

'Non tardar amato bene' Completed. But Not by Mozart

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to cope with the musical-dramatic imperative which he had set himself. In the longer run we could look to the even more ambitious and extended declamatory episodes in the two finales of *Die Zauberflöte*, but we might also note a certain stylistic continuity between them and that in *Die Entführung*.

Was Mozart in later years still hoping to take the

operatic medium further in this direction – did the agenda of October 1781 last, although perpetually frustrated by the existing theatrical conditions? It is possible, but at the same time he evidently also came to realize that there were methods of exploiting those conditions for serious artistic ends which were as yet invisible to him in October 1781.



'Non tardar amato bene' completed – but not by Mozart

John Platoff

In the last act of *Le nozze de Figaro*, Susanna sings her so-called 'Garden aria', 'Deh vieni non tardar'. This piece, which she really addresses to Figaro while teasing him by pretending to be awaiting the Count, is rightly hailed as one of the loveliest pieces in the opera. But its final form was not arrived at without difficulty. It is clear from the autograph score that Mozart and his librettist Da Ponte originally planned a rondò for Susanna, on the text 'Non tardar amato bene'. The composer drafted the introductory accompanied recitative and sketched 36 bars of a rondò in E-flat before abandoning the project.¹ Only near the very end of *Figaro's* composition, according to Alan Tyson, did Mozart decide on the 6/8 aria in F – 'Deh vieni non tardar' – that we hear today. Tyson notes that a sketch for 'Deh vieni' is found on the same page as a sketch for the opera's overture, 'surely a sign that it was written very late'. Moreover there is evidence in the autograph that the order of the final two arias before the Act IV finale, for Figaro and Susanna, was originally reversed: that Susanna's aria, initially to be the rondò in E-flat, was to precede Figaro's. Figaro's aria, 'Aprite un po' quegl'occhi', which is in E-flat, would also presumably have to have been in another key, to avoid consecutive numbers in E-flat.²

All this leaves us with a question or two. Why did Mozart abandon Susanna's rondò? Was the tonal plan a primary reason, or were there other factors? How did the matter of Figaro's aria fit into the decision? But before grappling with these matters we should take note of a surprising discovery in another Viennese opera from the same year.

On 12 July 1786, about two months after the first performance of *Le nozze de Figaro*, the Burgtheater presented its third new opera of the season: *Il demogorgone, ovvero Il filosofo confuso*, with a libretto by Da Ponte and music by Vincenzo Righini.³ In Act II, just before the last finale, the leading soprano character Lesbina sang an accompanied recitative and rondò in E-flat. My examination of the Viennese libretto and the manuscript score reveals that Righini's rondò sets precisely

the same text that Mozart abandoned: 'Non tardar amato bene'.⁴ Its music of course differs from Mozart's, despite the common key and the typical stylistic features of the rondò. But this discovery raises further questions: how did Righini wind up setting a text written for Mozart, and how could a text designed for a different opera fit successfully into *Il demogorgone*?

To evaluate why Mozart abandoned 'Non tardar' we must consider the nature of the operatic rondò.⁵ By the late 18th century the rondò was the standard show-piece aria for a leading female singer. It was an extended piece in two tempos – slow, then fast – that gave the soprano an opportunity to show off both her sustained cantabile singing and her agility in rapid coloratura passages. The main theme of each section of a rondò was repeated at least once. In the slow section, and perhaps the Allegro as well, this invited the singer to embellish the theme upon its return. Frequently the themes of the two sections were related melodically; frequently, as well, they depended on an underlying gavotte rhythm. As for the text, it was a generalized expression of emotional feelings, almost invariably comprising three quatrains of 'ottonario' (see the text of 'Non tardar' below). Typically the slow part of a rondò set the first two quatrains in ABA fashion, with the first quatrain used for the main theme and its return. The Allegro then used the final quatrain for its main theme, with earlier text repeated as needed for the contrasting material within the section.

Because the rondò was a piece essentially imported from opera seria, it was not always clear in an opera buffa who should sing one. For while the rondò was the showpiece owed to the prima donna it was more appropriate for seria or noble characters than comic ones. In *Così fan tutte*, for instance, Fiordiligi and Dorabella are virtually equivalent roles in size and importance; yet only Fiordiligi, the more serious of the sisters, sings a rondò ('Per pietà, ben mio, perdona'). In *Don Giovanni* the sole rondò ('Non mi dir, bell' idol mio') is sung by Donna Anna; Zerlina, though her role is as substantial, is clearly a buffa part, and Donna Elvira is



Vocal opening to Righini's 'Non tardar amato bene'

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mezzo carattere.

