15·8)

(see Table 15.2A). Yet a calculation of tessitura shows it to be more or less constant throughout the aria.

This calculation of tessitura is presented in the tables as an average represented by a number and the name of the nearest pitch: in Bartolo's aria this is f♯, a pitch not actually used. The tessitura fluctuates less than the median, and is unmoved by Bartolo's growing excitement. Is this an indication of the impotence of his fury? Certainly other examples show tessitura changing in the course of an aria or ensemble much more than this. Figaro's "Aprite un po' quegl' occhi" may be partly modeled on "Veramente ho torto," but it handles range and tessitura very differently. B♭ is reached in the second section and e♭¹ is present from the start (see Table 15.2B). The incidence of both extremes increases as the aria proceeds; nevertheless the last section, from m. 62, shows a marked rise in tessitura, while the previous measures, 48–62, plumb the depths. The opening of the aria has a tessitura centered just below a♭; mm. 48–62 it is below g; and from 62–85 it rises nearly to b♭ (see Table 15.2B).

Table 15.3. *Don Giovanni*

Arias in F sung by lower-caste characters	Range (median)	PCG
A Masetto (Lolli: Bussani)		
"Ho capito, Signor, si"	c–c^1 ($f_\sharp^1$)	$f_\sharp^1$/g (12·6)
B Leporello (Ponziani: Benucci)		
"Notte e giorno faticar"	A–c^1 (e/f)	f (10·9)

The calculation of tessitura as a pitch-sign marking the center of the comfortable range I owe to Richard Rastall's conception of a Pitch Center of Gravity (PCG).[24] The PCG is an average obtained by computing the amount of time the singer actually dwells on each note. The PCG is theoretically distinct from the median, even if often similar in practice. The median may be distorted by a single high or low note. The PCG covers statistically erratic extensions of range by including them in a complete calculation averaging pitch and duration. This gives an imprecise, but still truer, picture of the lie of a voice, its tessitura, than does the observation of extremes of range, and the calculation permits the demonstration of fine distinctions. Leporello, in "Notte e giorno faticar," goes no higher than Masetto in his aria in the same key; but Leporello's range extends a third lower (see Table 15.3). Both the median and the PCG are lower by a good three-quarters of a tone. But the lowering of the median would occur if Leporello had touched bottom A only once: the calculation of tessitura shows that the entire section lies lower. The difference need not be great to be significant. We all know how precise singers often are about the keys in which they are willing to perform certain music. It is not the outer extremities which cause a singer to transpose, for instance, a Schubert song, but

24 Rastall has devised what he describes as "a purely numerical manipulation [which] permits objective calculation of a point-tessitura," achieved by calculations in the pitch–time dimension. Richard Rastall, "Vocal Range and Tessitura in Music from York Play 45," *MA* 3 (1984), 181–99, quoted from p. 192. In order to reach the figures in the tables, each pitch is assigned a numeral, with low G 1, $f_\sharp^1$ 12, g 13, and so on.

Table 15.4. *Early Benucci roles by Mozart*

	Key	Range (median)	PCG	
A Bocconio (*Lo sposo deluso*)				
No. 1 (Quartet: lowest voice)	D	A–e^1 (f♯–g)	above a	(15·3)
No. 4 Trio	E♭	A♭–e♭^{1} (f–f♯)	e/f	(10·5)
B Figaro (*Le nozze di Figaro*)				
Duet No. 1	G	d–d^1 (g♯)	g♯/a	(14·5)
Duet No. 2	B♭	A–f^1	below f♯	(11·9)
Part I 1–96		B♭–f^1	above a	(15·3)
Part II 97–end		A–b♭	below d	(8·7)
Aria No. 3 "Se vuol ballare"	F	c–f^1 (g♯–a)	below g♯	(13·86)
Minuet sections		c–f^1		(13·73)
Contredanse		c–d^1	above g♯	(14·19)
Aria: "Non più andrai"	C	c–e^1	f♯/g	(12·6)
Refrain	C	c–e^1	above f♯	(12·3)
Dominant material	G	d–d^1	above g♯	(14·4)
Other tonic material	C	c–e^1	a	(15·1)

the *comfort* of the voice throughout the whole piece; and comfort is part of the definition of tessitura.[25]

