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DONIZETTI'S *DON PASQUALE* AND THE CONVENTIONS
OF MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY OPERA BUFFA¹

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Italian musicians, critics, and literati often suggested that opera buffa was experiencing difficulties. The issue of a widespread crisis in the comic genre was explicitly called on the carpet every time an opera buffa premiere or revival was unsuccessful, or when critics emphasized the fact that performances of opera buffa were less frequent than in the past. Such difficulties prompted comments that were replete with regret, bitterness, and complaints. Already in the age of Rossini, critics often remarked that the character of opera buffa had become increasingly corrupted. Indeed, Rossini's consistent use of similar procedures in serious and comic opera – as well as the ease with which he borrowed his own music and reused it in different contexts – is well known, and represents a serious obstacle to anyone trying to define the musical attributes of Italian serious and comic opera of the *primo ottocento* in a mutually exclusive way.

Numerous writings on opera buffa of the 1830s and 1840s show that a concern for the ambiguity of musical genres continued into the post-Rossinian period. Writing in 1833, the famous tenor Nicola Tacchinardi strongly criticized the combination of elements drawn from different genres and the excessive similarities between them:

Il pubblico tollera, ma non approva, la cavatina scherzosa nell'Opera seria; il duetto Marziale ridotto con parole amorose: il Rondò tragico nell'Opera Buffa, e tanti altri impasticciati pezzi di musica.²

¹ An earlier version of this study appears as chapter 4 of my Ph.D. dissertation, *Laughter between Two Revolutions: Opera Buffa in Italy, 1831-1848* (New York University, 2003). I am deeply grateful to Stanley Boorman, Martin Chusid, Andreas Giger, and Philip Gossett, who have read various drafts of the text, and improved it in a number of ways, and to Brian Fairtile, who engraved the first six musical examples.

² «The public tolerates, but does not approve of, the joking *cavatina* in *opera seria*, the martial duet belittled with amorous words, the tragic rondo in opera buffa, and so many other confused pieces of music». NICOLA TACCHINARDI, *Dell'opera in musica sul teatro italiano e de' suoi difetti*, 2nd ed., Firenze, presso Giovanni Berni, 1833; facsimile with an introduction by Francesca Gatta, Modena, Mucchi Editore, 1995, p. 57.

And in 1842, Carlo Ritorni described the growing contamination of opera buffa in these terms:

Mi ricordo che fino dal 1808, allorchè vidi la prima volta col gran teatro della Scala una grande opera buffa, mi fu maraviglia ritrovar nel Rivale di sestesso [sic] di Weigl l'apparamento de' cori: quindi, per secondare questa rumorosa molteplicità delle voci, il rumore, la molteplicità della istrumentazione. Fu questa certamente la causa prima della mescolanza di due coloriti diversi, poscia dell'eclissamento di quello ch'era più debole: secondo grado dell'imbastardamento, opera del rossinianismo; cui succedette l'ultimo passo, l'opera *seria-buffa*, rimanendo soltanto nelle parole il titolo ed alcuni sentimenti poetici apparentemente buffi. A tale arrivò l'imperizia degli Ultrorossinianisti, non capaci di dare alla musica concertatissima un color comico, senza servirsi badialmente de' concerti serj, e facendo adagi di *Miserere*, strette in suono di guerra e di procella, e cabalette quali adoperano essi ancora nel melodramma eroico [...].³

When Ritorni criticized the «rossinismo» in opera buffa for its «mixture of two different colors», he certainly implied a censure of the ease with which Rossini and his imitators introduced *seria* features (e.g., the heroic *rondò*) into opera buffa, as well as traditional *buffa* features (e.g., the middle finale and other ensemble types) into serious opera.

It is perhaps based on this type of negative outlook, as well as on a historiography of nineteenth-century Italian opera that has long privileged major composers to the disadvantage of broad-based operatic practices and conventions, that most modern commentators have easily dismissed (or altogether ignored) opera buffa of the post-Rossinian era. Julian Budden, for example, wrote that «[i]n the romantic age the importance of opera buffa became vastly diminished»,⁴ and David Kimbell, recalling the esthetic tendencies of romanticism, stated that «the repertory of the Romantic age was overwhelmingly heroic and tragic», and that

³ «I remember that already in 1808, when I saw for the first time a full-scale opera buffa at the great Teatro alla Scala, I was surprised to find in *Il rivale di se stesso* by Weigl the presence of choruses. Consequently, to go with this noisy multiplicity of voices, [there was] the noise and the multiplicity of the orchestration. This was certainly the first cause of the mixing of two different colors, and subsequently of the eclipse of the weaker [of the two]. The second step of the bastardization [was the] work of Rossinianism, which was followed by the last step, opera *seria-buffa*, [in which] some apparently comic poetic sentiments remained only in the title and in the words. To this stage arrived the inability of the Ultrorossinianists, [who were] unable to give a comic flavor to their most concerted music without making extensive use of serious ensembles, creating *Miserere*-like adagios, *strettas* in the tone of war and of storm, and cabalettas like the ones they also use in heroic *melodramma* [...]». CARLO RITORNI, *Ammaestramenti alla composizione d'ogni poema e d'ogni opera appartenente alla musica*, Milano, Luigi di Giacomo Pirola, 1841, pp. 202-203.

