



2018

Reflections of the Don: Zerlina's Empowerment Narrative and the Inclusion of "Per queste tue manine" in Don Giovanni

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**Reflections of the Don:
Zerlina's Empowerment Narrative and
the Inclusion of "Per Queste tue Manine" in *Don Giovanni***

by
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in
Musicology (primary major) and Master of Music in Vocal Performance (secondary major)
in the School of Music, Jordan College of the Arts of Butler University

Thesis Defense: 08/08/18

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Date of Final Thesis Approval: 8-18-18 Advisor: 

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ABSTRACT

After the premiere of *Don Giovanni* in Prague, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Lorenzo Da Ponte brought their opera to Vienna on May 7, 1788. One point of interest in the Viennese version of the score is the added duet “Per queste tue manine.” In this duet, the enraged Zerlina overpowers the bewildered servant Leporello with a handkerchief, a razor, and passion. She constrains the floundering fool and punishes him for his misconduct. In most modern performances, companies look no further than the Prague version of the score. Additionally, singers often portray Zerlina as either a mischievous temptress or a virginal peasant girl. Since modern opera companies often dismiss the Viennese score of *Don Giovanni* as insignificant and scholars often deem the role of Zerlina as simplistic, a holistic analysis of the role of Zerlina is needed. Viewing the interpretations of her character by Kristi Brown-Montesano and Wye Jamison Allanbrook through the lens of eighteenth-century gender politics and my own musical and literary interpretations results in a more complete understanding of the peasant girl. Through an analysis of the Viennese version of Zerlina’s character, I contend that Zerlina functions as a mirror-image foil to Don Giovanni. As Zerlina gains autonomy through the control of her own body, the Don loses his power over others and eventually his own life. This multi-dimensional understanding of Zerlina’s character is only possible if “Per queste tue manine” is taken into consideration.

Chapter One Introduction

“Zerlina, [with] a razor in her hand, drags Leporello in by the hair.”¹ These jarring stage directions introduce “Per queste tue manine,” the tenth scene in Act II of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Lorenzo Da Ponte’s Viennese version of *Don Giovanni*. To fully understand the drama and irony of this duet, it is necessary to contextualize the scene in relation to the opera as a whole.

Don Giovanni tracks the namesake libertine as he seduces and beds every woman with whom he comes into contact. The opera opens with a tussle between Donna Anna and Don Giovanni. The Don sneaks in through Donna Anna’s window with the intention of sleeping with her. Donna Anna attempts to catch the Don in the midst of his misdeed, and her desperate cries rouse the attention of her father, Il Commendatore. Her father then finds himself in a duel with Don Giovanni, and in an act of cowardice or self-preservation, Don Giovanni kills him. These violent acts function as an introduction to the libertine’s character. As the opera progresses, Mozart and Da Ponte introduce the audience to two more of Don Giovanni’s conquests: Donna Elvira and Zerlina. The libertine finds Zerlina on her wedding day as she blissfully prepares to marry her lover, Masetto. Using his charm and wit, the Don lures the young peasant girl away from Masetto and convinces her to run away with him; it is only through the interference of Donna Elvira, a previous conquest of Don Giovanni, that the young girl is saved and returned to her betrothed. Although the conniving, narcissistic libertine escapes all

¹ “ZERLINA con coltello alla mano conduce fuori LEPORELLO per i capelli.” Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Lorenzo Da Ponte, and Gary Kahn, *Overture Opera Guides: Don Giovanni* (Richmond: Overture, 2010), 197. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Don Giovanni*, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, series 2, workgroup 5, vol. 17, ed. Wolfgang Plath and Wolfgang Rehm (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag Kassel, 2014), 495.

punishment and consequences in the course of the opera, his inability to repent results in his ultimate damnation to hell.

The point of interest in “Per queste tue manine” lies in the fact that a woman, let alone a conquest of Don Giovanni, finds autonomy and power through sexuality and violence. In this scene, which Mozart and Da Ponte added for the Viennese premiere of the opera seven months after its premiere in Prague, the enraged Zerlina overpowers the bewildered servant Leporello with a handkerchief, a razor, and passion. She constrains the floundering fool and punishes him for his misconduct. At this moment in the opera, Zerlina believes Don Giovanni’s servant assaulted her betrothed; therefore, as an act of vengeance, she takes matters into her own hands. In true Mozart fashion, however, the opera abounds with trickery and deceit. It was not Leporello who attacked Zerlina’s partner but rather Don Giovanni disguised as Leporello. In the context of the opera, this scene complicates the characterization of the simple peasant girl. Notably, present-day performances of *Don Giovanni* rarely include this complex duet. Kristi Brown-Montesano suggests that the omission of this scene may be due to audiences feeling uncomfortable with a violent, powerful Zerlina.²

The compositional origin of “Per queste tue manine” further contributes to limited performances of the scene. After premiering the opera in Prague on October 29, 1787, Mozart brought it to Vienna on May 7, 1788. In his study of the Prague and Viennese premieres of *Don Giovanni*, Ian Woodfield recounts Da Ponte’s claim that “everyone except the composer thought that the [Prague performance of the] work was somehow

² Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart’s Operas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 79–80.

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flawed.”³ This led Mozart to make several changes to the score before the performance in Vienna. Woodfield clarifies that many of the changes Mozart made were due to the skill level of the performers, the excessive length of the production, and the lack of funding. In the hustle of rearranging pieces for vocalists’ ranges and cutting inessential numbers from the work, Mozart and Da Ponte added “Per queste tue manine.”⁴

Many modern opera companies look no further than the Prague score when performing *Don Giovanni*. It is reasonable to assume that this performance practice stems from concerns for authenticity; because *Don Giovanni* first premiered in Prague, companies usually accept this version as the most credible. On the other hand, many scholars, including Woodfield, agree that eighteenth-century musical society did not view operatic works as “fixed” entities in need of authentic conservation; rather, audiences and musicians alike viewed opera as a “fluid, constantly evolving enterprise.”⁵ Many musicians today assume that they should recreate compositions of the canon in a way that accurately reflects original performances.⁶ This narrow understanding of operatic works eliminates the possibility for performances of a composer’s own non-canonical scores. In the case of *Don Giovanni*, Woodfield explains that edits, copying errors, and urgent pre-performance changes in fact make it impossible to identify the original version of the

³ Ian Woodfield, *The Vienna Don Giovanni* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), 1.

⁴ Ibid., 2. Volkmar Braunbehrens, *Mozart in Vienna, 1781–1791* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 304.

⁵ Woodfield, *The Vienna Don Giovanni*, 1.

⁶ Lydia Goehr outlines two opposing viewpoints in relationship to the canon. “Conservatives defenders” view works within the canon as “having stood the test of time.” On the other hand, “liberal defenders” argue that a work in the canon should be “treated as open and revisable, and not like Polykleitos’s statue or Moses’s tablets, as eternally set in stone.” Lydia Goehr, “In the Shadow of the Canon,” *The Musical Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 312.

score.⁷ There is no single *Urtext* of *Don Giovanni* and no single score to consider in both characterization and performance.

Because scholars often dismiss the role of Zerlina as simplistic, and opera companies often dismiss the Viennese score of *Don Giovanni* as insignificant, a holistic analysis of the role of Zerlina is needed.⁸ A fuller understanding of the Viennese version and the role of Zerlina in it uncovers a new level of complexity in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and in turn allows women to portray Zerlina as a strong, complex female role. In modern performances, singers often portray her as either a mischievous temptress or a virginal peasant girl. This over-simplification of Zerlina implies that women cannot be complex, multifaceted creatures, both sexual and pure. By adding this scene to his work, Mozart and Da Ponte expand the possibilities for how performers interpret Zerlina.

Zerlina's physical nature throughout *Don Giovanni* further necessitates an incorporation of "Per queste tue manine" into the discussion of her character. Zerlina's two arias, "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto" and "Vedrai, carino," both emphasize the peasant girl's physicality. Whether she teasingly requests physical beatings or romantically pleads for sensual caresses, Zerlina constantly reminds her audience of her carnal presence as well as her physical touch. Mozart and Da Ponte further magnify Zerlina's thirst for human contact through the addition of "Per queste tue manine," but within the duet, her human contact becomes outwardly violent. In this respect, Zerlina becomes the physical, female counterpart to Don Giovanni. In contrast to a man who physically forces

⁷ Woodfield, *The Vienna Don Giovanni*, 1–12.

⁸ Two such scholars who dismiss Zerlina as simplistic include James M. Keller and Charles Ford. Keller refers to Zerlina as "remarkably uncomplicated," and Ford asserts that "she contributes nothing of any substance, musically or dramatically, to the drama." James M. Keller, "The Women: James M. Keller Listens to the Three Ladies of *Don Giovanni*," *Opera News*, March 2017, 26. Charles Ford, *Music, Sexuality and the Enlightenment in Mozart's Figaro, Don Giovanni and Così fan tutte* (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 146.

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women to submit to his sensual desires, Zerlina is a woman who seduces and physically defends her betrothed; she represents the moral, female complement to the immoral libertine. Through an analysis of the Viennese version of Zerlina's character, I contend that Zerlina functions as a mirror-image foil to Don Giovanni. As Zerlina gains autonomy through the control of her own body, the Don loses his power over others and eventually his own life. This multi-dimensional understanding of Zerlina's character is only possible if "Per queste tue manine" is taken into consideration.⁹

In order to analyze the role of Zerlina, I closely engage with the music, libretto, and stage directions of her two arias "Batti batti, o bel Masetto" and "Vedrai, carino" as well as the duet "Là ci darem la mano" to establish the basis of the peasant girl's physical nature. Through this lens, I then approach the duet "Per queste tue manine" to interpret its function in the development of Zerlina's character. Viewing the interpretations of her character by Kristi Brown-Montesano and Wye Jamison Allanbrook through the lens of eighteenth-century gender politics and my own musical and literary interpretations results in a more complete understanding of the peasant girl. This study encourages performers, opera companies, and audiences alike to search for a deeper understanding of female players on the operatic stage. In the words of Brown-Montesano, "the only way to make Don Giovanni worthy of our time, if indeed that is possible at all, is to listen more closely to the women."¹⁰ As twenty-first century society navigates the complexity of gender

⁹ It is important here to mention that I do not use the word "mirroring" in the same way that Sherry Lee observes mirroring in Alexander Zemlinsky's *A Florentine Tragedy*. Lee argues that the men do not see Bianca as herself but rather they see their "own reflected image" when they gaze upon her form. Essentially, the men project conceptions of themselves onto Bianca. In contrast, I use the word "mirroring" to refer to the way the audience can interpret the relationship between Zerlina and Don Giovanni. As Don Giovanni loses his control over others, Zerlina gains autonomy and power. Sherry D. Lee, "A Florentine Tragedy, or Woman as Mirror," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18, no. 1 (Mar. 2006): 37.

¹⁰ Kristi Brown-Montesano, "Holding Don Giovanni Accountable," *Musicology Now*, last modified December 5, 2017, <http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2017/12/holding-don-giovanni-accountable.html>.

politics and what it means to give a voice to sexual assault survivors, musicians must give women agency on the operatic stage.

Chapter 2
Mozart's Vienna:
The Josephine Empire and Gender Roles of Eighteenth-Century Europe

After *Don Giovanni* premiered in Prague on October 29, 1787, the composer and librettist made additions and alterations for its Viennese premiere on May 7, 1788. These edits include the addition of “Per queste tue manine,” an aggressive duet between Don Giovanni’s servant Leporello and a peasant girl Zerlina. The alterations that Mozart and Da Ponte tailored to an eighteenth-century Viennese audience were not enough, however, to excite the people; Julian Rushton argues that the addition of superfluous comical elements to the predominantly serious work contributed to an unsuccessful Viennese premiere.¹¹ In this chapter I explore the social, economic, and sexual context from which the original Viennese audience may have interpreted *Don Giovanni* in general and “Per queste tue manine” in particular. The opera auditorium functioned in part as a mirror of society itself; as divas performed their theatrical roles onstage, nobles, aristocrats, and peasants performed their societal roles in the opera auditorium. Furthermore, this chapter explores how Viennese society would have understood and possibly related to the gender politics revolving around the role of Zerlina.

¹¹ Rushton elaborates,

From the tradition of Viennese theatre and the type of alteration made, it is apparent that there was already a divergence between the increasingly coarse comedy and the serious aspects, so that the precarious harmony of the original conception was already damaged under the eyes of Mozart and Da Ponte themselves.

