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On the Form Functionality of Recitative Intrusions in *Le nozze di Figaro*

ABSTRACT

Background

The subfields of musical schema theory, topic theory, and formal theory involve substantially interrelated projects. For instance, the intersections between musical form and schemas have been treated by Byros (2015) and Caplin (2015); those between topics and form by Caplin (2005) and Agawu (2014); and those between schemas and topics by Byros (2014). This paper draws together all three strands in one analytical project, showing their interconnections in the eighteenth century's most overtly representational genre: opera buffa.

To do so, it builds on recent trends in opera research, particularly the study of formal function in Mozart's closed numbers (e.g. Martin 2015) and the recognition of a schematic vocabulary of melodic formulas in Italianate recitative (Sherrill and Boyle 2015) that existed alongside the familiar galant phrase schemas of Gjerdingen (2007).

In particular, the paper investigates the borrowing of recitative as a musical *topos* incorporated into closed ('songful') musical numbers. The topical borrowings are made recognizable by the schematized nature of recitative's vocabulary, and their effects arise from the ways in which the indigenous habitat of recitative differs from the musical environment of songful numbers, shedding light on the question of why cross-generic borrowing seems to be an important feature of the musical topic as a device, as Mirka (2014, 2) articulates.

Aims and repertoire studied

This paper seeks to understand the dramatic and expressive role of formal functions in Mozart's operas. It analyzes moments when recitative intrudes into formal numbers, causing conflicting sets of conventions and formal implications to collide. It identifies several such moments in the arias and small ensembles of *Le nozze di Figaro*. By investigating these seams between musical systems, and the dramatic situations that prompt them, it reveals how Mozart uses musical form as a communicative strategy within the larger multimedia project of opera.

Two numbers from *Figaro* in particular are selected for thorough analytical discussion: the Act I duet 'Cinque... dieci...' and the Act II trio 'Susanna or via sortite'. These numbers represent a range of devices that can also be found in numbers such as 'Se a caso madama', 'Cosa sento!', 'Venite inginocchiatevi', 'Vedrò mentre io sospiro', 'Dove sono', 'Aprite un po' quegli occhi', and others.

Methods

This paper analyzes the formal role of these moments of recitative intrusion. It first explores the formal context for each intrusion by modelling the moment's position within the number's global form and by investigating its immediate

form-functional context. (Does it, for instance, occur during the 'continuation' function of a musical sentence?) The paper then considers the internal makeup of the recitative itself, identifying the recitative schemas and phrase structure according to Sherrill and Boyle (2015). The results of the parallel formal analyses are then compared: do cadential recitative schemas substitute for cadential formal functions, for instance, or are the formal implications of the recitative schemas at odds with their form functional surroundings?

Mozart's compositional strategies for formal alignment or mismatch between systems are subsequently analyzed and interpreted with respect to their expressive and dramatic meaning. The orienting hypotheses of this interpretive phase are that, in songful music, characters are musical agents that accomplish dramatic goals as mediated through musical events (Lewin 2006; McClary 2000), whereas in recitative musical events are solely verbal and discursive in nature. The topical shifts cued by recitative intrusions serve both to create a separate space for asides and dialogue (cf. Hatten 1994, 175–84) and to undermine or redirect progress toward the primary dramatic goals of the songful numbers.

Implications

This study reveals that the numbers of *Figaro* involve a great deal of mismatch between the two systems of formal implication. Even in rare moments of alignment (such as a recitative cadence overlapping with a form-functional cadence, as in 'Cinque... dieci...'), the musical rhetoric strongly suggests that the two systems are incommensurate: instances of the recitative topic within closed numbers are truly disruptive *intrusions*, not mere substitutions or form-functional borrowings.

The two musical languages operate on parallel tracks, and the theatrical-expressive power of a recitative intrusion derives in no small part from its ability to sculpt a complicated musical temporality haunted by two pasts and foreseeing two futures. Such an effect is constructed in 'Susanna or via sortite', whose recitative intrusion follows on the heels of a deceptive cadence at the expected structural close of the number. Where songful music should respond to the DC with an attempt to replace the phrase's end with a new, more satisfactory cadence, the recitative intrusion moves forward within the new minor submediant tonality, treated as a *fait accompli* — as is typical of evaded cadences in recitative. For a moment, musical time is suspended, gesturing at the abject failure of the musical number as a tonal and dramatic process.

Keywords

Formal function, Mozart, music hermeneutics, opera buffa, recitative, schema theory, topic theory

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