⁴ PIERO WEISS and JULIAN BUDDEN, *sub voce* «Opera buffa», in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie, London, MacMillan, 1992, vol. 3, p. 687.

«the true opera buffa never recovered a central position in Italian musical life».⁵ John Rosselli claimed that «it largely went out after a final outburst of Rossinian fireworks»,⁶ and Giorgio Pestelli echoed these views in the most recent edition of *The New Grove Dictionary*, writing about «the waning popularity of comic opera after the peak reached by Rossini».⁷ Above all these statements towers Carl Dahlhaus's extreme verdict:

Strictly speaking, the history of Italian opera buffa had reached its end with Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* of 1816. Verdi's *Falstaff* (1893) and, long before that, Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* (1843) are as it were posthumous works in the history of this genre, exceptions to the rule that nineteenth-century Italian opera was all but taken up with opera seria.⁸

My purpose here is to revise this view by setting forth a discussion of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, arguing that the opera is best viewed not as a posthumous exhalation of a deceased genre, but rather in the context of the conventions of post-Rossinian opera buffa. And let us begin by examining the writings of those authors that, in spite of Tacchinardi's and Ritorni's comments, attempted to define the musical style of opera buffa, leaving us valuable insights into the contemporary perception of its generically relevant traits. The entry «Comico» of Pietro Lichtenthal's 1826 *Dizionario e bibliografia della musica*, for example, contains remarks not only on the origins and on the various manifestations of comedy, but also on contemporary comic music:

Il Comico nella musica consiste in una particolar applicazione nelle espressioni melodiche ed armoniche dell'arte, con cui si tenta di destare il sentimento della gajezza e del ridicolo. Il *Canto parlante*, il quale s'avvicina alla loquela ordinaria, è uno de' modi più sicuri, tanto nel Recitativo, che nelle Arie e pezzi concertanti; perciò l'armonia deve esserne semplice, mentre la speditezza e le frequenti repliche delle parole fatte con spirito, servono mirabilmente a rinforzare il ridicolo.⁹

⁵ DAVID R. B. KIMBELL, *Italian Opera*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 360.

⁶ JOHN ROSSELLI, *Music and Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, Portland, Amadeus Press, 1991, p. 22.

⁷ GIORGIO PESTELLI et al., *sub voce* «Italy», in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, London, Macmillan, 2001, vol. 12, p. 653.

⁸ CARL DAHLHAUS, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1989, p. 344.

⁹ «The comic in music consists in a particular approach to the melodic and harmonic expressions of that art, with which one tries to awaken the sentiments of gaiety and of the ridiculous. The *Canto parlante*, which is close to ordinary speech, is one of the safest ways, as

Under the entry «Opera», Lichtenthal went further into the technicalities of opera buffa:

Sebbene scopo dell'Opera buffa sia di divertire e di muovere in parte il riso, non conviene tuttavia trascurare i principj d'una buona scuola e del buon gusto; fa d'uopo altresì ben distinguere i limiti del così detto buffo nobile, di mezzo carattere, e caricato. L'Opera buffa concede bensì una maggior libertà nella scelta delle cantilene; le armonie vi sono meno complicate che nell'Opera seria, e l'istrumentazione è piuttosto brillante. Tal genere di composizione richiede altresì delle melodie facili, popolari, chiare, allegre e scherzevoli; e dovendo il genere buffo in generale portar l'impronto dell'umor comico e della caricatura, ne segue che lo scrivere una buona Opera buffa non è cosa conceduta a chichessia, e che senza il dono naturale de' summentovati requisiti, la composizione non sarà mai quella che debb'essere.¹⁰

Even though these statements provide some fascinating hints as to the stylistic features that characterize opera buffa musically, they are of little help in determining how this genre was perceived in the post-Rossinian era. Born in 1780 in Bratislava, and a censor of Lombardy-Venetia since the age of the Restoration, Lichtenthal was sufficiently old to be well acquainted with the pre-Rossinian repertory. His commentary on opera buffa applies to the comic style of Paisiello, Cimarosa, and Rossini, just as well as it describes the character of *buffa* works by Donizetti or Luigi Ricci – indeed, it is emblematic of the continuity of certain features throughout the history of the genre.

