

Research on the Shaping of Mezzo-soprano Trouser Roles in Mozart Opera Works

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Abstract: Mozart used vocal writing, characterisation, dramatic function and gendered stage conventions in these operas to create special mezzo-soprano trouser roles. Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Sesto in *La clemenza di Tito*, Idamante in *Idomeneo* and Annio in *La clemenza di Tito* are selected as typical cases of travesti casting in Mozart's operas for this study. Research has found that Mozart did not treat these roles as interchangeable male characters for women to sing; instead, he adapted each role according to the requirements of the play and changed vocal ranges and emotional expressions, etc. Historical research on trouser roles, Mozart's own studies, and the practices of opera performances all indicate that Mozart frequently employed various vocal types to depict different characters. Therefore, the mezzo-soprano trouser roles in Mozart's works are necessary to study how opera uses gender, colour and theatre to tell stories.

Keywords: Mozart; mezzo-soprano; trouser roles; travesti; Cherubino; Sesto.

1. Introduction

Trouser roles in Mozart's operas are typical operatic conventions that combine vocal writing, characterization, gender representation and theatrical practice. These roles are usually sung by mezzo-sopranos but depict male characters, often adolescents or noble young men, and their music needs to have both lightness and drama [1][2]. Among Mozart's operas, Cherubino, Sesto, Idamante and Annio are often studied cases because they show how Mozart explored the expressive possibilities of the female voice in male-coded roles [3, 4].

This paper will explore how Mozart created these roles and why they are still appropriate for mezzo-sopranos in their work today. A Historical question is also a practical one: How do Mozart's works help singers and teachers understand characterization, breath-planning, affect and stage presence? Given the extensive discussions on trouser roles in terms of gender performance, this paper will also explore how vocal identity and dramatic identity are interconnected in Mozart's operas [5-6].

According to the above studies, Mozart's mezzo-soprano trouser roles are not limited to traditional operatic conventions. The design of the characters and all other elements, such as vocal colour, tessitura, melodic contour, orchestration and stage function, are intended to create theatrical meanings. First, this paper will list the history of the role of the trouters, then analyze several representative cases from Mozart's operas, and finally discuss what these roles mean for operatic performance and interpretation.

2. Historical Background

Trouser roles developed from earlier operatic traditions in which male characters were sung by castrati or, in some cases, by female performers in travesti. As the history of opera shows, this convention was not new in the eighteenth century, and both vocal type and vocal timbre were highly valued [7][8]. Mozart worked within this operatic tradition, but he employed it in distinctive ways. Rather than simply using female singers to substitute for male performers, Mozart

exploited the warmth, agility, and expressive capabilities of the mezzo-soprano voice [1, 3].

Scholarship on trouser roles frequently suggests that these roles are used to portray young male characters who are emotionally vulnerable, tender-hearted, or experiencing sexual awakening, qualities that may be difficult to convey with a fully mature male voice [2, 6]. Mozart is a typical case of this; his young male characters are often in a state of innocence and desire. A mezzo-soprano can convey a feeling of youth without full masculinity and is therefore suitable for characters who are still developing socially and emotionally [5, 9].

3. Cherubino

Cherubino is one of the most well-known Mozart trouser roles and, as such, an ideal case for studying how Mozart uses music to portray characters. Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro* is a page boy who is easily led by passion, and Mozart has written for him in a variety of ways; some parts are light-hearted and swift, while others are deeply moving [3][10]. The character is a young man who should sound youthful and spirited but not too serious or heavy in voice, and it should not be excessively masculine.

Cherubino is a character defined by emotional and dramatic contrasts. Mozart's character melodies are relatively fast in pace and often abrupt, as if they are outpacing speech. Music in this time does not focus on showing the emotions of the young. Cherubino is not merely a "boy sung by a woman"; rather, he is a device used in the opera to convey the rapid changes in emotions of the character through singing [1, 2].

Cherubino also shows that the trouser role is related to the body and voice as well as performance. The performer should be able to portray a young, clumsy, physically curious and easily embarrassed character convincingly while also controlling their voice and playing the music accurately. Mozart's vocal works are very lyrical and expressive, so performers can create many different characters by adjusting phrases, changes in tone, etc. [6-8].

4. Sesto

Sesto in *La clemenza di Tito* is a new kind of Mozart trouser role. Cherubino is outgoing, and Sesto has suffered misfortune and is thus emotionally sensitive. Mozart's music for Sesto often has a strong sense of lyricism and dramatic sincerity, and as one of his more psychologically demanding roles in opera, it is quite complex [4, 11]. A mezzo-soprano voice can also show the sensitivity and inner world of a young man for Mozart's works.