These concerns seem relevant to Mozart's change of heart about Susanna's rondò. On the one hand Nancy Storace, who played Susanna, was the indisputable female star of the Italian opera in Vienna. Her audience was certainly accustomed to hearing her sing a rondò.⁶ And the rondò was typically sung late in the last act, either soon before or immediately before the last act finale⁷ – in short just where Susanna's aria was to be. On the other hand Susanna is no seria figure, no noble lady; she is a chambermaid. *Le nozze di Figaro* has a noble lady, in the person of the Countess, and she has had her rondò: 'Dove sono i bei momenti' in Act III. Daniel Hertz points out that here in the last act 'Susanna is disguised as the countess, so it is not unreasonable that she should put on airs and sing something such as Rosina herself might'.⁸ Still, a grand rondò for the Countess and another for her maid disguised as the Countess could be seen as a bit excessive. Hertz offers further reasons why Mozart might have abandoned 'Non tardar': the problem noted earlier of two consecutive arias in E-flat (if Figaro's aria had already been conceived in that key – of this we cannot be sure); a climactic melodic gesture in 'Non tardar' that comes uncomfortably close to a comparable one (using the same words: 'giusto ciel') in 'Giusto ciel, che conoscete', the well-known aria for Rosina in Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*; and the possibility that Mozart decided against a piece 'that laid on the pathos with such heavy brushstrokes' as his incomplete 'Non tardar'.⁹

Whatever the reason or combination of reasons, Mozart decided very late in the game to drop 'Non tardar amato bene' and write a much different kind of aria for Susanna.¹⁰ And what this meant for Lorenzo Da Ponte is that the overworked poet to the Italian theatre was left with a perfectly serviceable rondò text. Small wonder, one might argue, that 'Non tardar' found its way so rapidly into another opera buffa.

Il demogorgone is not one of Da Ponte's better efforts. It has the usual pair of lovers, Countess Lesbina and Count Ricciardo, and a secondary couple, Count Roberto and his wife Albetta; but the action is dominated by Demogorgone, the 'confused philosopher' who is relentlessly mocked throughout the opera and

humiliated at its end by the clever plotting of the women. The target of Da Ponte's derision in this libretto is the Abbate Giambattista Casti, a talented poet who had written librettos for three recent operatic successes in Vienna and was a dangerous rival for Da Ponte's job.¹¹ Da Ponte's endless and unsubtle jabs at the foolish philosopher evidently made for a long evening, for the opera (like Righini's previous effort in Vienna) received only four performances.

Because of the relatively nonspecific character of 'Non tardar amato bene' – typical of the high-flown generalities of a rondò text – Da Ponte could work it into his new libretto without much difficulty. When she sings it Lesbina is alone. She has been quarreling with Ricciardo and knows that he will soon arrive to beg her forgiveness.

Non tardar amato bene,
Vieni, vola al seno mio,
A finir le lunghe pene
A dar tregua a [tuoi] sospir.

*Do not delay, my beloved,
come, fly to my breast,
to end these long torments,
to give respite to your sighs.*

Giusto ciel! perchè mai tardi?
E sì lento il tuo desir?
Crederò che tu non ardi
[Quando avrai sì poco ardir.]

*Just heavens! why do you delay,
is your desire so slow?
I shall believe that you do not burn
if you show so little boldness.*

Care donne che sapete
Quanto è dolce il perdonar;
Il tormento comprendete
Che mi costa l'aspettar.¹²

*Dear ladies, who know
how sweet it is to forgive,
you understand the pain
it costs me to wait.*

Da Ponte had to make only two minor alterations in the two quatrains set by Mozart to make them suitable for Righini, but neither change is an improvement.¹³ At the end of the first quatrain 'miei sospir' became 'tuoi sospir'. In Mozart's setting Susanna was calling Figaro to ease her sighs; here, more awkwardly, Lesbina calls Ricciardo to ease his own sighs. Likewise in the second quatrain the revised version is less successful. The original last line was 'se mi fai così languir' – 'if you make me languish so' – again referring to Susanna's own desire for a reunion with her lover. In replacing that line, not appropriate for Lesbina's situation, Da Ponte has followed a line ending 'ardi' with one ending 'ardir' – the kind of repetitiveness he is usually careful to avoid.