Reviewers commenting on specific comic operas premiered in the 1830s and 40s are sometimes more helpful. Alberto Mazzucato's detailed review of Lauro Rossi's *Il borgomastro di Schiedam* (1844) is indicative of how a competent critic of that time approached a new opera and described its generic musical attributes. In spite of strong reservation on

much in the recitative as in the arias and in the ensembles; therefore the harmony must be simple, while the speed and frequent repetitions of the words, done with humor, serve perfectly to reinforce the ridiculous». PIETRO LICHTENTHAL, *Dizionario e bibliografia della musica*, Milano, Fontana, 1826, vol. 1, p. 179.

¹⁰ «Although the purpose of opera buffa is to entertain and in part to move to laughter, it is not appropriate however to neglect the principles of a good school and of good taste; moreover, it is necessary to distinguish clearly between the so-called *buffo nobile, di mezzo carattere*, and *caricato*. Opera buffa allows rather for greater freedom in the choice of melodies; in it, the harmonies are less complicated than in opera seria, and the orchestration is rather brilliant. Such a genre of composition requires nothing but simple, popular, clear, cheerful, and playful melodies; and since the *buffa* genre in general must bear the marks of comic humor and of caricature, it follows that writing a good opera buffa is not given to anyone, and that without the natural gift of the above-mentioned skills, the composition will never be what it should». *Ivi*, vol. 2, p. 78.

Giovanni Peruzzini's libretto, his response to Rossi's music for *Il borgomastro di Schiedam* was extremely positive. Some of the qualities he recognized in the music of this opera were the same as the opera buffa ingredients enumerated by Lichtenthal:

Lauro Rossi, questo bello ed ingegnoso talento, e per dura ed inesplicabile ingiustizia non ancora quanto il meriterebbe conosciuto ed apprezzato, vestì di note questo libretto, in modo che meglio, parmi, non potevasi. – Lo stile generale piano, ma quasi sempre originale, sempre coerente a sé stesso, correggente anzi per quanto si poteva il difetto notato testé di troppa elevatezza delle parole; le forme dei pezzi non ischiave di inveterate convenzioni, ma libere sempre, ma sempre create dalla fattura e forma poetica dei pezzi rispettivi del libretto, per cui se questo le presenta talfiata nuove, la musica le impronta nuovissime; i canti tessuti con non stentata larghezza di periodi; i parlanti facili, chiari, maestrevolmente combinati coi sottoposti eleganti movimenti d'orchestra; lo strumentale ingegnoso mai sempre, sicuro, non iscarso di nuovi effetti; tutti questi pregi fanno sì che io collochi il signor Rossi nel numero de' migliori sostenitori dell'Opera Buffa italiana.¹¹

A few days before this article appeared in the «Gazzetta musicale di Milano», an anonymous review published in «Il Figaro» had already set forth, albeit in less detail, the idea that the music of *Il borgomastro di Schiedam* was unmistakably buffa: «Il carattere buffo vi domina sempre lindo e piacevole: le melodie vi sono spontanee: la strumentazione vi è ben nutrita, quasi mai soverchia».¹²

Indeed, Mazzucato argued not only that Lauro Rossi's music was good, but also that it was truly *buffa*, and that the composer was successful at compensating for the generic ambiguity of the libretto. Among

¹¹ «Lauro Rossi, this beautiful and ingenious talent, who because of a rigid and inexplicable injustice is not yet as well-known and appreciated as he deserves, dressed this libretto in notes, in a way, it seems to me, that couldn't have been better. The style [is] generally simple, but almost always original, always coherent, and correcting as much as possible the defect of the excessively elevated text noted above; the forms of the pieces [are] never slaves to inveterate conventions, but always free, always modeled after the style and poetic form of the respective passages in the libretto, so that if sometimes the latter presents new [forms], the music makes them even newer. The melodies [are] constructed with spontaneous broadness of phrasing; the *parlanti* [are] easy, clear, masterfully combined with underlying elegant movements of the orchestra; the orchestration [is] always ingenious, secure, not lacking in new effects; all of these gifts make me place signor Rossi in the number of the best upholders of Italian opera buffa». ALBERTO MAZZUCATO, untitled article in «Gazzetta musicale di Milano», III, 1844, p. 92.