Change of range or tessitura is an obvious way to make a dramatic point. Mozart particularly relished the versatility of Benucci in this respect and exploited it in the first music he wrote for him (Table 15.4). The PCG drops with the spirits of Bocconio in the Trio of *Lo sposo deluso*, when compared to his confidence in the *introduzione*. The second duet in *Le nozze di Figaro* divides in two. Figaro is confident at first, then as he understands what Susanna is saying he is horrified: his tessitura falls by a fifth. That the first section includes a little top f^1 (the bell-imitation, possibly taken falsetto), and that the last section is mainly a duet (with Figaro much the lower voice), does not sufficiently account for this unusually drastic change.

25 Jander and Steane define tessitura in terms including "lie" and "comfortable": see note 16. See also Julian Rushton, "Villains and Voice-Types: Towards a Methodology of Operatic Characterization," paper delivered at the conference "Signs in Opera," Imatra, July 1993, forthcoming in *Acta Semiotica Fennica*.

I now return to my three problems. Benucci and Bussani may have been far apart in artistic quality but in the Mozart-Da Ponte operas they appear practically interchangeable as vocal types. Yet in *Lo sposo deluso* the role of Pulcherio lies almost as high as that of Asdrubale, itself the highest music Mozart ever wrote for Mandini or those who covered similar roles, such as Bassi and Albertarelli. It appears, however, that Bussani did in fact sing tenor roles, including those of lovers.[26] Mozart did not (as one might be tempted to conclude) make a mistake, but selected from possible voice types which inhabited the same body, that of Francesco Bussani; such versatility was doubtless more practicable in the small theatres of the time. For we cannot confuse Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, which is assumed to have influenced Mozart so much, with a tenor: the voice type is totally different from that of Pulcherio. This emphasizes that the subject under discussion is not after all the individual singer, tantalizingly lost to posterity, but the voice type. Mozart evidently came to prefer the baritone or bass Bussani and composed a lower tessitura both for him and Mandini in the second number of *Lo sposo deluso* – but not strikingly so, and they remain in the tenor C-clef (see Table 15.5). The two ensembles Mozart wrote for Bianchi's *La villanella rapita* (1785) already display Bussani (Biaggio) as a basso buffo.[27]

Turning to "Ho capito," to choose F rather than G would hardly change the voice type suited to the aria from baritone to bass, and the key was not altered to suit any singer's limitations. But with the aria in G, there would be great emphasis on the high dominant, d^1; in F, this emphasis moves down to c^1. Giovanni himself and the Commendatore make great play with d^1, so the choice of F major might have been intended to prevent Masetto sounding like his

26 I owe this information to Dorothea Link (personal communication): on 22 April 1783 Zinzendorf heard Bussani sing in *La scuola de'gelosi*, referring to him as "le primo amoroso" and comparing him unfavorably with the tenor Calvesi. Bussani sang the tenor role of Nardone in *La frascatana* in Turin in 1775.

27 There may have been a role in this revival for Stefano Mandini but it appears that the tenor/baritone role of Pippo, for which Mozart composed, was played by his brother Paolo (I am indebted to Dorothea Link for this information).

Table 15.5. *Lo sposo deluso* (Benucci's role, see Table 15.4)

	Key	Range (median)	PCG
Asdrubale (Mandini)			
No. 1 Quartet	D	e–g^1 (b/c^1)	above $c\sharp^1$ (19·2)
No. 4 Trio	E♭	d–$e\flat^1$ ($g\sharp$/a)	below a (14.8)
Pulcherio (Bussani)			
No. 1 Quartet	D	e–g^1	c^1–$c\sharp$ (18.5)
No. 3 Aria	G	$c\sharp$–$f\sharp^1$	a♯–b (16·4)

social superiors.[28] But this does not explain why, if Mozart planned an aria in F, he prepared in the recitative for one in a sharp key. The local conflict between D major and F major chords (not tonalities) may itself be an aspect of characterization, intended momentarily to animate the confrontation between Don Giovanni's flashing sword and the unfortunate peasant.[29]

