

# Study and Analysis on Ensemble Works' Artistic Features in the Heydays of Mozart's Opera Creation

Yu Xiang

Music and Dance Institute  
Qujing Normal University  
Qujing, Yunnan, China 655011

**Abstract**—Mozart thinks highly of dramatic value of opera. Ensembles, even being equated with aria and recitative by him, played a significant role in the heydays of his opera creation. During this period Mozart's opera ensemble works are characterized with abundant types and unique techniques of music creation and a lot of works are regarded as classics of Mozart.

**Keywords**—Mozart; opera creation; heyday; ensemble works; artistic features

## I. INTRODUCTION

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (27 January, 1756 -- 5 December, 1791), an Austrian composer, is one of the representative composers of Viennese Classicism. His musical creation involves many areas, in which opera creation is an important part. From his first opera *Aapo Lorne and Giajo Te*, which was written at his ten, to his last opera *Die Zauberflöte*, Mozart has produced twenty-two operas throughout his life. His creation career can be divided into early, middle and late phases. In the early phase, he exerted his efforts to strive for more audiences, has created *La Finta Semplice*, *Bastien und Bastienne*, *La finta giardiniera*, *Lucio Silla* and *Zaide*. In the middle phase, Mozart has had some achievements in opera creation, but still kept in touch with audiences; *Idomeneo*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *Der Schauspieldirektor* are his representative works during this period. The late phase is the heyday of Mozart's opera creation; he created many brilliant works, including *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, *Die Zauberflöte* and *La Clemenza di Tito*.

The ensembles have many diversified functions in Western operas. It is usually applied in the occurrence of emotional communication or dispute, carrying the artistic function of narration, plot development, emotional expression, contradictory aggravation and climax initiation, which increases the dramatic appeal of operas and contributes to the unique artistic and aesthetic value of ensemble. Mozart is the pioneer in regarding ensembles as the expression method of musical operas, valuing the expression of ensembles. He applies ensembles to his works to depict the characters' subtle psyche, describe the dramatic conflicts and promote the development of plots. In his operas, aria and ensembles are the pivot of operas' structure, and aria is the method to illustrate the personal characters, while the ensembles express the characters' mental compound, emphasizing on the opposition

and connection among characters. Ensembles are employed in most of his works. In the late phase, he paid more attention to it and it was the first time that he realized the unlimited possibilities of ensembles. Even in some of his works, the types of ensembles are richer than aria and recitative music, particularly in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. When producing *Don Giovanni*, he seemed to be carried away by the power of ensembles so that the arrangement of aria is slightly ill-considered.

## II. THE DIVERSITIES OF ENSEMBLES IN MOZART'S OPERA WORKS IN THE LATE PHASE

From the classification of voice parts, for the description of personal characters and plot development, the forms of ensembles in Mozart's musical creation are not restricted to traditional duets, but duets, trios even multiple ensemble. Ensembles not only portrayed the different characteristics of figures, but also are endowed with the function of expressing conflicts. In *Così fan tutte* there are male and female duet, male and female trio, male and female quintet and female duet. In *Nozze di Figaro* duets are employed in the first, second, fifth, thirteenth divided songs of Act I and the sixteenth, twentieth and twenty-second divided songs of Act III; the seventh divided song of Act I and the fourteenth divided song of Act II adopt trios; while the fifteenth divided song of Act I transits duet to septet and the eighteenth divided song makes use of sextet; the twenty-eighth divided song of Act IV is a large mixed-ensembles: from duet to quintet to quartet to duet to trio to ten duet.

In terms of timbre, there are no fixed patterns in the ensembles of operas which consist of different genders, melodies, figurers and timbres and can be divided into male ensembles, female ensembles and mixed ensembles. Mozart utilized this feature in his opera ensembles works; in *Die Zauberflöte* male and female ensembles are well-expressed, such as the male and female duets *Bei Männern welche Liebe fühlen* in Scene 2, Act 1, male and female trios *Schnelle FuBe, rascher Mut ... Das klinget so herrlich* in the sixth divided song of Act 1 and male and female duets *Pa, pa, pa, Papagena!* in the seventeenth divided song of Act II. Another striking example is *Le Nozze di Figaro*, in which there are at least nine male and female ensemble songs and three female ensemble songs.