¹² «In it the clean and pleasant buffo character always dominates: the melodies are spontaneous, the orchestration is well nourished, but almost never overwhelming». Anonymous review in «Il Figaro» XII, 1844, p. 178.

many numbers in *Il borgomastro*, Mazzucato may have had in mind the chorus at the beginning of the opera. The opening lines of the libretto read as follows:

1.° Che nuove?	1.° What is the news?
2.° Udiste – il gran disastro Del Borgomastro?	2.° Did you hear the great disaster of our burgomaster?
1.° Qual?	1.° What?
2.° Più di speme – non v'ha conforto È morto ...	2.° No more hope will comfort us, he is dead ...
1.° Morto!!	1.° Dead!!
2.° Purtroppo, il caso – che già suonò Si confermò! Da un gran viaggio – mentre redia Mancò per via. ¹³	2.° Sadly, the event – which was already rumored has been confirmed! As he was returning from a long trip, he died along the way.

The meter of the poetry (an alternation of *quinari semplici* and *doppi*), the dialogic structure, and the short-breathed phrases define the villagers of Schiedam as simple, good-hearted folk, suitable for a *semiseria*, or even *buffa* context. However, the matter under discussion (the death of the old burgomaster) is hardly comic. In Rossi's setting, which includes the participation of the peasant Daniele, the accompanying orchestral melody, with its brisk alternation of dotted figures and triplets, says more about the cheerful nature of the villagers than about their sadness at the death of the burgomaster (see Example 1).

While Lichtenthal and Mazzucato discussed opera buffa in practical terms, and tried – the former in general terms, the latter by referring to a particular opera – to pin down some stylistic aspects of the comic genre, other writers took a more speculative approach, and went so far as to discuss the ability of music to convey humor and laughter. Writing in 1842, composer and critic Raimondo Boucheron believed that music had at least some power to be humorous in contexts in which the text alone had little effect, as the following passage seems to suggest:

In questo genere gli affetti sono più miti, e per l'ordinario non oltrepassano lo scherzo; e però di rado esigono dalla musica più che mezze tinte: ond'è che il maestro in tali drammi, scelto un ritmo, un tono analogo alla situazione, è del resto per lo più libero di dare sfogo alla propria fantasia, ed anzi molto spesso gli corre l'obbligo di far tutto da sè; e purchè non gli manchi l'estro e la perizia nel maneggio dell'arte, qualunque cosa ei faccia sarà per bene. Ciò vediamo nelle

¹³ GIOVANNI PERUZZINI, *Il borgomastro di Schiedam. Melodramma in tre atti [...] da rappresentarsi nel Teatro Re la Primavera del 1844*, Milano, Luigi Brambilla, [1844], p. 5.

Example 1. *Il borgomasstro di Schiedam*, Act I

DANIELE

CORO

Che nuove? a - mi - ci

Del Bor-go mas-tro? Il gran di - sa - stro il gran di - sa - stro

p *p* *ff*

6

Nò più di spe - me non ha con - for - to, mor - to egl' è il
qual mor - to!

mor - to egl' è pur - trop - po.

p *p*

11

ca - so che già suo - nò — si con - fer - mò
si con - fer - mò
si con - fer - mò

migliori opere di Rossini, e segnatamente nell'*Italiana in Algeri* e nel *Barbiere di Siviglia*, nelle quali i migliori pezzi sono costrutti su parole del tutto insignificanti, e in situazioni comiche sì, ma di poco risentito affetto.¹⁴

Indeed, this passage says more on Boucheron's idea of the relationship between words and music in opera buffa than on the Rossinian specimens he mentions. Both *L'italiana* and *Il barbiere* have excellent librettos, filled with entertaining situations and hilarious verbal expressions. Boucheron certainly had in mind the «Lalaran-lalaran» of Figaro's cavatina, and the finale to Act I of *L'italiana in Algeri*, in which the onomatopoeic syllables sung by the various characters take precedence over the rest of the poetry.

Others writers were skeptical about the humorous powers of music. At the beginning of an article on opera buffa published in 1859, Abramo Basevi claimed that music could by no means express or generate humor:

La musica, per sé sola, non è capace di muovere in noi quel riso che nasce dalla rappresentazione delle cose ridicole. E la ragione è questa. Il riso, e non intendiamo di quello tranquillo e benevolente, richiede un'operazione della mente, tanto che non ha luogo se non in un essere ragionevole come l'uomo, il quale fu anco per ciò definito un animale risibile. Kant, nella sua *Critica del giudizio*, dichiara il riso per «un'affezione che provasi quando una grande aspettazione si trova ad un tratto annientata». Non cade adesso esaminare fino a che punto sia vera questa definizione; ma ci giova riferire l'opinione di un gran pensatore, onde si rileva la necessità del concorso dell'intelligenza nel riso; imperciocché l'*assurdo*, che muove il riso, non può venire riconosciuto che da un essere intelligente. Ora, la musica non s'indirizza mai alla mente, ma al cuore: essa può prendere bensì il luogo degli istinti, della ragione mai no. Per le cose anzidette, riesce aperto perché, mentre la musica è capace di tanti portentosi effetti, come di suscitare l'ira, indurre la calma, disporre all'amore, alla devozione, alla gioia, alla tristezza ec., non possa in verun caso eccitare il riso per la rappresentazione di cosa ridicola.¹⁵