Julian Rushton, *W.A. Mozart: Don Giovanni* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 68.

Josephine Vienna

An intimate understanding of the Viennese social hierarchy and opera-going culture during the eighteenth century informed how contemporary audience members interacted with *Don Giovanni*. The class structure inspired what Mozart and Da Ponte put on stage, and the opera-going experience influenced the audience's opinions toward the operatic works. Although it impossible to absolutely recreate these experiences for modern audience members, it is helpful to understand the audience for whom Mozart and Da Ponte composed the duet "Per queste tue manine." As a means of exploring the mindsets of these eighteenth-century Viennese audience members, I investigate how Viennese culture under Emperor Joseph II interacted with *opera buffa*.

Emperor Joseph II (r. 1756-90) maintained a particular affinity for music and theater, which culminated in his interest in opera.¹² It was the death of his mother, Maria Theresa, that gave Joseph II freedom to focus on and influence the operatic tradition.¹³ John A. Rice highlights the extent of the emperor's control in an anecdote about Leopold Mozart asking his friend Franz Heufeld for assistance in winning young Wolfgang a musical directorship in Vienna. Heufeld replied,

To recommend anyone to the sovereign would be a sure means of not finding a place for the person recommended. Nor is there any middleman through whom he could be approached, since, being himself a connoisseur, he arranges and chooses everything according to his own idea and fancy. Everybody knows this, and no one dares to come forward with suggestions and recommendations.¹⁴

¹² Daniel Snowman, *The Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010), 92–93.

¹³ As a boy, Joseph II shared his imperial duties with his mother Maria Theresa, but her death in 1780 allowed him to freely rule the Holy Roman Empire without parental constraint or limits. Andrew Steptoe, *The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas: The Cultural and Musical Background to Le nozze di Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Così fan tutte* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 18.

¹⁴ John A. Rice, *Mozart on the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 62.

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Although composers aimed to entertain the public as a means of gaining revenue and fame, they first had to attain the approval of the emperor in order to perform their works.

As the emperor, Joseph II had the power to influence the public's taste as well as the Viennese economic system, which in turn supported the creation of new artistic works. For example, Joseph II implemented his extraordinary theatrical power during the dress rehearsal of *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786). Mozart and Da Ponte originally cut the dancers from the Act III fandango (finale to Act III) to comply with the emperor's ban on dance performance in the opera house. When the emperor attended the dress rehearsal of the opera, however, he noted the awkward lack of staging during this scene and demanded the inclusion of a staged dance, insisting, "very well, let Da Ponte have as many [dancers] as he needs."¹⁵ Additionally, under Joseph II's guidance, Vienna flourished financially, especially in comparison with other cities in the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁶ In general, when money is readily available, people have the ability to commission and monetarily support musical works. This economic situation allowed for the blossoming of new operatic works in eighteenth-century Vienna.

Under the control of Emperor Joseph II, Viennese lifestyle had definitive structure that frequently intersected with, and revolved around, the arts. Men and women alike costumed themselves in order to attend musical performances, to socialize with friends and acquaintances, and to perform their class and gender roles. Andrew Steptoe explains that women of higher social status spent the majority of their mornings primping for the day's activities, indulged in "eating, gambling, [and] conversation" in the afternoon, and attended private musical performances, dances, or operatic productions in

¹⁵ Snowman, *The Gilded Stage*, 84–85.

¹⁶ Steptoe, *The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas*, 15.

the late evening.¹⁷ The performance of class required both lavish costuming and frequent attendance at musical productions.

Class relations within eighteenth-century Vienna were especially complex. Prestige was a commodity for purchase, and social mobility was available to those who could pay the price of admission. Steptoe explains that wealthy bureaucrats bought titles of nobility from the emperor, and these titles carried direct benefits in political and social circles. This practice resulted in a Viennese identity crisis; old and new members of the nobility were forced to coexist and reconcile their differences. Additionally, since hypothetically anyone could purchase a noble title, identifying those within the nobility became difficult for all members of Viennese society. It therefore became standard to determine someone's social ranking by the way they dressed.¹⁸ Much like performing a role on the operatic stage, any member of Viennese society could play the role of a wealthy noble; with the correct costume, one could earn respect from his or her peers.¹⁹

Within the theatre auditorium, opera-goers acted out their class designations. During performances, candles and candelabras lit the opera house; this lighting allowed opera-goers to easily see other audience members and encouraged distractions and socializing.²⁰ While some audience members listened to and enjoyed the operatic performances, many remained interested in observing and chatting with other opera-goers; attending an opera was more of a social experience than an artistic endeavor. John

¹⁷ Ibid., 24–26.

¹⁸ Ibid., 15–17.

¹⁹ Mary Hunter reaffirms that the primary concern of Josephine Era Viennese society was this dichotomy between social stability and social change; although individuals were socialized to believe in a rigid social hierarchy, anyone with the right amount of money could purchase a noble title and move up in the ranks. Mary Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna: A Poetics of Entertainment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 57–58

²⁰ Steptoe, *The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas*, 44.

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Rosselli explains that since the nobility, aristocracy, and common people all held specific locations within the theatre based upon the price of the opera boxes, the seating arrangement of an eighteenth-century opera house encouraged the stratified framework of the society.²¹ Furthermore, audiences constantly watched and mirrored the actions of their rulers.²² To see and to be seen remained an important function of attending an opera. Excluding the price of admission, anyone was capable of attending an operatic production.²³ Ticket price may have prohibited many from attending, but the open atmosphere of the opera allowed many classes of society to intermingle. Opera houses allowed lower tiers of society to observe the nobility and imagine what life would be like if they themselves had the ability to purchase a noble title.

Opera buffa remained particularly in fashion during Mozart's residence in Vienna. As the name implies, this genre of opera contains comical undertones; nonetheless, there is more to *opera buffa* than simply a humorous framework. *Opera buffa* provided an artistic formula that allowed composers and librettists to comment upon the complexities of the social structure. It emerged as a Neapolitan popular art around the turn of the seventeenth century; however, the genre's use of regional dialect resulted in its unpopularity among the aristocracy. It was not until Pergolesi's comical intermezzo *La serva padrona* (1733) that the *buffa* style achieved popular recognition.²⁴ Hunter elaborates that *opera buffa* typically incorporates a wide range of characters with

²¹ John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: The Role of the Impresario* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 42–43.

²² Rice, *Mozart on the Stage*, 196.

²³ Volkmar Braunbehrens, *Mozart in Vienna, 1781–1791* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 144.

²⁴ Ruggero Vené, "The Origin of 'Opera Buffa,'" *The Musical Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Jan. 1935): 35–36.

varying life perspectives and personalities; an “accident of location or loose connection” frequently brings these wide-ranging characters together.²⁵

Nonetheless, eighteenth-century Viennese *opera buffa* often reinforced the class hierarchy.²⁶ As an example, *Don Giovanni* follows a group of female characters who are united through the libertine’s sexual exploits. Mozart and Da Ponte’s music and dramatic content separate the women into three social strata: Donna Anna is a betrothed noble woman, Donna Elvira is a lovestruck aristocrat, and Zerlina is a betrothed peasant. Mary Hunter argues that *opera buffa* promotes the “immutability” of the social class structure.²⁷ Each character remains firmly within their designated social class from the beginning to the end of the opera. Much like the social structure of Vienna, there is an intermingling of social classes within *Don Giovanni*, but no character gains or loses social status.

Women of Eighteenth-Century Europe

Alongside the nuanced social hierarchy that existed in Vienna when Mozart and Da Ponte collaborated on *Don Giovanni*, eighteenth-century Vienna followed strict guidelines surrounding womanhood and gender roles. Many aspects of Zerlina’s character in general and “Per queste tue manine” in particular navigate these eighteenth-century conceptions of gender and female obligation. The duet exhibits class and gender role reversals as a female peasant physically dominates a male servant. Zerlina’s relationship and monetary struggles transform her sexual evolution into a profound

²⁵ Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna*, 63–64.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

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narrative of female triumph. To understand the nuances of “Per queste tue manine” as well as Zerlina’s exploitation and sexual exploration, it is necessary to investigate the lifestyle of eighteenth-century women of the lower class.

Due to societal expectations, women of the eighteenth century, especially members of the lower class like Zerlina, held limited agency and performed specific, gendered tasks. Olwen Hufton states, “from the moment a girl was born...she was defined by her relationship to a man.”²⁸ A girl passed from the care of her father immediately to the care of her husband; it was her primary duty to respect and please the men in her life.²⁹ Once she secured a husband, the young woman began her journey into motherhood. As the subordinate to her husband, most pre-Enlightenment Era girls were not guaranteed an education, but Jennine Hurl-Eamon clarifies that eighteenth-century girls of all classes were encouraged to receive an education solely to become suitable mothers. Advancements in biological science led society to view motherhood as the destiny of women.³⁰

In addition to marrying, attaining an appropriate education, and raising children, society expected women to protect and defend their own honor. Merry E. Wiesner clarifies that a woman’s honor was tied to her perceived sexual history; “whore” was the greatest insult a woman could receive.³¹ Since all women were expected to marry, female

²⁸ Olwen Hufton, *A History of Women in the West: III. Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, ed. Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993), 15–16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Women’s Roles in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010), 1, 5. Hufton, *A History of Women in the West*, 21.

³¹ Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe: New Approaches to European History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 40.

independence was not valued or expected. Eighteenth-century Europe did not encourage women to attain autonomy through education or sexual exploration.

In order to acquire a husband, unmarried girls first secured a dowry. When the audience meets Zerlina, she has already attained a dowry and a suitable fiancé. Audiences of Mozart's day would have understood the social situation and obligations tied to this dowry. Although she surrendered her dowry to her husband and relinquished her birthright to her father's property, she gained the protection and monetary support of her husband's estate.³² Unfortunately, not all families could afford dowries for their daughters; this meant that many lower-class girls had to work to attain a respectable dowry. Lower-class girls left home between the ages of twelve and fourteen to begin their earnings. The young girl first searched for an appropriate place of employment. The unemployed maiden brought along a letter of recommendation or a relative for endorsement; potential employers would then assess the girl's hygiene, morality, and needle work before deciding if she was an appropriate employee for their business.³³ Searching for work was not easy, and girls frequently traveled long distances to find job openings. Many girls looked for work on a nearby farm, but if nothing was available, they traveled into town for potential employment.³⁴

³² Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe: Volume One 1500–1800* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1996), 58, 60.

³³ *Ibid.*, 81, 85, 92. Hufton explores the difficulties a lower-class girl faced when searching for work: Her education had vaunted the virtues of cleanliness and a neat appearance. Given the housing conditions of the poor and the difficulties of obtaining water and maintaining a change of clothing, the ideal was not easy to achieve. Thus the most persuasive weapons at a young girl's disposal when she presented herself at an employer's door were a clean dress (however darned), a starched collar and apron (however old), stockings without holes, and shoes that had been polished. Simple issues of hygiene, which many modern readers may take for granted, were huge hurdles for young girls of the lower class. Simply presenting a well-kempt image may have meant the difference between securing a dowry and living the life of a spinster. The comforts of decent wealth had great influence on the marital outcomes of eighteenth-century women. Hufton, *A History of Women in the West*, 21.

³⁴ Hufton, *A History of Women in the West*, 18–19.

Eighteenth-century society expected girls to endure the emotional turmoil of leaving home at a young age in order to secure stable futures for themselves. In addition to these hardships, the working world was frequently difficult and unsafe for child laborers. Silk production marked one of the most demanding and deadly professions. Hufton states that young girls toiled away for long periods of time in excessively warm and damp environments, and they often “slept in cupboards and under looms.”³⁵ These unsafe working conditions often lead to lethal outbreaks of tuberculosis. If by chance the girls lived through this experience, they would receive their dowry payment at the end of their working period.³⁶ Girls often worked over a decade to collect an appropriate dowry for their admission into a marriage.³⁷ Audiences may have seen in Zerlina a dedicated silk worker who risked her youth in order to pursue marriage; in exchange for years of lethal labor, Zerlina secured a dowry and later a fiancé.