Like these two changes in the initial quatrains, the final quatrain testifies to a certain lack of imagination that may have resulted from Da Ponte's haste. We cannot know, of course, whether some version of this quatrain is what the poet initially wrote for Mozart's Susanna. (In its present form it would not have been suitable, because the reference to forgiveness does not apply to Susanna's situation.) What is clear is that the quatrain relies on a formula that Da Ponte employed quite frequently at just this point in his Viennese career: a call to listeners outside the frame of the drama itself, to those (most often ladies, occasionally Gods) who know or understand. The rhetorical figure is familiar from the opening of Cherubino's aria from *Figaro*: 'Voi che sapete / Che cosa è amor, / Donne, vedete / S'io l'ho nel cor'.¹⁴ But it appears many other times in Da Ponte's librettos of 1785-86, nearly always in the final stanza of a text as a marked change from the preceding stanzas. In the closing couplet from a duet in *Gli equivoci* (1786), the two sisters sing 'Donne voi che amor seguite / Dite s'è da paventar'.¹⁵ And one finds this final quatrain in an aria for Ricciardo in *Il demogorgone*, heard only minutes before Lesbina's rondò: 'Ah chi conosce amore, / Ah mi compiangia almen; / Chi sa cos'è timore / Di perdere il suo ben'.¹⁶

To be fair, if we find Da Ponte guilty of saving time by reusing a spare rondò text, and of revising it in less than an imaginative fashion, we must also acknowledge the pressures under which he was working. As librettist to the Italian theatre he was of course responsible for producing librettos for new operas. Beyond this, though, his tasks included revising as needed the librettos of operas imported from other cities, overseeing the publication of the librettos and, as Hertz has recently shown, directing the stage action of the operas.¹⁷ And during late 1785 and 1786 he wrote a staggering number of words, creating librettos for Martin y Soler's *Il burbero di buon cuore* (first performed 4 January 1786), Gazzaniga's *Il finto cieco* (20 February), *Figaro* (1 May), *Il demogorgone* (12 July), Martin y Soler's *Una cosa rara* (17 November), and Storace's *Gli equivoci* (27 December). That most of these were adaptations from other literary sources in no way diminishes the magnitude of the work involved – Da Ponte was a busy man.

The music of Righini's rondò illustrates many of the typical elements of this rather conventionalized aria type, along with one or two distinctive features (Ex. 1). The simplicity of the opening theme and its initial melodic descent are common – see by comparison the opening of a rondò by Giacomo Rust from *Il marito indolente* (1784) (Ex. 2).¹⁸ But Righini's melody surprises in two ways: with the vi chord rather than the tonic in its second bar, and with the asymmetrical 2+3 bar phrasing of the first line. The division, if not the asymmetry, is suggested by the text, with its caesura after the first three syllables. The second phrase, as may be seen, is a four-bar phrase with a standard 1+1+2 organization. Its descending approach to the half cadence is identical to that in Rust's melody and occurs in a number of other rondòs from the period. While quite different, the theme of Mozart's abandoned rondò may be seen to belong to the same family (Ex. 3). Its descending melody, though more obviously triadic, features the same dotted rhythms. The distinctive feature of Mozart's theme is the surprise in bar 7, when

Ex. 1 LESBINA
Larghetto

Non tar - dar, a - ma - to be - ne vie - ni
ne, vie - ni vo - la al se - no mi - o,
ra - va, sos - pi ra - va ques - to co - re,
pe - ne a dar tre - gua vi

Ex. 2 METILDE
Andante

Pen - sa oh Di - o, che ques - to co - re sos - pi
ra - va, sos - pi ra - va ques - to co - re,
pe - ne a dar tre - gua vi

Ex. 3 SUSANNA

Non tar - dar a - ma - to be - ne vie - ni
vo - la al se - no mi - o, a fi - nir le lun - ghe
pe - ne a dar tre - gua vi

the restated opening triadic descent continues to a low B-flat; the deceptive resolution to a vi chord used early in Righini's melody follows here in bar 8.

The Allegro theme of the Righini rondò features a conventional antecedent-consequent pair of four-bar phrases in a clear gavotte rhythm. Again the corresponding theme of the rondò by Rust shows marked similarities (Exx. 4 and 5). Mozart's sketch breaks off before the Allegro, so we cannot know what his theme would have been; but it might have featured much the same gavotte orientation, if we may judge by the Allegro theme of the Countess's 'Dove sono' (Ex. 6).

Ex. 4 LESBINA
Allegro

ca - re don - ne che sa - pe - te quan - to è
dol - ce il per - do - nar, il tor - men - to com - pren -
de te che mi cos - ta l'as - pet - tar.

Ex. 5 METILDE
Allegro

Mes - chi - nel - la, ab - ban - do - na - ta, non mi
res - ta ch'il do - lor.