From the perspective of emotional expression, Mozart's ensemble works can be classified into emotion synchronization type and contradiction type. Ensembles aim to demonstrate the inner world of different figures simultaneously to reflect the theatricality and musicality of operas. In many ensemble works, different roles share the consistency in emotions expressed by different voice part and the musical images shaped by music also have similarities. In the pursuit of unified themes and harmonious timbres, this kind of works is mainly for expressing emotions and its melodies are vocal and musical. People call them emotion synchronization ensemble works. For instance, in the fourteenth divided song of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, by the means of synchronic rhythm Susanna and Cherubino's panic is demonstrated well, which results in the synchronization of music and emotion. In Scene 2, Act 1 of *Die Zauberflöte*, the Pamela and Papageno's duets *Bei Mannern welche Liebe fühlen*, Pamela thinks that a man who understand love has a tender heart and Papageno thinks that it is women's obligation to enjoy sweet love. Therefore, they have the consensus that love is noble, and only when men and women are together can they have the access to paradise. However, some musical images shaped by other ensemble works are totally different, and different roles have drastic emotional conflicts. This kind of works is usually filled with tension in music and drama development, promotes the development of plot and manifest intense conflicts, such as Figaro, Susanna, Maartje Lina, Baltoro, Guzman and the Earl's sextet in the eighteenth divided song of *Le Nozze di Figaro*. The work contains many themes, shapes different musical images, trying to reflect different stances and complicated relationships among characters. The delight of re-union of Figaro and his mother Maartje Lina and father Baltoro, the Earl, the judge Guzman and Susanna's astonishment and excitement after knowing the truth are showed in ensembles at the same time. The ensemble shows different conflicts and mentality both in plot and music level, but the whole figures and musical images are well-developed.

### III. THE UNIQUENESS OF MOZART'S OPERA ENSEMBLE MUSIC

Mozart's opera ensemble works are exquisite both in opera and music level, especially in the late phase of his creation because he maximized the functions of ensembles. He drew a picture of eighteenth century society with music. In his works, every voice part will arrange the melodies, emotions and musical structures as needed. Apart from the unfixed patterns of ensembles, Mozart also valued the flexibility of voice parts, and the music is arranged according to the logic development and the purpose of operas. Different voice parts have different musical languages, timbres and gamut; also the melodies are processed in a different way, which makes every voice part independent. Therefore, distinction of melodies is a feature of Mozart's ensemble works.

#### A. The Utilization of Folk Music Materials

To take advantage of folk music in ensemble works is a primitive method. Since it lacks dramatic element, composers tend to apply folk music to the description of lyric scene. In Act II of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, countess and Susanna's duets

show this feature. The duet *Che Soave Zeffiretto* is solely a melodic lyric, smooth, with general features of barcarolle, in which there are no dramatic conflicts as arias or ensembles. When producing *Die Zauberflöte*, Mozart adopted German as lyrics, and took in traditional German folk music and chorale in his creation. For example, the male and female duets in the seventeenth divided song of Act II sings "Pa, pa, pa, Papagena!". This song can be traced distinct German and Austria elements, and it is melodic and lively, depicting kind and optimistic figures.

#### B. The Application of Homophony and Polyphony in Ensemble Works

When creating ensemble works, Mozart arranged the musical logic in accordance with the specific conflicts; therefore, every voice part is harmonious and has its own melodic features and musical languages. In terms of voice part creation, the application of homophony and polyphony is another distinct feature of Mozart's ensemble works. Homophony is to assist and foil melodic voice part in chorus effect. Generally speaking, the ensemble figures share the same emotion. For example, when the Act I of *Così fan tutte* comes to an end and the old philosopher Alfonso and two sister see off their lover, they sing the trio oave sia il vento to give their best wishes. This is a typical example of homophony ensemble, whose homophony voice part is accompanied with another two voice parts, describing a stunning scene with breeze and becalmed sea. Polyphony ensembles are unsynchronized ensembles based on polyphony music. In account of the complexities and diversities of polyphony, it is suitable for the depiction of different characters and emotions and for the development of conflicts. Mozart blended the techniques into his ensembles works of heydays. The sextet in the thirteenth divided song of *Così fan tutte* is a classic instance. Besides, in the twentieth divided song of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Mozart applied cannon to melt imitative polyphony into ensembles.