The ultimate goal of investing many girlhood years in farm or factory work was to ensure a stable marital arrangement. Due to the contractual understanding surrounding eighteenth-century marriages, audiences may have interpreted Zerlina and Masetto’s relationship as obligatory rather than romantic; therefore, Zerlina’s search for a more prestigious marital arrangement with Don Giovanni may have seemed logical. To establish a suitable marital arrangement, a woman’s family must first identify a promising partner. Ideal marital partners of the Enlightenment were of the same class. Families also considered religion, age, and personality when selecting potential partners for their children. Families did not consider beauty a valuable asset on the marriage

³⁵ Ibid., 23.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, 81.

market; the most desirable union was one of money and status.³⁸ On the other hand, since the poorer members of society had little to offer by means of status or wealth, monetarily strategic or prestigious marriages were irrelevant.³⁹ Marrying an individual of higher status would prove advantageous both monetarily and at court; a woman who married into a prestigious family would inherit a life of luxury.

As parents of the eighteenth century maintained rigorous standards in selecting an appropriate marital partner for their children, society dictated many strict regulations regarding sex and sexuality. Taking into account the nuances of Enlightenment era Viennese society, Zerlina's erotically dominant behaviors become even more risqué and complex. Both church and civil leaders condoned sex only as an act of procreation between spouses; they viewed lustful sexual acts for the sake of passion as immoral. Likewise, nudity was highly stigmatized, and Hufton documents accounts of fainting Parisian women who gazed upon the nude male form.⁴⁰ Feeling such fear and shame surrounding the human form, Viennese society would have interpreted Zerlina's sexual acts as shameful and possibly demonic.

³⁸ Ibid., 65, 72. Hufton, *A History of Women in the West*, 28. Although beauty was hypothetically unimportant in a marital contract, many bachelors valued marrying a woman of beauty. Hufton explains that men were frequently willing to take risks of status to marry the "family beauty." Furthermore, Hufton articulates, "to suffer from a physical impediment, to be sickly or low in the pecking order, made spinsterhood or the convent a possibility." Family name and wealth may have been important qualities for a potential bachelor or bachelorette, but physical ability, health, and physical appearance were also assessed. Perhaps physical beauty could even expand a potential bride's marital possibilities. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, 111.

³⁹ Hufton, *A History of Women in the West*, 28.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 65. Societal standards even attempted to regulate sexual activity within a marriage. Hufton elaborates,

All erotic acrobatics other than the approved formula—the woman supine and the man above her—were considered suspect in that they privileged pleasure at the expense of procreation. The only position that favored the planting of the male seed was the one metaphorically associated with the plowing of the earth by the laborer.

Procreation remained the sole purpose of intercourse; any other sort of sexual activity, even within a marriage, was sinful. As a modern interpreter of this phenomenon, I view this as a shaming or even a fear of sensuality. Hufton, *A History of Women in the West*, 70.

While society affirmed that sex was an act preserved for marital partners, in practice, this was not always the case. Breaking from societal values, Zerlina risks her honor and marital engagement for a relationship with a man of higher ranking; her desperation for monetary support outweighs the possible risk of dishonor. Hufton details that individuals with lower-class status practiced the sexual act of “bundling” or “night-courting,” during which couples would test their sexual compatibility with potential partners; nevertheless, sexual boundaries continued to restrict sexual activity.⁴¹ Ironically, individuals of the lower class were granted sexual freedoms that were suppressed in upper circles of society. These upper class women had to defend their honor above all else and were held accountable through the gossip of friends and neighbors.⁴² Perhaps Zerlina’s lower class granted her access to illicit sexual activities that were forbidden from women of higher ranking.

One of the easiest ways to lose honor and favor in eighteenth-century society was to commit adultery or participate in a forbidden affair. Viennese moral perceptions surrounding affairs contextualize the sensual encounter between Zerlina and Don Giovanni; Zerlina’s interactions with the Don may have put her at risk for societal shame and punishment. Hufton observes a double standard in relation to the act of adultery: while men could commit adultery without punishment, women who committed adultery were shamed. This phenomenon can be attributed to the patriarchal structure of eighteenth-century marriages; female virginity and marital chastity were gifts a wife gave

⁴¹ Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, 133–34. Hufton, *A History of Women in the West*, 67. Women of the lower class may have also possessed freedoms outside of sexuality. Hurl-Eamon argues that “The poorest women of Europe may actually have been the most free to end bad marriages.” Perhaps their positions on the peripheries of society gave them freedom to pass in and out of sexual and romantic relationships. Hurl-Eamon, *Women’s Roles in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 16.

⁴² Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 66.

to her husband. Additionally, the wife was the dependent and property of her husband; essentially, no husband wanted a defective wife.⁴³ This double standard reflected back on the Biblical ideal of marital chastity and the Madonna/whore dichotomy prevalent in many religious texts. The Bible provides both sensual and virginal interpretations of women. Hufton elaborates upon this dichotomy in his interpretation of the Biblical story of Adam and Eve; he demonstrates that Eve, the temptress of Adam and downfall of humanity, embodies all womankind.⁴⁴ Eve's extreme sexual thirst, inability to control impulses, and seductive nature represented the many faults in womankind of which men must be wary. Women were held to a higher fidelity standard than men, and their ability to measure up to these standards reflected upon their reputation and honor.

Illicit affairs between powerful men and young women occasionally took place during the eighteenth century. Zerlina, who is betrothed to the peasant Masetto, falls victim to the marital promises and sensual caresses of the libertine Don Giovanni. Hufton explores this relationship pattern in which a male of a higher status seduced a woman of the lower class. Although some powerful men tricked naïve, younger women into engaging in a socially prohibited affair, some lower-class women willingly engaged with these forbidden men for the monetary treasures. Once again, a societal double standard existed that punished women but acquitted men who participated in a forbidden affair. In

⁴³ Hufton, *A History of Women in the West*, 81–82. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, 60.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65. Wiesner makes a poignant observation about the association between religion and gender roles in the following quotation:

Most later Jewish and Christian commentators thus chose to view Eve, and by extension all women, as the source of evil and sin in the world, though there were also a few who held Adam equally responsible, and a very few who viewed him as more responsible because he was a man and should have been better able to withstand the temptation.

Since women do not have the ability to take responsibility for their own actions, men must then step in as both protectors and educators. With a higher mental capacity and aptitude toward logic, men must rule over their wives. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 15.

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the cases of these women, they were fired from their jobs, sent to correctional facilities, and dishonored.⁴⁵ It is crucial to note that in Zerlina's situation, the societal benefits of prestige and money must have outweighed the possibility of judgement from society.

Once a woman entered into a suitable marriage, she often needed to work to support her family. As a woman of the lower class, Zerlina would be expected to join the workforce after her marriage to Masetto. When entering into the workforce, women faced difficulties securing a job that paid substantial wages; women typically received half the compensation that men collected, even when they performed the same job.⁴⁶ Hufton attributes this gender pay gap to the assumptions that eighteenth-century society constructed in regard to women: since a married woman was the dependent of her husband, he assumingly provided both food and shelter for her. Employers therefore decided that women did not require the high wages that men earned.⁴⁷ Women's work carried a stigma; society viewed men's work as skilled labor and women's work as "domestic work" or "housekeeping."⁴⁸ The economic inequality between the wages of men and women are undeniable; however, women were not expected to provide the majority of a family's income. Society defined men by their wealth and occupation; contrastingly, society defined women by the wealth and occupation of their husbands.

An analysis of the eighteenth-century Viennese social hierarchy, opera house culture, and gender politics allows for further interpretations of Zerlina. It is helpful to conceptualize the audience for whom Mozart composed *Don Giovanni* in order to imagine his understanding of the peasant girl. It remains highly likely that many audience

⁴⁵ Hufton, *A History of Women in the West.*, 77–78.

⁴⁶ Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 106.

⁴⁷ Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, 60.

⁴⁸ Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 104–5.

members were able to empathize with Zerlina's life experiences as an engaged peasant girl. Seeing her through the eyes of Enlightenment Era society eliminates perfunctory and overly-simplistic interpretations of her character as villainous or foolish; instead, through studying her background as a female within the lower class, it is apparent that her hard work and vast life experiences inform her onstage presence. Additionally, the sensual actions of Zerlina cannot be accurately understood without knowledge of eighteenth-century morality and practices. With her limited agency in society, she solely possesses the power of her body to navigate complex situations.

Chapter Three **Damsel or Dominatrix:** **A Musical Overview of the Role of Zerlina**

In comparison to the other characters in *Don Giovanni*, Zerlina may seem uninteresting; she is a simple girl who makes a youthful mistake before continuing to live a conventional life with her husband. Indeed, scholars often dismiss the role of Zerlina as simplistic and unimportant. Both James M. Keller and Charles Ford diminish Zerlina's musical and dramatic importance throughout the opera.⁴⁹ And yet, as Kristi Brown-Montesano has suggested, Zerlina is the only woman in the opera who pursues Don Giovanni and later rejects his advances.⁵⁰

Although Zerlina possesses less agency than men of higher rank, her story remains significant to the development of the drama and Don Giovanni's ultimate damnation. Through an analysis of the Viennese version of Zerlina's character, I contend that Zerlina functions as a mirror-image foil to Don Giovanni; as Zerlina gains autonomy through the control of her own body, the Don slowly loses power and influence and eventually his own life. An analysis of Zerlina's duets and arias leading up to "Per queste tue manine" leads to a fuller picture of the importance of Zerlina's character, illuminating how her story symmetrically reflects the trajectory of Don Giovanni. In the following chapter, I first introduce the dramatic and characteristic musical elements relating to "Là ci darem la mano," "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto," and "Vedrai, carino." I then propose two possible interpretations of Zerlina's role in each of these duets or arias. Finally, I track

⁴⁹ James M. Keller, "The Women: James M. Keller Listens to the Three Ladies of *Don Giovanni*," *Opera News*, March 2017, 26. Charles Ford, *Music, Sexuality and the Enlightenment in Mozart's Figaro, Don Giovanni and Così fan tutte* (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 146.

⁵⁰ Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 61.

how each duet or aria relates to the mirror-like connection between Zerlina and Don Giovanni.

“Là ci darem la mano”

Don Giovanni first sets his eyes on the young Zerlina on the morning of her wedding. Celebrating their upcoming nuptials among a large community of happy peasants, Zerlina and her betrothed Masetto sing of their promising futures together (“Giovinette che fate all’amore”). The conniving Don, quick to manipulate the individuals who surround him, pressures Masetto and the other villagers to move the matrimonial celebration to his extravagant castle; unbeknownst to the groom, however, the libertine then separates Zerlina from the group in order to enact his artful seduction. In the Act I, Scene 9 duet “Là ci darem la mano,” the Don suggests that he and Zerlina run away together to marry. The young peasant girl, intrigued by the wealthy man yet wary of betraying her betrothed, weighs her options. Don Giovanni continues to pressure the young girl until she ultimately plans to run away with him. It is not until after the duet itself that Donna Elvira, Don Giovanni’s former lover, warns Zerlina that the Don does not intend to keep any of his promises, and Zerlina rejects the libertine and returns to Masetto. The scene transpires as follows (Example 3.1):

EXAMPLE 3.1 *Libretto to “Là ci darem la mano”*

Don Giovanni: Quel casinetto è mio: soli saremo, That little castle is mine: there we shall be alone,
e là, gioiello mio, ci sposeremo. and there, my little jewel, we shall marry.

Duettino:

Don Giovanni: Là ci darem la mano, There we will hold hands,
Là mi dirai di sì. there you will say “yes.”
Vedi, non è lontano; See, it is not far;
Partiam, ben mio, da qui. let us depart, my dear, from here.

Zerlina: Vorrei e non vorrei, I want to and yet I don’t want to,
mi trema un poco il cor. my heart trembles a bit in me.
Felice, è ver, sarei, Happy, it is true, I would be,
ma può burlarmi ancor. but still, he could be mocking my innocence.

Don Giovanni: Vieni mio bel diletto! Come my beautiful beloved!

Zerlina: Mi fa pietà Masetto. It makes me pity Masetto.

Don Giovanni: Io cangierò tua sorte. I will change your fate.

Zerlina: Presto non son più forte. Soon I will not have the strength to resist.

Don Giovanni: Andiam! Let us go!

Zerlina: Andiam! Let us go!