Ex. 6 COUNTESS
Allegro

mi por - tas - se u - na spe - ran - za di can -
giar l'in - gra - to cor.

What we learn from the discovery of Righini's rondò and its relationship to Susanna's abandoned aria tells us less about Mozart, of course, than about Da Ponte's methods and about the nature of the rondò as a genre. A busy and eminently practical librettist, Da Ponte was not about to let a perfectly usable text go to waste – a little tinkering made it fit in another context. And this easy substitution was made possible by the very general and rather elevated rhetoric deemed appropriate for rondò texts. Because they are invariably the laments of unhappy lovers or, conversely, calls to love (as in this case), they could be made to apply to virtually any operatic plot. Their final quatrains present some shift of emphasis, as dramatic justification for a new musical section, but this need not be any more specific. It could instead, as in 'Non tardar', rely on a broader appeal to listeners outside the drama: knowing women, fate, or even the all-knowing Gods in heaven. Awareness of this thoroughly standard approach further suggests that we rethink our interpretation of a famous, and famously problematical, rondò by Mozart: Donna Anna's 'Non mi dir bell'idol mio'. Perhaps her coldly distant final couplet, 'Forse un giorno il cielo ancora / Sentirà pietà di me',¹⁹ should be seen for the cliché it is, rather than as an expression of her insensitivity to the feelings of Don Ottavio. In the final peroration of her aria Donna Anna may be understood as a generalized, idealized figure, a grand operatic heroine singing of universal feelings: pain, love, longing. Would it really matter very much if for her words one substituted the final quatrain of Lesbina's rondò, or for that matter the last quatrain of the rondò by Rust quoted earlier: 'Meschinella abbandonata, / Non mi resta che il dolor. / Perchè darmi, o sorte ingrata, / Perchè darmi questo cor?'²⁰




Finally, our recognition of the rather general and distant quality of rondò texts suggests another reason why Mozart might have chosen not to complete his rondò for Susanna. Whatever its merits, the rondò is not well-suited to particularly personal expression. This is apparent both in 'Non mi dir', a piece often treated harshly by writers on Mozart, and in 'Dove sono'. The latter opens with a lovely and deeply-felt Andantino, but one which is rather unusual; its melody bears little relation to the slow theme of a typical rondò (compare Exx. 1-3). And the aria's more typical final Allegro, while musically attractive, surely adds little to our knowledge of the Countess beyond a generalized sense of her determination. Because Mozart aspired to a more individual and personal expression for Susanna in Act IV – her sole previous aria, 'Venite inginocchiatevi', is an action piece that reveals little about her – he must have seen that the conventional form and style of the rondò denied him the freedom he required. 'Deh vieni non tardar', with its unusual text in 'endecasillabi', its three-bar phrases, its delicate scoring for solo woodwinds and pizzicato strings, is a marvellous evocation of the inviting atmosphere of the garden by night. It is also, with the 6/8 Andante of the pastorale,²¹ music more fitting for an enlightened chambermaid than the high-born rondò could ever be. As for 'Non tardar amato bene'? Mozart could happily leave that text for someone else – perhaps Vincenzo Righini.