#### C. The Application of Sonata Forms in Ensemble Works Creation

Sonata form is a huge musical structure, with the appearance, development and reappearance of different themes. It has unique tonal layout, obvious features of dramas and voice. The creation principle of sonata form varies incessantly with the development of plots, and this kind of form is usually used in the musical works full of struggles and conflicts. Mozart is good at combining sonata forms with ensemble works. He could make the homophony and tonic chord take effect, and at the same time he employed inflection and harmony to explore the tension of dramas. The homophony and subordinate tune serve the description of ensemble works' plot development and conflicts to promote the development of music. For instance, the sonata structure is used in Susanna, the earl and Basilio's trios in the seventh divided song and Figaro, Susanna, Maartje Lina, Baltoro, Don Curcio and the earl's sextet in the eighteenth divided song of *Le Nozze di Figaro* to cause conflicts, initiate climax and develop the plot. The trios in Act II of *Don Giovanni* also belong to sonata structure.

#### D. The Application of Ensembles at the Finale in the Heyday of Mozart's Opera Creation

Finale ensembles is that when one act comes to an end, all actors and actress appear on the stage to take part in the opera until the climax of the opera emerges, the purpose of which is to keep the consistency of plot and musical form. When realism and plot in finale ensembles develop, exquisite and harmonious musical forms are combined with them. Mozart fully utilized finale ensembles in his brilliant masterpieces. Every actor and actress joined every lovely and funny finale ensembles in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Especially at the finale of Act II, at the beginning, it is a duet between the earl and the countess, and with the participation of Susanna, Figaro, doctor Baltoro, Maartje Lina and teacher Basilio, it becomes trio, quartet, quintet, sextet and septet till the climax. The finale of *Le Nozze di Figaro* is a classic of finale ensembles: male and female duets (Cherubino and the countess), quintet (Cherubino, the countess, the earl, Figaro and Susanna), quartet (the countess, the earl, Figaro and Susanna), duet (Figaro and Susanna), trio (Figaro, Susanna and the earl) and multiple ensemble (Susanna, the countess, Cherubino, Barbarina, Maartje Lina, Basilio, Don Cuicio, the earl, Baltoro and Figaro), as well as *Der Schauspieldirektor*. Some other works applied finale ensembles between acts to promote the climax; for example, the Act I of *La Clemenza di Tito* ends up with duet.

#### IV. THE ARTISTIC VALUE OF ENSEMBLE WORKS CREATED IN MOZART'S HEYDAYS

In the long development history of Western music, ensembles have already appeared in some simple polyphony music in Middle Ages. With the development of musical history, ensembles are accepted by more and more composers and play an increasingly important role in opera works. The approaches to create are also becoming plentiful. Mozart is a master in composing opera ensembles, is the promoter as well as the epitome of it. Almost every opera of his twenty-two masterpieces involves ensembles. He inherited the creation techniques of former musicians. For example, he borrowed polyphonic music texture and multi-level polyphony of Renaissance in his works, Handel and Bach's techniques in homophonic and polyphonic music as well. Therefore, he could create ensemble works skillfully and every voice part and characters could find their positions. Haydn's symphonies also have an important impact on Mozart's works, and the application of cannon in *Le Nozze di Figaro* is a striking example. His works showed the dramatic power of ensembles, with which he dug into the potential of operas. He has mastered the unique techniques of ensemble creation and even put ensembles in a higher position than aria in his works, which has never happened in the opera history. He arranged the types of ensembles and voice parts skillfully and orderly. From duet to multiple ensembles, from male, female ensembles to mixed ensembles, every musical element can find its own way. Ensemble composing has its own charms, and even many of his ensembles works are arranged more subtlety than aria and recitative; different voice parts mingle with each other to form a harmonious melody. Mozart excels in creating classics, and every opera of his heyday belongs to

this category, no matter they are works, characters or musical excerpts. In *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Figaro, Susanna and the earl's sextet enjoys a great prestige in opera field.

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