Both: Andiam, andiam, mio bene. Let us go! Let us go my dearest.
a ristorar le pene to comfort the pains
d’un innocente amor. Of an innocent love.⁵¹

Mozart divides the duet into two distinct sections: the A section encompasses Don Giovanni’s seduction and Zerlina’s apprehension, and the B section presents Don Giovanni’s excitement and Zerlina’s hope for a wealthy marriage. In the A section, the moderate *andante tempo* and the steady “uhm-pah” accompaniment pattern in a duple

⁵¹ Bard Suverkrop, “Là ci darem la mano,” IPA Source, LLC, 2010, <https://www-ipasource-com.ezproxy.butler.edu/la-ci-darem-la-mano.html>. All of the following Italian lyrics and English translations for “Là ci darem la mano” come from Bard Suverkrop’s IPA Source article.

meter evokes an elegant courtly dance.⁵² Zerlina resists Giovanni’s persistent pressuring, claiming that she worries about Masetto’s well-being. Further, she indicates that her “heart trembles a bit”: this may refer to her attraction to the Don or her discomfort surrounding the volatile situation. Contrastingly, the jaunty 6/8 allegro of the B section displays the two lovers emphatically agreeing to pursue their mysterious connection and their desire to “comfort the pains of an innocent love.” This line is both comical and naïve, because Zerlina’s pursuit of an “innocent love” means she must betray Masetto.

Mozart structures the duet as a conversation between Don Giovanni’s sensual vocal lines and Zerlina’s nervous responses. Perhaps the most famous melodic line within the opera as a whole is Don’s musical introduction to the duet (Example 3.2).⁵³ The melody is not particularly virtuosic or technically difficult, but the legato vocal line and parallel period phrase structure create a memorable moment of seduction.

EXAMPLE 3.2 *Don Giovanni’s Entrance Melody in “Là ci darem la mano,” mm. 1-8*⁵⁴

The image shows two staves of musical notation in bass clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The first staff is labeled 'Don Giovanni' and the second 'DG'. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Don Giovanni: Là ci da-rem la ma - no, là mi di - rai di si;

DG: ve - di, non è lon - ta - no, par - tiam, ben - mio, da - qui.

⁵² Wye Jamison Allanbrook explains that while this duet may resemble a bourée or gavotte, it is more appropriately identified as a “lover’s serenade.” Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro & Don Giovanni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 263.

⁵³ Allanbrook suggests that Don Giovanni’s opening melody is one of many moments within the opera where the libertine “is called on to perform.” *Ibid.*, 263.

⁵⁴ All “Là ci darem la mano” vocal excerpts come from the following score: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Don Giovanni: Vocal Score*, libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte, reprint of Marquerie Frères, Paris, 1838 edition (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004).

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After Zerlina repeats this melodic line following the Don's initial entrance, she introduces new melodic material that displays her conflicted conscience. Mozart characterizes Zerlina's responses with chromatic inflections, as in her qualm about Masetto's well-being (Example 3.3). Her chromatic line, especially as a response to the Don's triadic singing, suggests that Zerlina feels uncomfortable in her present situation.

EXAMPLE 3.3 *Zerlina's Chromatic Response in "Là ci darem la mano," mm. 20-22*

Zerlina



Mi fa - pie - tà - Ma - set - to;

The image shows a musical staff for Zerlina in 2/4 time, key of D major. The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter rest. The lyrics are: Mi fa - pie - tà - Ma - set - to;

Another significant moment within this duet introduces the B section when Zerlina and Giovanni join together homorhythmically (apparently) to celebrate their mutual love and sexual attraction (Example 3.4). Taken alone, this harmonic consonance symbolizes the couple's romantic resolution; however, viewed within the context of the duet as a whole, this homorhythmic moment may more basically symbolize Zerlina's navigation through a complex relationship with the powerful Don Giovanni.

EXAMPLE 3.4 *Homorhythmic Section of “Là ci darem la mano,” mm. 50-56*

The image displays a musical score for the opera *Le Nozze di Figaro*, specifically the duet "Là ci darem la mano" (Act II, Scene 1). The score is presented in two systems. The first system features Zerlina (Z) on the top staff and Don Giovanni (DG) on the bottom staff. Both characters sing in a homorhythmic fashion, with their lyrics: "An - diam, an - diam, mio be - ne_ , a ri - sto - rar le". The second system continues the duet with Zerlina (Z) on the top staff and Don Giovanni (DG) on the bottom staff. Their lyrics are: "pe - ne_ d'un in - no_ cen - te a - mor." The music is in the key of D major (two sharps) and 6/8 time. The notation includes treble clefs for Zerlina and bass clefs for Don Giovanni, with a key signature of two sharps and a 6/8 time signature. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words connected by lines to indicate phrasing.

Two Interpretations of “Là ci darem la mano”

Scholars often interpret “Là ci darem la mano” in one of two ways: as Don Giovanni pressuring a frightened Zerlina to pursue a physical relationship with him or a straightforward seduction. In an example of the first type of interpretation, Brown-Montesano understands the scene as a sexual assault on a young bride, viewing Zerlina’s quivering heart as a symbol of her explicit fear of an older gentleman.⁵⁵ In this vein, Zerlina weighs her options to stay loyal to her fiancé, but the Don has ultimately trapped her: the libertine separated her from any protectors or witnesses, so the young girl must think fast and fend for herself. In a discussion of class privilege, Brown-Montesano questions if Zerlina even possesses the power to say “no” to a man of a high social class.⁵⁶ The peasant girl not only remains trapped physically by a man but also systematically by the patriarchal structure that supports this man’s behavior. The question

⁵⁵ Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart’s Operas*, 74.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 73, 76.

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is not whether or not Zerlina was romantically charmed by Don Giovanni but whether Zerlina has a choice in the matter at all.

It is also possible to interpret “Là ci darem la mano” at face value as a scene of seduction and mutual attraction. Wye Jamison Allanbrook notes that Zerlina “has a sense of her own attractiveness; she is probably not innocent of girlish fantasies about precisely the opportunity Giovanni is offering her.”⁵⁷ This scene then displays two important aspects of Zerlina’s personal growth: first, she recognizes the power her body holds over men, and second, she understands the potential benefits that seducing a man may bestow upon her. In other words, Zerlina connects the physical power of her body with the social mobility she would gain from marrying a man of a higher social status. Although Zerlina was born a female of the lower class, she can use her sexualized body as a tool to manipulate men and ultimately get what she wants.

I argue that Don Giovanni’s seduction of Zerlina is best interpreted as a combination of the previous two interpretations: Zerlina feels both fearful of and intrigued by Don Giovanni. His physical presence and social status imply a sexual expectation of Zerlina, and their brief rendezvous awakens fantasies of what her life could become if she marries a man of a higher social status. Donna Elvira’s interference in the superficial relationship provokes something inside Zerlina. She realizes that seduction can be channeled with deceptive motives, and she chooses to never let a man hold that power over her again. Instead, she plans to use her own body as a means of

⁵⁷ Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 265. Berthold Hoeckner labels this encounter as the moment when Zerlina discovers her ability to capitalize on the seductive effects of her body; however, I argue Zerlina learns from this naïve misstep that sexual dominance is a strong persuasive technique that she can harness in appropriate situations to gain independence and power within her limiting, lower-class reality. Berthold Hoeckner, “Homage to Adorno’s ‘Homage to Zerlina,’” *The Musical Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (Autumn 2004), 514–15.

personal agency in future encounters with men. Zerlina's only avenue of autonomy within this oppressive society is through the purposeful attention to her own body and its effects on men.

"Batti batti, o bel Masetto"

After Zerlina's brief excursion with Don Giovanni, she returns to her betrothed to discuss her encounter with the Don and to defend her honor. In her first aria, "Batti batti, o bel Masetto" (Act I, Scene 16), the young peasant girl must convince her fiancé of her innocence and remind him of her undying love. During her performance of this aria, Zerlina channels her feminine wiles to intimately connect with her fiancé and to reconcile her missteps. The libretto proceeds as follows (Example 3.5):

EXAMPLE 3.5 *Libretto to "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto"*

Batti, batti, o bel Masetto,
la tua povera Zerlina;
Starò qui come agnellina
le tue botte ad aspettar.
Lascierò straziarmi il crine,
Lascierò cavarmi gli occhi,
e le care tue manine
lieta poi saprò baciar.
Ah, lo vedo, non hai core!

Pace, pace, o vita mia,
in contento ed allegria
notte e di vogliam passar.

Beat, beat, oh dear Masetto,
your poor Zerlina;
I will remain here as a little lamb
your blows to await.
You can tear my hair out,
I will allow you carve out my eyes,
and the dear your hands
happily then I will kiss.
Ah! I see, not you have the heart!

Peace, peace, oh life mine,
in happiness and joy
day and night we will spend.⁵⁸

The aria is divided into two contrasting moods: desperation and bliss. These two contrasting moods explore the inner workings of Zerlina's mind as she navigates the

⁵⁸ Bard Suverkrop, "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto," IPA Source, LLC, 2010, <https://www-ipasource-com.ezproxy.butler.edu/batti-batti-o-bel-masetto.html>. All of the following Italian lyrics and English translations for "Batti, batti" come from Bard Suverkrop's IPA Source article.

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options available to her as a woman during the eighteenth century. In the A section of the aria, Zerlina pleads for her fiancé's forgiveness. Through playful requests of violence, Zerlina hopes to win back her fiancé's trust. It is not until the B section, however, that Zerlina fulfills her goal of restoring stability to her marriage. It may appear incongruous that at one moment the peasant girl attempts to marry for wealth and status, and at the next moment she works to reestablish the relationship with her impoverished fiancé; however, Allanbrook explains this problem within the context of the society in which Zerlina resides. Zerlina needs "wit" and "resilience" in order to survive within the realm of Don Giovanni.⁵⁹ Masetto does not represent the perfect lover or husband, and his qualities do not equal Zerlina's intelligence and passion, but without choosing him as her lover, Zerlina would be left in the "void."⁶⁰ Zerlina has no choice but to use tricks of seduction on her man. Due to her close-call fling with Don Giovanni, the town would view her as an outcast and a courtesan. Zerlina needs Masetto to conceal her missteps and to take her in as his own; it is her only way to exist in society.

The aria follows Zerlina's seemingly one-sided attempt to win her fiancé's love.⁶¹ Although the aria abounds with lyrical melodies and bouncing ornamentation, the most recognizable melody of the piece is that which Zerlina sings at the top of the aria (Example 3.6). Zerlina begs Masetto to beat her, pull her hair out, and poke her eyes out. She coyly follows up these violent claims with the delicate imagery of her as a lamb awaiting his blows.

⁵⁹ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 274.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ However, Brown-Montesano suggests that the active cello obbligato interjects Masetto's voice, or rather heartbeat, into the aria, therefore molding the song into a duet between young lovers. Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 71.

EXAMPLE 3.6 Zerlina's First Melody from "Batti batti, o bel Masetto," mm. 1-8⁶²

Zerlina

Bat - ti, bat - ti, o bel Ma - set - to, la tua po - ve - ra Zer -
 li - na. Sta - rò qui come a - gnel - li - na le tue bot - te ad a - spet - tar.

The persistent wife changes her strategy mid aria as she acknowledges that Masetto will not harm her. The B section functions as an accompanied quasi-cadenza, allowing the soprano to show off her facile runs and virtuosic vocal technique. The pinnacle of virtuosity occurs at measure 72, where Zerlina sings sixteenth-note runs, reaching the highest note of Bb, over the top of a sixteenth-note cello obbligato figure (Example 3.7).

EXAMPLE 3.7 Zerlina's Virtuosity Runs from "Batti batti, o bel Masetto," mm. 70-78

Zerlina

not - te e di vo - glia pa - sar, not - te e
 di vo - gliam pas - sar, not - te e di vo - gliam pas - sar,

Piano

Pno.

⁶² All "Batti, batti" and "Vedrai, carino" musical excerpts come from the following anthology: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto," in *G. Schirmer Opera Anthology: Arias for Soprano*, ed. Robert L. Larson (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1991), 50–56. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, "Vedrai, carino," in *G. Schirmer Opera Anthology: Arias for Soprano*, ed. Robert L. Larson (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1991), 57–60.

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The aria then comes to a close through a series of satisfying cadences in F major, during which she insists that into the future, they will pass their time in happiness and peace, and the couple reunites as if Zerlina's transgression never occurred. Of course, Masetto never fathoms that his innocent peasant wife was complicit in the seduction; regardless, the young couple reconcile and are once more in love.