¹⁴ «In this genre the affections are milder, and ordinarily they do not go beyond the playful; and therefore they rarely require more than half-shades. It is for this that in such operas the composer, having chosen a rhythm and a tone suited to the situation, is for the rest mostly free to give way to his fantasy, and rather, very often he has the duty of doing everything by himself. We see this in the best operas of Rossini, namely in *L'italiana in Algeri* and in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, in which the best pieces are constructed on words totally meaningless, and in situations that are comic indeed, but of little intrinsic effect». RAIMONDO BOUCHERON, *Filosofia della musica o estetica applicata a quest'arte*, Milano, Ricordi, 1842, p. 102.

¹⁵ «By itself, music is not capable of moving us to that type of laughter which arises from the representation of ridiculous things. And the reason is this: laughter – and by this I do not mean tranquil and benevolent laughter – requires an operation of the mind such as can only

For Basevi, it was the text alone that provoked laughter in opera buffa:

Se lo spettatore in un'Opera buffa si trova mosso a ridere, dappoiché la musica sola non è abile a produrre tal' effetto, è giuoco forza che il riso proven- ga dalle parole. E così è.¹⁶

And the function of music was largely limited to making the text intelli- gible, and to reinforcing the natural declamation of the words:

Che servizio può prestare la musica alle parole in un'Opera buffa? È chiaro che prima di tutto essa non deve minimamente soffocare le parole medesime, le quali anzi devono pervenire all'uditore intelligibilissime, e tanto da far tosto comprendere la facezia che contengono. Questo servizio della musica, sebbene importante, pure non è che negativo. Havvene altro ancora positivo, e che consi- ste nell'afforzare la declamazione, e ciò specialmente in quanto s'appartiene più o meno da vicino ai così detti lazzi, i quali sono accompagnati da particolari in- flessioni di voce, o da certe ripetizioni di parole ec. [...] [N]ell'Opera buffa il ri- dicolo non può appartenere che alle parole; onde ché la musica non deve attrar- re a sé tutta l'attenzione dello spettatore.¹⁷

Basevi praised the composers of the past (from Cimarosa and Paisiello to Rossini), who in his opinion gave an adequate prominence to

take place in a rational being like man, who has thus been defined as a laughing animal. Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment*, declares laughter to result from «an affection that is experienced when a great expectation finds itself suddenly come to nothing». It is not for us now to exam- ine to what extent this definition may be true; but it is useful to report the opinion of a great thinker, which indicates the necessary role played by intelligence in laughter; since the *absurd*, which provokes laughter, can only be recognized by an intelligent being. Now, music is never directed to the mind, but rather to the heart: it may well take the place of the instincts, but never of reason. Thus it may be clearly seen why music, though capable of many portentous effects such as arousing anger, inducing calm, disposing to love, devotion, joy, sadness, etc., cannot possibly excite that laughter which arises [in connection with] the representation of a ridiculous thing». ABRAMO BASEVI, *Pensieri sull'opera buffa*, «L'armonia: giornale non politico», VI, 1859, pp. 209-210. I am grateful to Jesse Rosenberg for providing me with a copy of this article, and for allowing me to use his excellent English translation of it.

¹⁶ «If the spectator at a comic opera finds himself moved to laugh, since the music alone is unable to produce this effect, it follows necessarily that the laughter arises from the words [alone]. And thus it is». *Ibid.*

¹⁷ «What service can music lend to the words in a comic opera? It is clear that first of all it must not in the least suffocate the words themselves, which rather must reach the listener in the most intelligible form, in order immediately to render comprehensible the jest that they contain. But this function of music, while important, is still merely negative. There is another, positive function, which consists of strengthening the declamation, and this especially insofar as it belongs to a category similar to that of the so-called buffooneries, which are accompanied by particular inflections of the voice, or by certain repetitions of the words, etc. [...] [I]n comic opera the ridiculous can only belong to the words, and the music must never attract all of the spectator's attention to itself». *Ibid.*

the declamation of the text, and claimed that true opera buffa had ended with Rossini. He sharply criticized more recent opera buffa composers, particularly the Ricci brothers, who filled their operas with dance tunes in the assumption that cheerful and fast-moving melodies and rhythms were appropriate means to generate gaiety:

L'errore de' maestri presenti non è soltanto nel curare solamente i *motivi* a scapito dell'espressione; ma nel reputare capace di destare la gioia qualunque musica, che per il suo ritmo possa accompagnare il ballo. Cotali *motivi*, per il loro *effetto ritmico*, riescono piacevoli, ma non ne viene la conseguenza che debbano suscitare sempre la gioia. Alcune volte questi motivi possono associarsi con efficacia anche a poesia esprimente affetti non gaj, ed anche mesti, o d'ira, ec. I migliori maestri antichi o meno recenti hanno raramente adoprato la musica ballabile nelle Opere buffe, e vediamo che nel *Barbiere* poca se ne incontra, e quella poca là dove le parole non porgono nulla o poco di ridicolo, come quando Figaro indica a Lindoro la sua bottega.¹⁸

Composer and critic Abramo Basevi was a prominent figure in mid-century Florence, where he had two serious operas performed in the 1840s – *Romilda ed Ezzelino* (1840) and *Enrico Howard* (1847). The year in which his article on opera buffa appeared, he also published his *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi*, which in recent years has become highly influential for the insights it offers not only on Verdi, but generally on mid-nineteenth-century operatic practice, terminology, and conventions.¹⁹ In general, Basevi's interest in introducing new influences into the Italian operatic school caused him to neglect opera buffa. The *Studio critico*, which begins with Verdi's third opera, *Nabucco*, makes no mention of *Un giorno di regno*, and refers only marginally to such comic masterworks as Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*; it never mentions *Don Pasquale*; it completely neglects those contemporaries of Verdi who wrote mainly comic operas.

All this notwithstanding, and even though it was written at a later

¹⁸ «The error of present composers is not merely in attending exclusively to the tunes at the expense of the expression, but in considering capable of arousing joy any music which by its rhythm can accompany a dance. Such themes, with their rhythmic effect, turn out to be pleasant, but it does not follow that they must always arouse joy. At times these [same] themes can also be effectively associated with effects that are not cheerful, or are even sad, or enraged, etc. The best composers, whether of earlier or more recent times, have rarely employed danceable music in their comic operas, and in Rossini's *Barbiere* there is little of it to be found, and that little where the words have little or nothing of the ridiculous about them, as when Figaro points out his shop to Lindoro». *Ibid.*

¹⁹ ABRAMO BASEVI, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi*, Firenze, Tipografia Tofani, 1859. On the reception of Basevi in modern scholarship, cfr. below, note 28.

time than the period under consideration, Basevi's article cannot be easily dismissed. First of all, it expresses and reinforces the ideas of many critics of the 1830s and 40s. Furthermore, it is the only mid-nineteenth-century Italian source I know of which deals with the issue of musical humor. Basevi's approach to this matter is hardly original, and draws from ideas expressed several decades earlier by German philosophers. For example, in 1817 Johann Stephan Schütze had argued that

[m]usic cannot draw on humor itself, as the latter is based on representation. Music is the expression of feelings, and as such remains unaffected by humor since humor presupposes the possibility of representation.²⁰

Basevi's argument for the primacy of the text as a vehicle of humor in opera buffa is extremely important for modern criticism. A similar view has informed the work of numerous scholars. Folco Portinari, for example, stated that in nineteenth-century opera buffa the verbal element had far greater importance than in contemporary serious *melodramma*: «[n]el comico la parola ha una funzione 'intrigante', entra nel gioco al pari dell'azione, ad essa proprio è demandata buona parte degli effetti [...]».²¹ Finally, beyond its philosophical stance, Basevi's article provides precious insight into the music of opera buffa at mid century. His negative remarks on the use of dance music, for example, point to a typical aspect of post-Rossinian comic opera, which will be discussed below.

In spite of their vagueness, the writings quoted so far convey the idea that opera buffa possessed musical qualities that made it clearly distinguishable from (although hardly independent of) its serious counterpart. Reading the score of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* against the backdrop of the contemporary comic repertory, and keeping an eye on the writings examined above, in the remainder of this study I will address some salient musical features of opera buffa of the 1830s and 40s.

²⁰ Quoted in ROSSANA DALMONTE, *Towards a Semiology of Humour in Music*, «International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music», XXVI, 1995, p. 168.

²¹ «In comedy the word has an 'intriguing' function, it becomes part of the game as much as the plot; it is indeed on it that a good part of the effectiveness depends [...]». FOLCO PORTINARI, *Pari siamo! Io la lingua, egli ha il pugnale: Storia del melodramma ottocentesco attraverso i suoi libretti*, Torino, EDT, 1981, p. 10.