Sesto's characters have changed more significantly than those in many other Mozart trouser roles. Mozart has used all sorts of words and expressions in Sesto's arias to show his inner turmoil. Music provides substantial freedom of expression for remorse, loyalty and other emotions in the singer's heart, which are highly suitable for the mezzo-soprano voice [4, 7]. In this way, Mozart uses the mezzo-soprano voice to add a sense of humanity to the drama of politics and emotions.

Among Mozart's trouser roles, Sesto represents one of the most serious and emotionally complex characters. This person is in a bad moral environment, and loyalty to Tito conflicts with love for Vitellia. The mezzo-soprano part helps to create the sense of young tragedy for Sesto in this work. For this reason, many mezzo-sopranos regard Sesto as one of Mozart's most demanding roles, requiring exceptional technical control and emotional depth [10-11].

5. Idamante and Annio

Idamante in Mozart's earlier opera *Idomeneo* is also a representative trouser role, demonstrating Mozart's early interest in the expressive possibilities of the human voice. The character possesses both noble aspirations and emotional sensitivity; therefore, Mozart chose a mezzo-soprano voice for a prince who combines authority with vulnerability [3, 12]. Idamante's music is often spacious and elegant; therefore, Mozart may have been designing a role that required a particular kind of lyrical masculinity on stage.

Although Annio in *La clemenza di Tito* is a secondary character, he is also significant because he shows that Mozart frequently uses female voices to portray young men who are faithful, morally upright and emotionally reserved [4][9]. Annio is not as emotionally unstable as Cherubino or Sesto, but this part also needs to be sung by a mezzo-soprano with a youthful and gentle voice. This role illustrates Mozart's ability to adapt the trouser-role convention to different dramatic purposes rather than applying it mechanically.

Taken together, Idamante and Annio demonstrate that Mozart's mezzo-soprano trouser roles were shaped by dramatic characterization rather than restricted to a single vocal or theatrical model. One is a prince's heir; the other is an honest young man in a political crisis, yet both are assigned to female vocalists to extend the drama rather than restrict it. Therefore, Mozart's trouser roles continue to be a focus of research on voice types and character creation [1-4].

6. Mozart's Compositional Logic

The four links in Mozart's use of trouser roles can be classified as: tessitura, melodic gestures, orchestration and dramatic pace. First, the tessitura is often in a range that allows the mezzo-soprano to sing clearly and flexibly, not too heavy, but also expressive [5-6]. Second, the form of the melody can also present a person's emotions; for instance, a

fast-rising jump might be due to the young man's anger. Third, orchestration should support the voice and not overshadow it; otherwise, the character will be difficult to discern on stage. Fourth, fast-paced scenes can present characters in different emotional conditions.

Therefore, Mozart's compositional approach suggests that each trouser role is conceived as a distinct dramatic character. Cherubino is restless, Sesto is emotionally conflicted, Idamante is noble and open-hearted, and Annio is calm and loyal. There are various forms of mezzo-soprano, so they are not all the same. Instead, it is a flexible instrument for building original dramatic worlds by Mozart. Flexibility can be attributed to the fact that these roles are both artistically meaningful and technically demanding for singers [2, 10, 11].

7. Performance Implications

Contemporary mezzo-sopranos need to be both musically talented and intelligent on stage for the Mozart trouser roles. The students should be able to breathe regularly, perform quickly and have good pronunciation, and show their personality. One of the main problems is how to create a sense of stage masculinity that meets the demands of the drama for that character and avoids being merely a traditional gender stereotype [6, 8].

Therefore, the performance of history and society should conform to the general norms of that time. In order to understand Cherubino and Sesto well, one should know how they are sung and what gender they have. Therefore, teachers and coaches should consider these roles as integrated studies of music, body and character, rather than as independent technical training [5, 9].

8. Conclusion

Mozart's mezzo-soprano trouser roles are the result of careful study of vocal writing, dramatic purposes and theatrical presentation. Cherubino, Sesto, Idamante, and Annio are four trouser roles in which Mozart uses the mezzo-soprano voice to present various ideals of youth. Based on the above discussion, it can be seen that Mozart did not have a single pattern for the trouser role and created all of them individually. Generally, these roles are for a middle-aged man's voice that can convey youthfulness, tenderness and high ideals.

Therefore, Mozart's trouser roles continue to be used in contemporary opera for character representation. They demonstrate how to combine gender, timbre and narrative to build a system of theatre language. Singers and scholars have continuously been able to find rich material for interpretation in these works because they are some of Mozart's most accessible examples of shaping character through music.

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