This view derives some support from considering the other bass-clef voices when they use the same key, F major (see Table 15.6A). Leporello, in "Notte e giorno faticar," extends the range downwards, with an appreciably lower PCG: this represents the natural voice of the character, in soliloquy. "Per queste tue manine" is in C major, the key of Benucci's exultant "Non più andrai," but Leporello is tied up and awaiting punishment; the upward extension is more than compensated for by low notes, and overall the tessitura is gloomy. Leporello's two arias in sharp keys lie markedly higher.[30] Like the duet which replaced it, "Ah, pietà Signori miei" is

28 On the use of d^1 in the role of Giovanni see Steptoe, *The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas*, pp. 193–94. Tyson's hypothetical transposition might have been intended to support this characterization.

29 Heartz (*Mozart's Operas*, pp. 176–77) observes that Mozart seldom has consecutive numbers in the same key (the preceding chorus is in G). He also argues that the move D–F "is not a strange relationship in this opera" (e.g. the overture and *introduzione*); nevertheless it remains eccentric as a shift from recitative to aria.

30 A performance including "Per queste tue manine" should not also include Leporello's G major aria. On the two versions of the opera see Julian Rushton, *W. A. Mozart: "Don Giovanni"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 20–22, 53–57.

Table 15.6. *Don Giovanni*

	Range (median)	PCG	
A *Don Giovanni*: arias in F			
Leporello (Ponziani: Benucci) "Notte e giorno faticar"	A–c^1 (e/f)	f	(10·9)
Masetto (Lolli: Bussani) "Ho capito, Signor, si"	c–c^1 (f♯)	f♯/g	(12.6)
Giovanni (Bassi: Albertarelli) "Metà di voi quà vadano"	c–e^1 (g♯)	below g♯	(13·8)
B Other sections of Giovanni's music			
Duet: "Là ci darem la mano" (in A)	e–e^1 (b♭)	above b♭	(16·3)
Quartet: "Non ti fidar" (in B♭)	B♭–e♭^{1}	below g	(12·8)
Aria: "Fin ch'an dal vino" (in B♭)	d–e♭^{1} (g♯/a)	above a	(15·3)
Trio: "Ah taci, ingiusto core" (in A)	c♯–d^1 (e^1 x 𝅘𝅥𝅯)	a	(15·1)
Serenade (in D)	d–d^1 (e^1 x 𝅘𝅥𝅯)	above b♭	(16·3)

a plea for mercy, but Leporello is free-moving and escapes at the end. As for "Madamina, il catalogo è questo," he is, if not imitating Giovanni in D major, at least empathizing with him; the PCG is noticeably higher than is normal for Leporello.

The other F major aria is Giovanni's "Metà di voi quà vadano," in which the range extends a third higher than the other bass-clef pieces in F. The median is correspondingly higher; but the tessitura is only a semitone higher than Masetto's, and is generally lower than the rest of his role (see Table 15.6: Giovanni lies unusually low in the Quartet, where he is the lowest voice and must talk under his breath). Even in the dominant area of "Metà di voi," when the tessitura rises sharply, it remains lower than Giovanni's most exultant utterance, "Fin ch'an dal vino." Doubtless this is because, in the F major aria, he is imitating Leporello. Within the aria, the PCG for different sections of the aria varies significantly: when Giovanni is fully in (Leporello's) character, it remains at a fairly normal "Mandini" level which is also the level of Leporello in his sharp-key arias. But when, in the dominant key, Giovanni narcissistically describes himself, his hat, and his sword (currently worn by Leporello), he rises frequently to his favorite high d^1 and even e^1. In