Two Interpretations of "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto"

Although it is possible to interpret Zerlina in "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto" as an independent woman fighting for her own autonomy or as a model wife who protects and soothes her fiancé, the music and text strongly support an interpretation of Zerlina as seducing her fiancé as a manipulative means of seeking forgiveness. Since Zerlina upset Masetto by entangling herself with the romantic affairs of Don Giovanni, she must placate her fiancé by speaking the language that he understands: the language of seduction. Brown-Montesano notes that Zerlina makes use of a gavotte within her aria. This style of dance was not typically performed by the lower class; therefore, Zerlina must pastorally embellish the piece in order to relate to her fiancé.⁶³ Additionally, she sensually suggests that he physically dominate her as a teasing temptation and as a knowing reminder of his love for her. By tailoring her performance to her fiancé and metaphorically comparing her innocence to an angelic lamb, Zerlina poses as a delicate woman, eager for physical intimacy. Allanbrook labels this phenomenon as "an arch parody of submission."⁶⁴ Both Zerlina and the audience realize that Zerlina holds the power in this situation; however, Brown-Montesano emphasizes that Zerlina feigns

⁶³ Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 69–70.

⁶⁴ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 269.

weakness as a means of forgoing actual submission or violence.⁶⁵ Interestingly, Masetto fails to recognize Zerlina's devious methods; instead, Mozart presents the audience with a knowing female lead and her clueless fiancé.

Zerlina adopts a vocabulary that is primarily physical and inherently sexual in nature. Rather than solely using language as a form of manipulation, perhaps this woman uses language to adjust the oppressive balance of power. Mozart highlights Zerlina's physical language through his use of text setting. Allanbrook highlights the onomatopoeic quality of the word "batti" and notes that Mozart mirrors this quality of the word in his music.⁶⁶ Mozart places the phrase "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto" on a powerful descending line starting on C5 and running down to E4 (see Example 3.6). Through the use of clipped eighth-notes in the vocal line and running sixteenth-notes in the baseline, the composer conjures the image of an emphatic blow. He creates a similar effect for the lines "Lascero strazarmi il crine, lascerò cavarmi gli occhi." With this onomatopoeic, biting libretto, Mozart creates an arching vocal line within a sixteenth-note passage. These phrases start on B4 and reach their peak at F4. For a soubrette soprano, this line would sit near her upper passaggio, creating a more pressed or aggressive timbre in her voice. Zerlina capitalizes on her sole power of sexuality in order to gain agency.⁶⁷ Rather than taking advantage of this situation or her fiancé, Zerlina recalibrates the imbalance of power through her use of physical language.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 70.

⁶⁶ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 269.

⁶⁷ Mary Hunter justifies Zerlina's physically expressive language through the lens of the peasant girl's cultural experience and writes, "In late-eighteenth-century opera buffa, serving girls seduce but ladies can only succumb." Wye Jamison Allanbrook, Mary Hunter, and Gretchen A. Wheelock, "Staging Mozart's Women," in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 61.

⁶⁸ Another interpretation of Zerlina's behavior, which I find less convincing, is that of the loyal wife. In his discussion on Theodor Adorno's analysis of Zerlina, Berthold Hoeckner pinpoints Adorno's emphasis on

In terms of Zerlina's mirror-like relationship to Don Giovanni, this aria represents Zerlina's awakening to the power she holds over her own body; it is the beginning of Zerlina's journey to empowerment.⁶⁹ Contrastingly, at the end of the opera, Don Giovanni loses all power over his body when he loses his life. This mirror-like relationship strengthens the interpretation that Zerlina uses her body both for autonomy and as a means of growing her relationship with her fiancé. Her previous encounter with Don Giovanni both frightened and educated her about the art of seduction; now, as a means of making peace with her fiancé and introducing a new aspect of physicality to their relationship, Zerlina brings to the surface ideas of domination and submission. Perhaps as a result of her rendezvous with Don Giovanni when she was forced into submission by her gender and class identity, Zerlina now wants to experiment with submission in a safe, familiar environment.

"Vedrai, carino"

Zerlina's brief tryst with Don Giovanni stirs up jealous feelings within Masetto, and disregarding Zerlina's commitment to fidelity, Masetto assembles a group of men to

the mutuality of Zerlina's passion; her use of physical language is not manipulative but loving; therefore, the mutuality of Zerlina's sensuality is a "mark of her humanity." In contrast with the peasant girl, the Don's seductive language often lacks compliance and symbolizes self-satisfaction. Furthermore, Allanbrook supports this theory through an explanation of the cello obbligato, which is present during the gavotte section of the aria. The presence of Masetto's heartbeat suggests his compliance in the seduction; therefore, Zerlina considers her lover's deepening feelings of devotion. Through a tangible representation of Masetto's emotions, Mozart displays the reciprocity of love and intimacy that exists in the young couple's relationship. Hoeckner, "Homage to Adorno's 'Homage to Zerlina,'" 514–15. Allanbrook *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 269.

⁶⁹ In his commentary on Adorno's analysis of Zerlina, Hoeckner argues that Mozart structured "Batti batti" on Zerlina's previous duet with Don Giovanni, "Là ci darem la mano." The overarching structure of the aria, a binary form that begins in duple meter and transitions into triple meter, parallels that of the seduction duet. This metric progression continues into Zerlina's second aria, "Vedrai, carino," which starts in triple meter. The aforementioned metrical sequence symbolizes Zerlina's sexual maturity. Hoeckner, "Homage to Adorno's 'Homage to Zerlina,'" 514–15.

locate and kill Don Giovanni as a means of defending his wife's honor and retaliating against the Don's selfishness. Unsurprisingly, Masetto's efforts are unsuccessful. The crafty Don, planning ahead of the naïve fiancé, asks his servant Leporello to trade clothing with him. This results in Don Giovanni gaining Masetto's trust and ultimately assaulting him; therefore, Masetto is left weak and injured, thinking that Leporello has attacked him. Zerlina must once again comfort her fiancé for a complication that resulted from her indiscretion, singing her Act II, Scene 6 aria "Vedrai, carino" as a means of consoling her wounded fiancé.

Zerlina's second aria exhibits an intimate quality that dramatically contrasts with her previous aria. Much like her first aria, however, "Vedrai, carino" divides into two sections. In the A section, Zerlina hints to her lover that she has a special balm (specifically "un certo balsamo") that an apothecary cannot reproduce. In the B section of the aria, Zerlina reveals the specifics of this curious antidote: it is her love or, more specifically, her heart. She tells her fiancé to hear it beating and directs him to touch her bosom, or "toccami qua!" The full libretto progresses as follows (Example 3.8):

EXAMPLE 3.8 *Libretto to "Vedrai, carino"*

Vedrai, carino,
se sei buonino,
Che bel rimedio
ti voglio dar!
È naturale,
non dà disgusto,
E lo speciale
non lo sa far.
È un certo balsamo
Ch'io porto addosso,
Dare tel posso,
se il vuoi provar.
Saper vorresti
dove mi sta?

You will see, dear one,
if you will be very good,
What a beautiful cure
to you I want to give!
It is natural,
won't be distasteful,
And the apothecary
not it knows to make.
It is a certain balm
That I carry on me,
give it to you I can,
if it you want to try.
To know want you
where on me it is?

Sentilo battere,
toccami qua!

Feel it beating,
touch me here!⁷⁰

Overall, “Vedrai, carino” abounds with beautiful simplicity. The aria remains firmly in the key of C major and continues at a steady andante tempo as Zerlina’s soothing melody caresses the ailing Masetto. Additionally, the vocal line rests comfortably in a young soprano’s range, scaling no farther than an octave as she delicately ornaments her repeated flirtations toward her fiancé. The most recognizable melody within the aria appears at the top of the A section, where Zerlina introduces the concept of her special cure (Example 3.9). A microcosm of the aria as a whole, this first melody contains repetitions of notes artfully ornamented with turns, descents, and dotted rhythms.

EXAMPLE 3.9 Zerlina’s First Melody in “Vedrai, Carino,” mm. 9-16

The image shows two staves of musical notation for Zerlina's first melody. The top staff is labeled 'Zerlina' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Z'. Both staves are in 3/8 time and C major. The melody consists of four measures. The first measure has a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The second measure has a quarter note C5, a dotted quarter note B4, and an eighth note A4. The third measure has a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The fourth measure has a quarter note D4, a quarter note C4, and a quarter note B3. The lyrics are: 'Ve - drai, ca - ri - no, se sei buo - ni - no, che bel ri - me - dio ti vo - glio dar.' The final note 'dar.' is followed by a dotted line.

The B section of the aria explores Zerlina’s seductive urgings for her fiancé to touch her bosom. Once she identifies that the cure is her heart, Zerlina repeatedly teases her fiancé, “toccami qua!” (“touch me here!”). These repeated sensual pleas build to a corporal climax when Zerlina reaches her highest note of a G5 (Example 3.10). The aria then

⁷⁰ Bard Suverkrop, “Vedrai, carino,” IPA Source, LLC, 2010, <https://www-ipasource.com.ezproxy.butler.edu/la-ci-darem-la-mano.html>. All of the following Italian lyrics and English translations for “Vedrai, carino” come from Bard Suverkrop’s IPA Source article.

concludes with an orchestral postlude as the lovers reestablish their commitment and trust for one another through physical contact.⁷¹

EXAMPLE 3.10 *Zerlina Sings “toccami qua” in “Vedrai, carino,” mm. 80-85*

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 3/8 time. The top staff is for Zerlina and the bottom staff is for Z. Both parts feature a simple, rhythmic melody with lyrics underneath. Zerlina's lyrics are "toc - ca - mi qua, qua, toc - ca - mi qua, qua." Z's lyrics are "toc - ca - mi qua, qua, toc - ca - mi qua." The notation includes treble clefs, a key signature of one flat, and a 3/8 time signature.

Two Interpretations of “Vedrai, carino”

Zerlina’s seemingly manipulative behavior within “Batti, batti” carries over into her performance of “Vedari, carino.” As with her first aria, Mozart structures this aria as a binary form and includes dance-like elements. Allanbrook explains that within “Vedrai, carino,” Zerlina transforms a siciliano, a youthful, lower class dance form, into an intentional, mature serenade. Additionally, much like “Batti, batti,” “Vedrai, carino” sounds pastoral in nature; this may be due to the lilting quality of the 3/8 meter, which gives the piece a rustic quality.⁷² Once more, Zerlina speaks in the language of Masetto; however, this time her seduction techniques appear more genuine. Perhaps Zerlina has become selfless; or, through the repeated need to seduce Masetto, maybe she has refined

⁷¹ Much like “Batti, batti,” “Vedrai carino” also communicates the inner dialogue of Masetto. Hoeckner explains that Mozart alternates between a ii and vii⁰⁷/ii, which emulates the pulsation of the man’s heart. While Zerlina is telling Masetto to listen to her beating heart, it is actually Masetto’s heartbeat that the audience hears. Hoeckner, “Homage to Adorno’s ‘Homage to Zerlina,’” 519.

⁷² Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 272–73.

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her malicious seduction techniques. Rather than assuming a fake position of submission, Zerlina transforms into what Allanbrook interprets as a maternal caretaker.⁷³ The vocal line contains short, repetitive phrases within a limited vocal range; for the majority of the piece, the singer sits between a B4 and an E5. Furthermore, the piece easily divides up into four measure phrases. These musical elements, alongside Mozart's use of triple meter and moderate tempo, may remind listeners of a lullaby. Allanbrook furthers the maternal metaphor through her observation of Zerlina's use of diminutives (such as in *carino* and *buonino*) and "graphic game[s]," both of which mothers often use with their children.⁷⁴ The intelligent peasant girl caters her seductive techniques to the desires of her lover. At this moment in the opera, Masetto is in a place of need because his attempt to physically defend his wife's honor ended in catastrophe. Due to his injuries, his body is in a position of physical submission; therefore, Zerlina must assume the dominant role. To console her betrothed, win back his trust, and wash away her own misdeeds, Zerlina becomes the comforting mother figure.

