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Extended Abstract Template (approx. 1,000 to 1,800 words): Aria-Sonata Forms?: Taking *Formenlehre* to the Opera Once More

ABSTRACT

Background

This paper refines previous definitions of sonata forms in Classical opera numbers, establishing a new set of guidelines for their formal layout. Previous studies on operatic sonata forms either disengaged them from, or downplayed their connection with, instrumental sonata forms. This study builds upon recent work by Nathan John Martin, adopting a more flexible, "*Formenlehre*"-based approach to arias, duets, and other numbers in Classical operas.

Aims and repertoire studied

To establish revised norms to Hepokoski and Darcy's Sonata Theory in order to better define the forms of numbers from operas by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven between 1760 and 1810. Based on a detailed survey of these numbers, the main differences in vocal sonata forms (compared to instrumental sonata forms) are: transitions are not standard or necessary in expositions, 'development' sections are often less substantial (sometimes more akin to 'Contrasting Middle' sections), and recapitulations do not always literally return subordinate-theme material in the tonic. Indeed, recapitulations often present a "replacement" subordinate theme that does not carry the melodic-motivic material from the exposition's subordinate theme, but does carry subordinate-theme *function* as defined by William Caplin. The main numbers examined in this study are: "Si, ma d'un altro amore" from Mozart's *Ascanio in Alba*, Mozart's 'Non so d'onde vieni,' K. 294, 'Ah fuggi il traditor' from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and 'Ah, se fossi intorno' from Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito*.

Methods

Two previously established methods are used: Sonata Theory developed by James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy and Formal-Function Theory developed by William Caplin.

Implications

The study's results show that establishing these revised definitions for operatic sonata forms not only creates a needed typology of form, but also allows us to re-approach more unusual or idiosyncratic forms that have previously eluded classification. Moreover, it challenges a previous claim by James Webster that "invok[ing] instrumental formal types as the primary basis for understanding arias may be irrelevant, if not positively misleading." Instead, it addresses a cautionary plea from Nathan John Martin's recent work, striving to define "both the formal types and the criteria invoked in their analytic deployment…as explicitly and precisely as possible," and using these adjusted "aria-sonata" types as a starting point for analysis of operatic numbers. The results also show how certain forms gradually fell out of favour later in the 18th century, particularly the concerto-based aria-sonata forms (Type 5 sonatas), whereas more compact forms with unusual features began to figure more prominently. My hope is that more work can be done on 'taking Formenlehre to the opera,' applying Caplin's formal-function concepts to opera numbers (and perhaps sacred-music numbers) and deploying them in context of a baseline set of forms such as my aria-type sonata forms, while also not (over-)privileging sonata form at the expense of other factors. This paper lays out some basic principles and examples, but, of course, there remains much more to explore. In particular, the more 'idiosyncratic' numbers, especially those from Mozart's late operas that have eluded easy classification, can be re-approached in dialogue with this adjusted, but not brand new, set of aria-sonata forms.

Keywords

Form, tonality, vocal music, opera

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