a concinnity of parameters, this section places exceptional emphasis on G major (V of V); presumably it is this point that Edward J. Dent interpreted as Giovanni almost forgetting his disguise.[31] The effect in "Metà di voi" results from Mozart's manipulation of range and tessitura; it is not an inevitable result of the conditions of his musical language. One might expect the tessitura to rise when the music modulates to the dominant, if only because one constituent pitch is sharpened, often two; higher intensity may be recognized in the tonicization of the dominant pitch. But in Masetto's aria, although the dominant C is clearly tonicized, with even a passing F♯ in the orchestral melody, the section in the dominant is barely higher in tessitura than the opening; there is a greater rise at the dominant preparation for the reprise.[32] And in Bartolo's aria, as already noted, the tessitura is actually a little higher in the tonic sections.

Tessitura, therefore, remains one of the composer's areas of choice. Another effective example is Bartolo's fruitless search for the paper dropped by Rosina; this section of their F major duet is largely in the subdominant, and Paisiello uses the same range as the tonic sections, but with the tessitura nearly a semitone down. Mozart's drastic manipulation in Figaro's second duet with Susanna, described above, remains exceptional in degree rather than in kind. Extension of range of voice in the closing section of an aria is an obvious rhetorical device; equally rhetorical is the way Masetto sticks obdurately to his octave in "Ho capito," even for the fanfare coda. The question of key, therefore, may be resolved without hypotheses about transposition, or reference to long-range structural considerations. The character of the music would

31 Dent, *Mozart's Operas: A Critical Study*, 2nd edn. (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 166. Abert suggests the mask falls at measure 15, at "ferite pur, ferite" (*Mozart's "Don Giovanni"*, trans. Peter Gellhorn [London: Eulenburg, 1976], pp. 102–03). Such emphasis on V/V is unusual in arias and almost without parallel in *Don Giovanni*.

32 The opening section, 12.3; the dominant section 12.6; the retransition 13.1; the reprise 12.8; the coda 12.6.

come over equally strongly in G, but having the aria in F, and the obtuse tonal juxtaposition with D, characterize Masetto, and in this particular situation: the voice part, in particular, resists the flamboyant possibilities available from the original singer. Mozart's procedures here – key, range, and tessitura, harmonic non-sequitur, instrumentation – go beyond conventional animation and characterize Masetto as surely as "Fin ch'an dal vino" and, I would suggest, "Metà di voi" characterize Giovanni.

The problem of Guglielmo may also be referred to the needs of characterization. In ensembles Guglielmo is the lowest voice, with Bussani as Alfonso lying above, so that the positions of Benucci and Bussani in *Le nozze di Figaro* and the Vienna *Don Giovanni* were reversed (even in Alfonso's little aria "Vorrei dir" Bussani was asked for a consistently higher tessitura, though not as high as the aborted role of Pulcherio; Mozart presents Alfonso as a baritone and surely if the chance had been offered he would have written it for Mandini). Guglielmo's G major arias both exploit the high dominant d^1 without stress; and, descending only to B, neither employs Benucci's lowest notes. Thus both predominantly use the $d–d^1$ octave and have a PCG in the region of a (Table 15.7), which is almost identical to that of the rejected D major aria, "Rivolgete a lui lo sguardo." But "Rivolgete" exploits the high *tonic* d^1 from the outset, and to enliven the closing fanfare Mozart has recourse to several extended high mediants: $f♯^1$ rather than the e^1 of "Non più andrai." Mozart's previous piece for Benucci, "Per queste tue manine," uses the range $F–e^1$; Mozart asked of Benucci as Guglielmo a range higher by a whole tone than what his other music implies was comfortable (the repeated high f^1, in "Se vuol ballare" is surely not meant to be comfortable). Was "Rivolgete" then cut because it was too high "für Benucci"?[33] Surely it is hardly conceivable that Mozart would make such a mistake about a singer

33 The PCG of "Rivolgete" is affected by an extension of range downwards in the closing stages, as well as upwards: nevertheless the closing section rises to the highest level (see Table 15.7).