LA COMICA FORMA²²

Following the Trieste premiere of *Don Pasquale* at the Teatro Mauroner in the summer of 1844, «Il Figaro» published a negative review of the opera by an as yet unidentified commentator with the initials O.T., who condemned both the libretto and the music of the opera for their lack of originality. The reviewer went so far as to bring into the discussion Stefano Pavesi's *Ser Marcantonio* (Milan: La Scala, 1810), whose libretto by Angelo Anelli served as the source for *Don Pasquale*, in order to claim that Donizetti's last opera buffa was derivative of earlier models:

[*Don Pasquale*] ci venne da Parigi con una fama maggiore del merito, da quanto sembra. Nessuno pone in dubbio che la feconda vena del Donizetti, non abbia versato anche qui musica bella ed ingegnosa, e che parecchi pezzi del *Don Pasquale* non sieno fattura degna di lui: ma pochi asseriranno che questa sia una bell'opera buffa, e che il libretto non è la sola cosa vecchia in essa. O *Don Pasquale*, o *Marcantonio*, meno qualche bel tratto d'accompagnamento, niente in esso brilla per novità.²³

It is impossible to determine whether there were ulterior motives lurking behind O.T.'s harshness. It cannot be denied, however, that a knowledgeable Italian opera-goer who attended a performance of *Don Pasquale* in the early 1840s would recognize a number of familiar fea-

²² In addition to *Don Pasquale*, the following discussion of *buffa* music will be based primarily on the following operas: Pietro Raimondi's *Il ventaglio* (1831); Luigi Ricci's *Il nuovo Figaro* (1832); Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* (1832); Ricci's *Un'avventura di Scaramuccia* and *Chi dura vince* (1834); Vincenzo Fioravanti's *Il ritorno di Pulcinella* (1837; Milanese version prepared by Carlo Cambiaggio, 1842); Giuseppe Verdi's *Un giorno di regno* (1840); Lauro Rossi's *Il borgomastro di Schiedam* (1844) and *La figlia di Figaro* (1846); Antonio Cagnoni's *Don Bucefalo* and Ricci's *Il birrajo di Preston* (1847). Furthermore, I refer to the comic operas by Rossini that circulated widely during the 1830s and 40s – especially *L'italiana in Algeri*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and *La Cenerentola*. I have chosen to focus on these works for two reasons. First, these are the *opere buffe* which enjoyed the greatest success and had the widest dissemination during the period under consideration. (The only exception to this rule is *Un giorno di regno*, which was produced only four times during the nineteenth century, and which has been included here because of the relevance of its author.) The second reason is that most of these works have been transmitted in reliable primary musical sources. I have examined the autograph scores or other manuscript full scores of most of these operas, and printed piano-vocal scores of all of them.

²³ «It seems that [*Don Pasquale*] came to us from Paris with greater reputation than merit. No one questions that Donizetti's prolific vein has poured beautiful and ingenious music even here, and that many pieces of *Don Pasquale* are a creation worthy of him: but few will assert that this is a beautiful opera buffa, and that the libretto is the only old thing in it. Be it *Don Pasquale*, or *Marcantonio*, except for a few beautiful passages of accompaniment, nothing in it shines for its novelty». O.T., review in «Il Figaro», XII, 1844, p. 275.

tures in this work.²⁴ The plot of the opera, derived from a libretto more than thirty years old, is filled with typical opera buffa situations: a young couple boycotted by a nasty old man; useless precautions; disguises; and a final nocturnal garden scene. To these staples Donizetti responded with a score well within the horizon of expectations of the genre, although not on that account derivative of *Ser Marcantonio*.²⁵ The dependence of *Don Pasquale* on a set of solid musical conventions is neither a negative trait, nor one that sets it apart from the contemporary operatic tradition. As William Ashbrook suggested, this opera is best seen as «a fascinating mixture of conventional and unconventional solutions to traditional situations».²⁶ On the one hand, it showcases a thorough collection of procedures common throughout the contemporary opera buffa canon, consisting not only of comic operas by Donizetti himself and by other composers of his time, but also of the *opere buffe* by Gioachino Rossini – particularly *L'italiana in Algeri*, *La Cenerentola*, and of course the perennial *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. On the other hand, it presents musical features that seem to break away from a number of widespread conventions, indicating new directions in the comic genre. In the light of this, *Don Pasquale* is an ideal point of departure for testing the conventional boundaries of opera buffa of the mid-nineteenth century, identifying differences and similarities between this and other works of the contemporary comic repertory.

Thanks to decades of invaluable scholarship, we have gained considerable insight into the formal conventions of Italian opera of the early and mid nineteenth century, and can approach any work of that period with solid analytical tools.²⁷ Since the publication in 1987 of an article by

²⁴ Although *Don Pasquale* received its world premiere at the Théâtre-Italien in Paris, relevant to this discussion is its presence and impact on the Italian stage. Hence, I discuss the significance of this work in the Italian context, and in reference to Italian performances.