References

- ¹There are two sketches for the rondò, both transcribed in the Appendix, vol. 2, pp.638-41, of the Neue Mozart-Ausgabe edition of *Figaro*, ed. Ludwig Finscher (1973). The first is a 30-bar sketch of the rondò melody alone; according to Alan Tyson (personal communication), its current location is unknown. The second sketch comprises the introductory recitative (with bass and first violin cues) and 36 bars of the rondò for voice and bass only. This longer sketch, according to Dr Tyson, has been divided. The portion with the recitative and bars 1-7 of the rondò was auctioned by Leo Liepmannssohn, Berlin, in 1929; at one time it was in a French private collection. The portion with bars 8-36 of the rondò was sold by Sotheby's in London in May 1990, and apparently acquired by an American collector. I am grateful to Dr Tyson for generously providing this information.
- ²Alan Tyson, 'Le nozze di Figaro: Lessons from the Autograph Score', *Musical Times* CXXII (1981); reprinted in *Mozart: Studies of the Autograph Scores* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1987), pp.122-24.
- ³Righini (1756-1812) was a well-known operatic tenor and singing teacher as well as a composer. He wrote a successful *Il convitato di pietra* for Prague in 1776. In Vienna he was the director of the Italian opera and singing master to Princess Elisabeth of Württemberg. His one previous opera buffa for the Viennese theatre had been *L'incontro inaspettato* in 1785, with a libretto by Nunziato Porta. It failed, receiving only four performances. See Otto Michtner, *Das alte Burgtheater als Opernbühne* (Vienna, 1970), pp.187-88, 391-92 n.8.
- ⁴The libretto was published by Kurzbek [sic], Vienna in 1786 (a copy is found in the Musiksammlung of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, 641.432-A.M. 6, 13 TB). The only known score belongs to the Musikabteilung of the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin (KH 4655).
- ⁵Some of the following discussion is drawn from Daniel Heartz, 'Mozart and his Italian Contemporaries: *La clemenza di Tito*', *Mozart-Jahrbuch* (1978-79); rev. in Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, ed. Thomas Bauman (Berkeley, Cal., 1990), pp.306-07. See also Helga Lühning, 'Die Rondo-Arie im späten 18. Jahrhundert: Dramatischer Gehalt und musikalischer Bau', *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft V* (1981), pp.219-46.
- ⁶For example in *Gli sposi malcontenti*, with music by her brother Stephen, first performed on 1 June 1785, and Martin y Soler's *Il burbero di buon cuore*, which opened on 4 January 1786.
- ⁷This may not be true of late 18th-century Italian opera generally, but it was standard practice in operas written for Vienna in the 1780s.
- ⁸Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, p.151.
- ⁹*Ibid.* For a comparison of the two melodic gestures see Exx. 8.2 and 8.16, pp.142 and 151.
- ¹⁰In March 1786 Mozart presented a concert performance of his *Idomeneo* that included a newly-composed rondò for Idamante (K.490). Its text (quite possibly by Da Ponte) begins 'Non temer amato bene'. We cannot know, however, whether Mozart wrote 'Non temer amato bene' after having already given up 'Non tardar amato bene', or whether the resemblance of the two opening lines was another factor in his decision to abandon Susanna's rondò.
- ¹¹The three operas were Paisiello's *Il re Teodoro in Venezia* (1784), an enormous hit; Salieri's *La grotta di Trofonio* (1785); and Salieri's one-act *Prima la musica, poi la parola* (1786), in which Casti had made fun of Da Ponte.
- ¹²Text as it appears in the Kurzbek libretto. Brackets mark words that differ from the version of the text set by Mozart.
- ¹³The text of the Mozart version, with its preceding recitative, is given in Tim Carter, *W. A. Mozart: 'Le nozze di Figaro'*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge, 1987), p.71. It is also transcribed, along with the music of the longer sketch, in Alfred Ebert, 'Die erste Fassung der Susannen-Arie im 4. Akt der "Hochzeit des Figaro"', *Mitteilungen der Mozartgemeinde XXX* (1910), pp.207-19.
- ¹⁴'You who know what love is, ladies, see if it is what I have in my heart'.
- ¹⁵'Ladies, you who understand love, say if it is to be feared'.
- ¹⁶'Ah, you who know love, at least pity me; you understand the fear of losing one's beloved'. Comparable passages occur in three arias from *Il burbero di buon cuore*, two arias from *Una cosa rara*, a duet from *Figaro*, and another aria from *Il demorgorgone*. In addition the last quatrain of 'Non temer amato bene' uses the same formula. Further examples may be found in Lühning, 'Die Rondo-Arie', pp.228-33.
- ¹⁷Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, pp.89-105.
- ¹⁸For purposes of comparison the two examples from Rust's rondò (Exx. 2 and 5) have been transposed to E-flat from the original key of A. The manuscript score of Rust's opera is in the Musiksammlung of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna (K.T. 283). For other examples of rondò themes see Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, p.308, and Lühning, 'Die Rondo-Arie'.
- ¹⁹'Perhaps one day heaven may yet feel pity for me'.
- ²⁰'Poor abandoned one, nothing remains to me but sorrow. Why, cruel fate, do you give me this heart?'
- ²¹Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: 'Le nozze di Figaro' and 'Don Giovanni'* (Chicago, 1983), p.174.

Errata

The following corrections should be noted by readers of the article 'Stages in the Development of Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier II*' by Richard D. P. Jones in the September issue of *MT*.

The contents of G2 (p.441, col. 2) are: C, c sharp fg (in c), G fg. In the elaboration of the C sharp fugue at stage A1 (p.442, col. 2),  was corrected to , not vice versa. The fragment of the E flat prelude in B1 (Ex. 2b, p.443, col. 1) is entitled 'Prelude ex dis +', and the f prelude in the same source (p.444, col. 1), 'Prelude 12 ex f b +'. Finally, the reading of source-group D in bar 81 of the b flat prelude (p.446, col. 1) is  "e" flat d" flat.