"Vedrai, carino" is an inherently physical aria, and much like "Batti, batti," the physicality may represent female empowerment.⁷⁵ Although Zerlina occupies a position of power in this situation, she feigns innocence as a means of seduction. The peasant girl pretends to innocently nurture her fiancé while coyly urging him to sensually touch her breasts. Mozart provokes a sensual interpretation of the libretto through his text setting. Before Zerlina utters the text "Sentilo battere, toccami qua" for the first time, the

⁷³ Ibid., 273.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Steven Rumph emphasizes the importance of touch in this aria as he tracks Zerlina's sensory progression from a statement of vision ("Vedrai, carino") to a command of touch ("toccami qua"). He underscores that the sensuality of Zerlina's physical language resides in its "chaste literal meaning." Steven Rumph, "The Sense of Touch in 'Don Giovanni,'" *Music and Letters* 88, no. 4 (Nov. 2007), 577.

orchestra introduces a melodic pattern of running sixteenth-notes, which implies the quickening of Masetto's heart. She then repeats the phrase "toccamì qua" no less than seven times. Each iteration, with its various ornamentations, fermatas, and dotted rhythms, represents the deepening of passion between the two lovers. The final two statements of "toccamì qua" ascend to the highest note within the aria, a G5, and descend back to the tonic, C5 (Example 3.10). This dramatic climax followed by a gentle conclusion on the tonic conjures the image of a euphoric sigh. This scene may disclose the power dynamic within this couple's relationship. As the two lovers play an innocent game of passion, Zerlina tricks Masetto into forgetting his ailments.

A combination of the interpretations of Zerlina maternally soothing her lover and of Zerlina seeking empowerment best supports the mirror-like interpretation between Zerlina and Don Giovanni. From Zerlina's previous recognition of her body's power in "Batti, batti," she now yearns to control the body of her lover through the use of seduction. Masetto's careless behavior and ultimate injury gives Zerlina a chance to practice her seductive techniques. Her maternal caretaking and innocent teasing escalate to literal demands of physical intimacy. As she urges her lover to touch her breasts, the two young peasants reconcile their relationship. In contrast, Don Giovanni experiences the loss of his seductive powers through his relationship with Zerlina. Although she initially fawns over his every word, she later discovers his true motives and rejects him.

Zerlina possesses a powerful and self-aware disposition that allows her to function as a counterpart to Don Giovanni. The two other female leads, Donna Anna and Donna Elvira, occupy quite different positions within the opera. Donna Anna, the recent victim of an attempted rape and mourner of her father's death, struggles through the

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opera to regain a sense of meaning and stability in her life; the storyline of the opera follows Donna Anna as she plots the vengeance for her father's death and negotiates the trials of loving a man while grieving the loss of a family member. In contrast, Donna Elvira copes with her own brand of grief for loving an unfaithful man while trying to encourage him to re-evaluate his life choices and repent for his wrongdoings. In essence, both Donna Anna and Donna Elvira are lost in a state of personal instability as well as grief for lost loved ones (one to death and another to infidelity), and they are not in the business of reframing their own life experiences toward an empowered existence. On the other hand, Zerlina's sole purpose within *Don Giovanni* is her coming-of-age; she matures from a naïve bride-to-be to an autonomous life partner. The trajectory of her journey from discovering the power of her body to navigating life with a newly empowered disposition pleasantly mirrors the downfall of the unjust libertine; therefore, through Mozart and Da Ponte's inclusion of "Per queste tue manine" into the Viennese production of *Don Giovanni*, Zerlina becomes a fully-formed character who both reaches a point of womanly maturation and functions as a foil to the masculine Don Giovanni.

Chapter Four
From Seduction to Sadism:
The Development of Zerlina in “Per queste tue manine”

In the previous chapter, I explored how Zerlina’s sexual awakening diametrically opposes Don Giovanni’s loss of power and influence. The last stage in Zerlina’s development occurs in the duet “Per queste tue manine,” which transpires between the peasant girl and Don Giovanni’s servant Leporello. Mozart and Da Ponte added this scene to *Don Giovanni* for the Viennese premiere on May 7, 1788. It is significant that Mozart and Da Ponte added a scene specifically for the character of Zerlina. Of course, listeners today cannot definitively discern Mozart and Da Ponte’s motives for adding “Per queste tue manine.” They may have wanted to further humanize the peasant girl, or perhaps they felt that the work as a whole, and the character of Zerlina in particular, needed a moment of comic relief. Regardless, the addition of this duet results in a more complex and nuanced characterization of Zerlina.

In the Prague version, the audience understands the flirtatious bride-to-be only through her duet with the conniving Don and her two seductive arias for her betrothed Masetto. Mozart and Da Ponte originally left many aspects of Zerlina’s character ambiguous, leaving it to the audience to interpret Zerlina as a narcissistic temptress or an empathetic and empowered seductress. The addition of “Per queste tue manine” in the Viennese version fills many gaps in Zerlina’s characterization and therefore allows both performers and audience members to better understand the peasant girl. Through the addition of “Per queste tue manine,” Mozart and Da Ponte fully develop Zerlina into a mirror-like foil to Don Giovanni. Including “Per queste tue manine” in both the

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performance and analysis of *Don Giovanni* thus adds a new level of depth to the role of Zerlina while definitively framing Don Giovanni as the villainous rapist.

In both the Viennese and Prague productions of *Don Giovanni*, Act II traces yet another of Don Giovanni's seduction schemes; this time he wishes to win the temporary affection and physical delights of Donna Elvira's maid. He urges his servant Leporello to trade clothing with him, and with little choice in the matter, Leporello tentatively concedes. In the midst of his scheming, Don Giovanni, masquerading in Leporello's clothing, stumbles upon an irate Masetto. In a rage over Don Giovanni's attempted affair with Zerlina, Masetto wishes to hunt down the libertine in order to kill him. Unfortunately for Masetto, Don Giovanni possesses the ability to consistently think on his feet and manipulate situations to his advantage; therefore, in his disguise as Leporello, the libertine gains the trust of Masetto and later assaults him, exacting the opposite outcome from the naïve peasant boy's original intentions. This then leads to Zerlina's comforting praises for her wounded fiancé in her aria "Vedrai, carino" (see Chapter 3).

"Per queste tue manine"

Diverging from the Prague plotline, Mozart and Da Ponte interject the duet "Per queste tue manine" into the Viennese production. The scene occurs after Zerlina's attempt to soothe Masetto's pains with her second aria ("Vedrai, carino) and before the Don's ultimate demise. Overcome with rage and aggression, she "drags Leporello in by the hair."⁷⁶ Leporello, both terrified and confused, flails about as Zerlina threatens him

⁷⁶ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Lorenzo Da Ponte, and Gary Kahn, *Overture Opera Guides: Don Giovanni* (Richmond: Overture, 2010), 196–203. All text and translations for "Per queste tue manine" come from *Overture Opera Guides*.

with a razor. The peasant girl pushes the bumbling buffoon into a chair, and restraining him with a handkerchief, she threatens to cut out his hair, head, heart, and eyes. She later resolves to shave his bare skin with her razorblade. To discourage her from these violent acts, Leporello attempts to flatter the young bride with pleasantries about her delicate hands. Dismissing Leporello's charming sentiments, Zerlina continues to harass him and "[ties] him as tightly as she can." As Zerlina physically and mentally dominates the struggling servant, she becomes more and more pleased with herself and her current situation. After feeling she has gained reparations for Leporello's crime, Zerlina exits the scene. The full libretto progresses as follows (Example 4.1):

EXAMPLE 4.1 *Scena Xa Recitativo*

*Zerlina e Leporello; poi un contadino
Zerlina, con coltello alla mano, conduce fuori
Leporello per i capelli*

Zerlina
Rèstati qua!

Leporello
Per carità, Zerlina!

Zerlina
Eh, non c'è carità pei pari tuoi!

Leporello
Dunque cavarmi vuoi...

Zerlina
...i capelli, la testa, il cor e gli occhi!

Leporello (*vuol farle alcune smorfie*)
Senti, carina mia....

Zerlina (*in atto minaccioso lo respinge*)
Guai se mi tocchi! Vedrai, schiuma de'
birbi, qual premio n'ha chi le ragazze
ingiuria.

Leporello (*a parte*)
Liberatemi, o Dèi, da questa furia!

Zerlina (*si strascina dietro per tutta la scena
Leporello*)
Masetto... olà! Masetto! Dove diavolo è ito...
servi... gente... nessun vien... (entra
un contadino) nessun sente...

Leporello
Fa' piano per pietà... non strascinarmi a coda
di cavallo.

Zerlina
Vedrai, vedrai come finisce il ballo. Presto qua
quella sedia.

Leporello
Eccola.

Zerlina
Siedi.

Scene Xa Recitativo

*Zerlina and Leporello; then a villager [non-
speaking role] Zerlina, a razor in her hand,
drags Leporello in by the hair*

Zerlina
You stay here!

Leporello
For pity's sake, Zerlina!

Zerlina
There's no pity for the likes of you!

Leporello
So you're going to cut off...

Zerlina
...your hair, your head, your heart and your
eyes!

Leporello (*trying to butter her up*)
Listen, dear girl...

Zerlina (*threatening him with the razor*)
Watch out if you touch me! You'll see, you
ruffian, what you get for interfering
with girls.

Leporello (*aside*)
Save me, ye gods, from this fury!

Zerlina (*dragging Leporello all over the stage*)
Masetto... Hey! Masetto! Where the devil has
he got to? ...Servants... anyone...
Nobody comes... (*enter a villager*)
nobody hears...

Leporello
Be gentle, for pity's sake... Don't drag me like
a carthorse.

Zerlina
You'll see how the fun will end. Quick, bring
that chair over here.

Leporello
Here it is.

Zerlina
Sit down.

Leporello
Stanco non son!

Zerlina
Siedi, o con queste mani ti strappo il cor e poi
lo getto a' cani.

Leporello (*siede*)
Siedo: ma tu, di grazia, metti giù quel rasoio.
Mi vuoi forse sbarbar?

Zerlina
Sì mascalzone! Io sbarbare ti vo' senza
sapone.

Leporello
Eterni Dèi!

Zerlina
Dammi la man!

Leporello
La mano.

Zerlina
L'altra!

Leporello
Ma che vuoi farmi?

Zerlina (*lega le mani a Leporello col
fazzoletto; il contadino l'aiuta*)
Voglio far, voglio far quello che parmi.

No 21a Duetto
(*Zerlina lega Leporello alla sedia*)

Leporello
Per queste tue manine candide e tenerelle, per
questa fresca pelle, abbi pietà di me!

Zerlina
Non v'è pietà, briccone; son una tigre irata, un
aspide, un leone no no, pietà non v'è!

Leporello
Ah di fuggir si provi!

Zerlina
Sei morto se ti muovi!

Leporello
I'm not tired!

Zerlina
Sit down, or with my bare hands I'll tear out
your heart and throw it to the dogs.

Leporello (*sitting down*)
I'll sit: but for pity's sake, put away that razor.
You're not going to shave me, are
you?

Zerlina
Yes I am, you rascal! I'm going to shave you
without any soap.

Leporello
Gods in heaven!

Zerlina
Give me your hand!

Leporello
Here it is.

Zerlina
The other one!

Leporello
But what are you going to do to me?

Zerlina (*ties Leporello's hands with her
handkerchief; the villager helps her*)
I'm going to do whatever I please!

No 21a Duet
(*Zerlina ties Leporello to the chair*)

Leporello
By those little hands of yours, so white and
tender, by your smooth skin, have
mercy on me!

Zerlina
There's no mercy for you, you knave; I'm an
angry tigress, an asp, a lioness: no,
no, there's no mercy!

Leporello
Ah, I must try to escape!

Zerlina
If you move, you're dead!

Leporello
Barbari, ingiusti Dèi! In mano di costei chi
capitar mi fe'!

Zerlina
Barbaro traditore! Del tuo padrone il core
avessi qui con te!

Leporello
Deh non mi stringer tanto! L'anima mia sen
va.

Zerlina (lo lega con molta forza)
Sen vada o resti, intanto non partirai di
qua.

Leporello
Che strette... o Dèi, che botte!... È giorno,
ovver... è notte? Che scosse... di...
tremuoto! Che buia oscurità!

Zerlina
Di gioia e di diletto sento brillarmi il petto.
Così, così cogli uomini, così, così si
fa. (parte)

Leporello
Cruel, unjust gods who let me fall into this
woman's hands!

Zerlina
Cruel traitor! If only I had in my power your
master's heart along with you!

Leporello
Please don't tie me so tightly! I'm going to
faint.

Zerlina (tying him as tightly as she can)
Whether you do or not, you're not getting
away from here.

Leporello
How the ropes pinch, how they tug! Is it day
or night? It feels...like...an
earthquake! What darkness all
around!