Table 15.7. *Così fan tutte:* Guglielmo (Benucci)

	Key	Range	PCG	
No. 1 Trio	G	B–e^1	f♯/g	(12·5)
No. 2 Trio	E	d♯–e^1	g♯	(14·3)
No. 3 Trio	C	c–e^1	g/g♯	(13·4)
Aria: "Non siate ritrosi"	G	d–e^1	a	(15·02)
Duet: "Il core vi dono"	F	c–d^1	below g♯	(13·8)
Aria: "Donne mie a tanti"	G	B–e^1	below b♭	(15·8)
1st half (includes section in V)			a/b♭	(15·4)
2nd half (from measure 87)			b♭	(16)
Aria: (rejected) "Rivolgete a lui lo sguardo"	D	G–f♯^{1}	a	(15·1)
Tonic section 1–30		c♯–d^1	below f♯	(11·9)
Dominant section 31–70		c♯–e^1	a	(15·1)
X section 71–128		c♯–e♭^{1}	below b♭	(15·88)
Allegro molto (tonic return)		G–f♯^{1}	above b♭	(16·03)

he knew this well, and other evidence suggests that Benucci could employ higher notes still when required.[34] So why do his Mozart roles, including Guglielmo in the final version, not exploit this ability to the full?

Mozart was no doubt intending a particular characterization of Guglielmo, and the tessitura is one result. Guglielmo's arias are baritonal, but in ensembles he functions as a bass with a correspondingly lower range and PCG. The marvelous Benucci presumably took this in his stride. Mozart's rhetorical purposes in exploiting this singer, and Bussani, in particular ways were surely concerned with character and class. A bass sound and tessitura are

34 Kay Lipton informs me that when singing Picchanillo in Guglielmi's *Le vicende d'amore* (Rome, 1784, in the presence of the Austrian emperor) Benucci reached g^1 (see Lipton, "The *opere buffe* of Pietro Alessandro Guglielmi in Vienna and Eszterháza: Contributions to the Development of *opera buffa* between 1768 and 1793," PhD diss., UCLA, 1995). Was this falsetto? When this opera was sung in Vienna he sang a different, and lower, role, so his g^1 was not then on display to Mozart.

associated with the plebeian or peasant class: Leporello, Masetto. Alfonso is a middle-class intellectual; Guglielmo is an officer. Of course Bartolo, whom both singers had impersonated, was a middle-class professional, but he was also a buffoon, and Mozart does not intend us to understand Guglielmo or Alfonso that way. This interpretation is borne out by Cimarosa's role for Benucci, Count Robinson in *Il matrimonio segreto*, an opera without servant characters. Robinson lies generally above Geronimo in ensembles; nevertheless his tessitura is not high, with a PCG generally in the region of $f_{\sharp}$. It rises distinctly in more soloistic utterances, including the duet with the tenor, Paolino. Both upper-crust and a buffoon, Robinson is a summation of Benucci's abilities. Cimarosa requires a notated range of over two octaves, although the bottom E is obviously a joke and there is only a little, but full-voiced, f^1.

In conclusion, there appears to be a distinction in late eighteenth-century practice between high, middle, and low male voices; but in certain circumstances that distinction becomes blurred. Singers whose abilities we think we know from one role are deliberately exploited in a different way in another context, and thus appear to have been capable of functioning as two distinct voice types; but when a role has been composed, it implies, as it were for future use, only one voice type. The tessitura and range of sung passages is a variable like any other, under the rhetorical control of the composer (failure to understand this has led to such modern aberrations as bass Alfonsos and Giovannis). Mozart was lucky in that both Bussani and Benucci could cope with baritonal roles or at least baritonal sections within bass roles, and his exercise of choice in the matter is part of his manipulation of musical material to a dramatic end. We should modify our view of Mozart the bespoke tailor, and perhaps reflect on the unexpected level of creative control he exercised in his mature opera buffa, for it is clear that for purposes of characterization he sometimes deliberately avoided exploiting the full potentialities of his singers.