Zerlina
With joy and delight I feel my heart
bursting! This, this is the way to
deal with men! (exit)⁷⁷

Over the cheerful façade of a major key signature, Zerlina enacts her violent revenge on the terrified Leporello. With its allegro moderato tempo, 4/4 time signature, and repeated dotted figures, the duet feels regal yet restless. The piece abounds with virtuosic vocal runs and agile arpeggiations, which evoke both a paradoxically cheerful and appropriately agitated atmosphere. Leporello's first outwardly nervous vocal line occurs over the text "abbi pietà di me," or "have mercy on me." Although both Leporello and Zerlina sing this melodic figure, in combination

⁷⁷ The boldfaced text denotes text that returns in the A' of the duet. Interestingly, there is an onlooker who witnesses Zerlina commit her violent deed. Although this villager could simply add another dimension to the humor or the sensuality (by means of a voyeur) of the scene, it is fruitful to compare Zerlina's experience terrorizing Leporello to Don Giovanni's experiences of seducing, abusing, and taking advantage of women. The Don frequently commits his illicit acts without any witnesses. The only witness who is ever present is his servant and accomplice, Leporello. On the other hand, Zerlina gets her revenge with the witness of a villager. This could put her in a position of shame and ridicule by the townspeople.

with Leporello’s libretto, the dotted, leaping vocal figure can be interpreted as the terrified servant’s vocal manifestation of bodily jitters (Example 4.2).

EXAMPLE 4.2 “*Abbia pietà di me,*” mm. 8-11 ⁷⁸

The musical score for Example 4.2 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line for Leporello, written in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are "ab - bi pie - di me, ab - bi pie - tà di me!". The vocal line features a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, then a series of eighth notes with a slur, and finally a dotted quarter note. The middle staff is the piano accompaniment in treble clef, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment in bass clef. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand.

The irony of Leporello’s vocalizing in a major key during a violent episode dissipates as the duet shifts to the parallel minor. For example, Leporello sings “Deh non mi stringer tanto!” (“Please don’t tie me so tightly!”) as his vocal line quivers between an Ab and G (Example 4.3). The sections in C minor serve to further accentuate Leporello’s fear and pain.

EXAMPLE 4.3 “*Deh non mi stringer tanto!*” mm.34-38

The musical score for Example 4.3 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line for Leporello, written in bass clef with a common time signature. The lyrics are "Deh non - mi - strin - ger - tan - to!". The vocal line starts with a dotted quarter note, followed by a series of eighth notes with a slur, and ends with a dotted quarter note. The middle staff is the piano accompaniment in treble clef, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment in bass clef. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand. Dynamic markings *sf* and *p* are present in the piano part.

⁷⁸ This and all following musical examples come from the following score: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Don Giovanni: Vocal Score*, libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte, reprint of the Marquerie Frères, Paris, 1838 edition (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004), 225–32.

Mozart's choice of form aptly corresponds with the context of the libretto. Although the duet evades traditional formal classifications, it can be described as an altered binary form. Mozart adds musical material to some areas and removes it from other sections of the duet, causing a notable departure from the typical expectation of a binary form. The beginning of the A section contains material that Mozart chooses not to repeat in the A' section; the pleasantries Leporello uses to tranquilize Zerlina's animosity do not return in the A' section once her physical aggression has spun out of control. Additionally, Mozart represents Zerlina's incessant happiness with discovering "the way to deal with men" through an extensive cadential coda in C major; this prolonged monologue of "Così, così si fa" fits appropriately at the conclusion of the duet, where Zerlina claims victory over her fiancé's supposed assailant and over men as a whole (Example 4.4). For the reader's reference, the text that occurs in both A sections is set apart in bold (see Example 4.1).

EXAMPLE 4.4 Coda: “Così, così, così si fa,” mm. 82-93

Zerlina

co - si, co - si, co - si si fa, co - si, co-si, co-si, co-si, co-si, co - si si

fa, co-si, co-si, co-si, co-si, co - si si fa, co-si, co-si, co-si, co - si si fa, co - si, co - si, co - si, co - si si

co - si, co - si si fa, co - si, co - si co - si, co - si, co - si si

fa, co - si, co - si, co - si si fa!

cresc.

“Per queste tue manine” as Comic Relief

Audience members of the eighteenth century may have interpreted this violent interaction between Zerlina and Leporello as comical.⁷⁹ This duet reverses the typical balance of power within eighteenth-century society. Zerlina, a woman of the lower class, would retain a lower status in society than Leporello, who is both a servant of an aristocrat and a man; therefore, Zerlina’s physical domination of Leporello may have seemed absurd and therefore comical to audience members of the eighteenth century. The comedic value of this scene is heightened when one considers the function of Leporello as a comic baritone in the opera as a whole. Numbers such as the famous “Catalog Aria” practically condition the audience to laugh when he appears onstage.

The dismissal of “Per queste tue manine” solely as comic relief devalues the scene and Zerlina’s character, limiting the function of Zerlina in the Viennese *Don Giovanni* as a whole. Zerlina’s storyline can be viewed instead as a coming-of-age tale of an intelligent woman who occupies a low status in society; with only her body as a weapon, Zerlina must capitalize on her assets to succeed. Additionally, Zerlina functions as a foil to the immoral Don Giovanni; her story represents what good can come from autonomy and the control of one’s body. She is not possessed by narcissism and therefore acts as a balance to the libertine’s negative energy. Furthermore, it is crucial to remember that although Da Ponte originally conceptualized the work as an exaggerated act of comedy, Mozart planned the opera as a serious drama.⁸⁰ Viewed through this lens, it seems that this “Per queste tue manine” serves a higher purpose than

⁷⁹ In a discussion of the poor reception of *Don Giovanni* in Vienna, Julian Rushton describes the added musical elements as “course comedy.” Julian Rushton, *W.A. Mozart: Don Giovanni* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 68.

⁸⁰ Charles C. Russell, “Confusion in the Act I Finale of Mozart and Da Ponte’s *Don Giovanni*,” *Opera Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 25–26

exclusively functioning as comic relief. Although Mozart may have composed this scene in the *buffa* style, its placement within *Don Giovanni* as a whole endows it with greater meaning and significance. Some audience members may interpret the duet as humorous, but it is reductive to assume that the duet's sole function is to be funny. Three fitting interpretations arise from Zerlina's interactions with Leporello in the duet "Per queste tue manine": Zerlina acts as a self-interested seductress, Zerlina acts as an oppressed woman searching for autonomy, and Zerlina acts selflessly in the interests of her fiancé.

Zerlina as Seductress

The immediately apparent interpretation of the peasant girl's words and actions in "Per queste tue manine" is that of the violence-obsessed temptress. From the beginning of the recitative that introduces the duet, she enacts a long list of dominant actions to intimidate and suppress Leporello, including pulling the servant onstage by his hair, intimidating him with a razorblade, forcing him into a chair, restraining his hands with her handkerchief, and tying the rest of his body to the chair. Taken alone, the young bride may appear psychotic, narcissistic, or even demented.

Viewed in terms of her previous seduction arias and duet, however, a new narrative arises for the peasant girl. Zerlina repeatedly exhibits a propensity to associate sexual desire with physicality, and in an extreme sense, physical violence (Chapter 3). The young bride's interest in provoking the doxy servant may, in fact, reflect her interest in dominatrix-like sexual acts.⁸¹ Her musical exaltations are far too cheerful for a woman who simply yearns to avenge her fiancé; instead, it appears that Zerlina gains sexual satisfaction from dominating Leporello. For example,

⁸¹ Here I use the word "dominatrix" to refer to the twenty-first century understanding of the word; this word was not used during the eighteenth century.

when Zerlina sings “Non v’è pietà, briccone; son una tigre irata, un aspide, un leone,” she appears both rightfully agitated and perhaps even giddy (Example 4.5).

EXAMPLE 4.5 “Non v’è pietà briccone,” mm. 11-20

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the scene. The first system is for Zerlina, with her name 'Zerlina' written to the left of the first staff. It consists of a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics 'Non v'è pie-tà bric - co-ne, non v'è pie-tà, bric - co-ne, son u-na ti - gre i -', a piano accompaniment in treble clef, and a bass line in bass clef. The second system is for Zerkino, with 'Z' to the left. It features a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics 'ra-ta, un a - spi - de un le - o-ne, no, no, pie - tà non v'è, pie - tà non v'è,', a piano accompaniment in treble clef with a 'cresc.' and 'f' dynamic marking, and a bass line in bass clef. The third system is also for Zerkino, with 'Z' to the left. It includes a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics 'no, no, pie-tà non v'è no, no, pie-tà non v'è!', a piano accompaniment in treble clef with a 'p' dynamic marking, and a bass line in bass clef with a 'p' dynamic marking.

Her downward descent from G5 on “son una tigre irata” imitates a shrill yelp, which transforms into light, bouncy laughter as she continues to discuss her merciless attitude toward Leporello. The dotted eighth-note figure, C major key signature, and high-energy leaps communicate Zerlina’s pure joy, and perhaps even sexual arousal, toward her current situation. After Zerlina’s two previous attempts at seducing her lover through conjuring imagery of sexual violence and

physical intimacy, Zerlina advances to the more extreme level of attaining sexual pleasure through physical violence.

Zerlina's aggressive comments within "Per queste manine" strengthen the interpretation that Zerlina sexually thrives on her physical domination of men. Within the recitative that precedes the duet proper, Leporello frantically asks Zerlina about his fate, which currently rests in her hands. Zerlina flirtatiously retorts, "Vedrai, vedrai come finisce il ballo," which literally translates to "You will see, you will see how the dance ends." In conjuring up the image of a dance, Zerlina inserts a sensuality and playfulness to the violence; she draws out the torture to create suspense for her victim as an act of erotic teasing.⁸² The violence, which could proceed as a brief physical fight, slowly unfolds as erotic gestures toward aggression. Additionally, Zerlina invokes the name of Don Giovanni to further heighten the sexual atmosphere. After she insults Leporello by naming him a "cruel traitor," she continues on to assert her wish to "[have] in [her] power [his] master's heart along with [his]!" Zerlina's emotions toward Don Giovanni were never romantic but rather consisted of fantasies of monetary support, social mobility, and perhaps erotic pleasure (see Chapter 3); therefore, when Zerlina refers to Don Giovanni's heart, it is apparent that she is not referring to his romantic love. It is obvious that Zerlina wishes to enact revenge against Don Giovanni for the pain, heartbreak, and stress he has caused her, so when Zerlina suggests she wants Don Giovanni's "heart," perhaps she truly means that she would like to physically dominate him alongside his foolish servant, and since she has taken a liking to the world of sexual domination, she would like to take recourse against the libertine through her violent manifestation of sexual pleasure.

⁸² Interestingly, Gary Kahn translates "il ballo" to "fun."

Zerlina as Empowered

Another viable interpretation of Zerlina's physical domination over Leporello is that of the peasant girl as an oppressed woman of the lower class who wishes to gain autonomy through her acts of violence. In the eighteenth century, women of the lower class faced a different set of social rules from women and men of higher rankings. Mary Hunter explains, "In late-eighteenth-century opera buffa, serving girls seduce but ladies can only succumb."⁸³ In a sense, Zerlina's special power as a peasant girl is her ability to seduce the men around her; therefore, the peasant girl pushes this ability to the extreme by developing the persona of a dominatrix. Perhaps Zerlina even learned her violent habits from the libertine himself. Within the busy ensemble finale to Act I, Don Giovanni attempts to take Zerlina by force. For clarification of the plotline, this scene occurs after "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto" but before the jealous Masetto runs into Don Giovanni. Through a chaotic interplay on and offstage, Masetto eventually rescues his beloved from the violent grasps of the Don. Once again, Russell notes Mozart's solemn intentions for the work; therefore, I argue that it is viable to assume this interaction between Don Giovanni and Zerlina was traumatic for the young bride.⁸⁴ Perhaps Zerlina transformed this uncalled-for punishment into power; since the young girl now associates physical domination with power and sex, she tried on this technique in a more appropriate way for her own empowerment.

Both the libretto and music strengthen the female empowerment reading of Zerlina's violent actions. During her assault on Leporello, Zerlina emphasizes the gender dichotomy between herself and the male servant. Within the recitative, Zerlina proclaims, "You'll see, you ruffian, what you get for interfering with girls." This aggressive statement is Zerlina's

⁸³ Wye Jamison Allanbrook, Mary Hunter, and Gretchen A. Wheelock, "Staging Mozart's Women," in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 61.

⁸⁴ Russell, "Confusion in the Act I Finale of Mozart and Da Ponte's *Don Giovanni*," 26.

empowered proclamation that she will no longer allow people, regardless of their social status and gender, to take advantage of her. Furthermore, at the end of both A sections of the duet, Zerlina sings, “With joy and delight I feel my heart bursting! This, this is the way to deal with men!” Mozart musically depicts this statement by allowing Zerlina to repeatedly sing it over an extended cadential coda (Example 4.4). The soubrette soprano displays her virtuosic vocal talent through unending repetitions of challenging runs over a satisfying cadential closure in C major. The repeatedly arcing vocal melody, alongside the percussive quality of the word “così” when uttered consecutively at a fast tempo, resembles childlike taunting of youngsters fighting over trivialities on a playground. The young bride rejoices over her ability to overcome her adversary, specifically her adversary of the male gender. Although she is but a lowly peasant girl, she possesses the ability to physically dominate a man of higher social standing.

Zerlina as Selfless Wife

Of course, it is reasonable to take Zerlina by her word and understand her actions as a means of selflessly avenging her fiancé. Her brief flirtations with Don Giovanni in Act I result in her fiancé’s trauma in Act II; consequently, the peasant bride must defend Masetto’s honor as a means of reestablishing balance to Don Giovanni’s universe. Zerlina strengthens this interpretation through her attempt to summon her fiancé during the recitative to “Per queste tue manine.” Searching for an assistant to aid in her dominatrix-like tyranny, she calls, “Masetto...Hey! Masetto! Where the devil has he got to?...Servants...anyone...Nobody comes...nobody hears...” Unfortunately, Masetto does not respond to her request for assistance, though a silent peasant does appear on stage; nevertheless, Zerlina carries out her violent acts as a means

of neutralizing the imbalance of power. In doing so, the powerful peasant girl confirms that no one will interfere with the safety or stability of her little family again.

Although Zerlina frames her violence toward Leporello as an act of revenge for her fiancé, it is possible to interpret her actions as both dominatrix-like acts of sexual pleasure and acts of female empowerment. Even though she may feel frustrated with Leporello's supposed attack on Masetto because it inconvenienced her and required her to exert an extensive amount of emotional energy in order to comfort her fiancé, it seems the young bride used her circumstances as an excuse to gain both sexual satisfaction and autonomy. If Zerlina truly felt empathetic toward her fiancé, she probably would deem it inappropriate to command Masetto to face his aggressor for the sake of his participation in her playfully violent game. Rather, it seems that she invokes her fiancé's name as a means of excusing her actions to both Leporello and herself. By giving herself a supposed motive for her actions, she allows herself to feel justified in her violence. Nevertheless, throughout the opera, Zerlina proves her genuine love and commitment to her fiancé; accordingly, an interpretation of Zerlina enacting violence toward Leporello as a means of performing the role of "good wife" cannot be completely dismissed.

Zerlina as Mirror

Zerlina's actions in "Per queste tue manine" complete the reading of Zerlina as the mirror-like compliment to Don Giovanni. At the beginning of the opera, the Don attempts to take control of another's body through violence. Although he was initially successful, throwing Donna Anna into a world of trauma, agony, and confusion, the libertine's possible sexual assault of the noble woman ultimately led to his ultimate damnation at the opera's conclusion. On the other hand, Zerlina takes control of another's body through violence during "Per queste tue

manine.” This leads to the question of whether or not Zerlina possesses more wholesome motives for her aggressive actions than her libertine counterpart. Viewed solely as actions for sexual pleasure, it would seem that both she and the libertine are selfish, sexually-starved individuals. Contrastingly, if Zerlina acted to gain power within the oppressive, patriarchal society in which she resides or if Zerlina acted to right the wrongs done to her fiancé, she remains justified in her aggression.

Today, opera companies perform “Per queste tue manine” fairly infrequently, and scholars practically never discuss the added duet. This lack of interest retains an imbalance of power between the male aggressor and his female victims. By further developing the stories of the women in the Viennese version of *Don Giovanni*, Mozart and Da Ponte humanized the survivors, thereby further villainizing the aggressor. Although especially important for Zerlina, this mirroring phenomenon has implications that transcend the role of the peasant girl. The inclusion of this duet brings out facets of the title character that allow the opera to remain relevant in modern society. The focus on the body as well as the corporal pleasure and pain one can inflict on another human being resonates with today’s society, in which issues of domestic violence and rape remain relevant. The physical empowerment of Zerlina shines a light on the systematic disempowerment of Don Giovanni. The Don, a character who opera companies can easily—even if unintentionally—glorify as a seductive womanizer, no longer becomes a man the audience relates to or aspires to become; instead, his narcissism and weakness transforms into the humanity and strength of survivors of sexual assault.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Sergio Durante explains that “in the romantic [E.T.A Hoffman version of] *Don Juan* the title role is (secretly) beloved by Donna Anna, rather than her would-be rapist.” This makes room for a glorification of the Don. Rather than acting as a sexual criminal, the libertine becomes a playful womanizer. Sergio Durante, “*Don Giovanni* Then and Now: Text and Performance,” in *Four Contemporary Perspectives on the Mozart/Da Ponte Operas*, ed. Julian Rushton et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 63.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Zerlina's journey towards autonomy tracks Don Giovanni's loss of power and influence with mirror-like precision. This process not only allows audiences to explore Zerlina's rise to power and self-awareness but also directs them toward the villainous ways of Don Giovanni. In other words, highlighting the female self-awareness and empowerment narrative graphs a narrative of abuse and loss of influence onto the libertine. The inclusion of the duet "Per queste tue manine" establishes the full trajectory of both Zerlina and Don Giovanni; as Zerlina assumes power over her own body, Masetto's body, and eventually Leporello's body, Don Giovanni loses the ability to violently assume power over Donna Anna's body, Zerlina's body, and ultimately his own: in the end he loses the power to live.

Like many scenes in its Prague counterpart, "Per queste tue manine" is not free from problems. The duet makes light of a woman perpetrating violence, perhaps even sexual violence, against a man. Although it is tempting to dismiss the violence as defense of a loved one, directors and music scholars alike must confront the implications of a woman tying up and threatening a man onstage. Performing this scene requires self-awareness and nuance as well as an understanding that any gender can commit sexual violence. Zerlina does not sexually assault or violently injure Leporello, however, thereby significantly edifying the situation; she emasculates the male servant as a means of protecting her partner. Additionally, an operatic character does not need to behave consistently morally to be relateable to an audience. In fact, Zerlina's propensity for anger humanizes her and encourages modern audiences to appreciate her fully-formed character. Humans make mistakes, get angry, and act vengefully. Including the duet allows Zerlina to become a realistic woman who radiates positive traits such as strength and self-confidence. It is the duty of the audience to parse out right from wrong.

The integration of “Per queste tue manine” not only allows singers to portray realistic female roles but also provides audience members with the chance to see themselves reflected onstage. The peasant lifestyle may not resonate with many modern opera-goers, but a woman’s struggle with relationships and finances remains relevant to contemporary viewers. Without the duet, Zerlina, a woman of the lower class, fades into the background of society and the opera itself. Contrastingly, with the duet, Zerlina transforms from object of affection to subject and actor in her own life.⁸⁶ Furthermore, Zerlina’s powerful actions within “Per queste tue manine” inform how audiences interpret Zerlina’s previous arias. Millie Taylor labels this phenomenon of backward referencing in a dramatic work as the “horizontal dimension.”⁸⁷ In this scenario, Zerlina’s physical and innately sexual actions toward Leporello inform how the audience interprets Zerlina’s flirtatious nature as well as her relationship with her fiancé. Her powerful actions in Act II encourage the interpretation that she acts intentionally and intelligently throughout the drama. Zerlina’s actions in the duet allow audience members to see a woman of the lower class performing autonomy and strength, therefore giving other women permission and even encouragement to do the same.

Additionally, I advocate for the performance of this duet as a means of bringing attention to general assumptions audiences have about soprano roles, particularly those sung by soubrette sopranos. As previously noted (See Chapters 1 and 3), many scholars dismiss Zerlina as

⁸⁶ Kristi Brown-Montesano observes the object/subject dichotomy in her discussion of Donna Elvira: “Giovanni effectively introduces Elvira when his nose picks up the ‘scent of a woman’—so that Donna Elvira is already more object than subject, the focus of Giovanni’s obvious arousal and Leporello’s wry asides.” Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart’s Operas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 35.

⁸⁷ Millie Taylor, “Layers of Representation and the Creation of Jenny: Instability in the Characterization of Jenny in *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* by Brecht and Weill,” in *Bertolt Brecht: Performance and Philosophy* (2005), 160.

simplistic and insignificant to the storyline of the opera.⁸⁸ I question what beliefs and biases audience members bring to the opera house when soubrettes, such as Zerlina, are onstage. From the libretto, the audience knows that Zerlina is a young girl of the lower class. Furthermore, most would assume she is beautiful, because she attracts the attention of Don Giovanni; on the contrary, it seems he is drawn to most women. Any further conclusions about her character must be drawn from the content of her arias and duets. It is only through the music of “Per queste tue manine,” however, that audiences see a fully-realized construction of the peasant girl.

Above all, the incorporation of “Per queste tue manine” allows Zerlina to act as a foil to Don Giovanni, pulling female voices to the forefront. Elevating a peasant woman to a position of power encourages the other female characters to rise with her, highlighting a dichotomy between the sexual assault survivors and the villainous sexual aggressor. Kristi Brown-Montesano calls on musical scholars to view *Don Giovanni* through “contemporary ethical values” by “listen[ing] more closely to the women.”⁸⁹ Brown-Montesano additionally emphasizes the current social context in which women are finally able to voice their traumatic sufferings as sexual violence survivors.⁹⁰ The thorough development of Zerlina’s character encourages audience members to connect and empathize with the female characters onstage. By accentuating the stories of Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, and Zerlina rather than glamorizing the exploits of a convicted rapist, musical scholars and directors alike can bring *Don Giovanni* to modern audiences.

In contrast, many modern performances of *Don Giovanni* continue to glorify the libertine as a sexual conqueror rather than condemn him as a sexual predator. In this vein, a 2018

⁸⁸ James M. Keller, “The Women: James M. Keller Listens to the Three Ladies of *Don Giovanni*,” *Opera News*, March 2017, 26. Charles Ford, *Music, Sexuality and the Enlightenment in Mozart’s Figaro, Don Giovanni and Così fan tutte* (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 146.

⁸⁹ Kristi Brown-Montesano, “Holding Don Giovanni Accountable,” *Musicology Now*, last modified December 5, 2017, <http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2017/12/holding-don-giovanni-accountable.html>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

production of *Don Giovanni* at the University of Illinois, which Nathan Gunn directed and starred in, cast the Don as a “corporate raider” who Leporello jealously and incorrectly accused of sexual crimes.⁹¹ There is an uncanny resemblance between the libertine and the sexual aggressors outed by the recent #MeToo movement. In this production, even though many women confess the sexual indiscretions of Don Giovanni, this man of wealth and power denies accusations that he sexually assaulted any of the self-identified victims. By dismissing the guilt of Don Giovanni, this production and many productions similar to this silence the voices of the female victims. This interpretation colors the women as liars and blames them as untrustworthy and guilty victims. Productions of this Mozart and Da Ponte opera cannot sidestep the controversial bits of the plot; rather, they must lean in to the discomfort in order to make a point about morality. If modern classical music culture hopes to continue to perform *Don Giovanni*, it must confront the timeless issues within the work’s plotline.

I propose the inclusion of “Per queste tue manine” not to endorse one valid interpretation of Zerlina but rather to allow for a plethora of appropriate interpretations. The performance of this duet within *Don Giovanni* allows modern audiences to connect with the characters onstage in an immediate and visceral way. Although there are several differences between the culture of eighteenth-century Vienna and the culture of today, there are still several aspects within the opera with which modern opera-going audiences can empathize. Zerlina’s humanity, particularly her struggles with her lower class identity and with a manipulative man, remain relatable in contemporary society. Zerlina binds herself to a man, whether its Masetto or Don Giovanni, in order to survive. Due to modern gender and racial inequalities, women continue to support themselves and their families by marrying a less-than-ideal partner. The inclusion of “Per queste

⁹¹ “Don Giovanni,” Krannert Center, accessed July 8, 2018, <https://krannertcenter.com/events/don-giovanni>.

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ture manine” brings *Don Giovanni* into the twenty-first century in a way that both acknowledges its historical roots and carves a path for modern reception.

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