²⁵ The relationship between *Ser Marcantonio* and *Don Pasquale* is discussed at length in CHARLES PATRICK DESMOND CRONIN, *The Comic Operas of Gaetano Donizetti and the End of the Opera Buffa Tradition*, Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1993, pp. 168-208. The transformation of Angelo Anelli's libretto by Giovanni Ruffini and Donizetti himself is also discussed in PHILIP GOSSETT, *Don Pasquale: Introduction to the Facsimile Edition*, in GAETANO DONIZETTI, *Don Pasquale: Dramma buffo in tre atti di Giovanni Ruffini, Facsimile dell'autografo*, Milano, Archivio storico Ricordi (M.I.13), Roma, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, and Milano, Ricordi, 1999, pp. 91-94.

²⁶ WILLIAM ASHBROOK, *Donizetti and his Operas*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 489.

²⁷ Studies on the formal procedures of nineteenth-century Italian opera are far too numerous to be listed in a reasonably-sized footnote. Some seminal works in this field are: MARTIN CHUSID, *The Organization of Scenes with Arias: Verdi's Cavatinas and Romanzas*, in *Atti del I° Congresso Internazionale di Studi Verdiani: Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 31 luglio-2*

Harold S. Powers, containing a significant and influential attempt at developing an analytical method based on mid-nineteenth-century concepts and terminology, the term «solita forma», derived from Abramo Basevi's *Studio delle opere di Giuseppe Verdi*, has pervaded the fields of Italian opera studies.²⁸ The title of the present section pays playful homage to this popular expression, emphasizing at the same time a lacuna: amidst such a proliferation of studies, to date we have lacked a thorough examination of the ways in which the formal procedures of the *primo ottocento* manifest themselves in opera buffa. The following discussion aims to shed light on this aspect.

The structure of *Don Pasquale* is outlined in Table 1. The internal subdivision of the opera into acts and numbers deserves a closer look. In particular, the subdivision into three acts is rather uncommon in opera buffa of this time. In the comic genre the subdivision into two acts remained in effect almost without exception through the 1830s and early 40s, whereas in the serious genre the most prominent composers had begun to use three- and four-act subdivisions liberally already in the 1830s.²⁹ Bellini's *I puritani* and Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, both in three acts and both premiered in 1835, are good cases in point.

TABLE 1. The structure of *Don Pasquale*³⁰

–	Sinfonia
Act I	
no. 1	Introduzione «Son nov'ore» (Malatesta, Don Pasquale)

agosto 1966, Parma, Istituto di Studi Verdiani, 1969, pp. 59-66; PHILIP GOSSETT, *Verdi, Ghislanzoni, and 'Aida': The Uses of Convention*, «Critical Inquiry», I, 1974, pp. 291-334; ROBERT MOREEN, *Integration of Text Forms and Musical Forms in Verdi's Early Operas*, Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1975; SCOTT BALTHAZAR, *Evolving Conventions in Italian Serious Opera: Scene Structure in the Works of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi, 1810 to 1815*, Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1985.

²⁸ HAROLD S. POWERS, 'La solita forma' and the Uses of Convention, «Acta Musicologica», LIX, 1987, pp. 65-90. For a criticism of Powers's views, cfr. ROGER PARKER, *Insolite forme, or Basevi's Garden Path*, in *Verdi's Middle Period (1849-1859): Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp. 129-146.

²⁹ The few exceptions to this rule are mostly from the Neapolitan school: Lauro Rossi's *Amelia, ovvero Otto anni di costanza* (Naples, San Carlo, 1834), Agostino Locasto's *La locandiera* (Palermo, Teatro Carolino, 1838), and Pietro Raimondi's *Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino e la Fornarina* (Naples, Teatro Nuovo, 1838).

³⁰ This table is based on Philip Gossett's introduction to and the score of DONIZETTI, *Don Pasquale: Dramma buffo in tre atti di Giovanni Ruffini* cit.

- no. 2 Duetto «Prender moglie!»
(Ernesto, Don Pasquale)
- no. 3 Cavatina «Quel guardo il cavaliere»
(Norina)
- no. 4 Duetto Fine Atto 1mo «Pronta io son»
(Norina, Malatesta)

Act II

- no. 5 Preludio, Recitativo e Romanza «Cercherò lontana terra»
(Ernesto)
- no. 6 Trio «Via, da brava»
(Norina, Malatesta, Don Pasquale)
- no. 7 Finale Atto 2do «Fra da una parte»
(Norina, Ernesto, Malatesta, Don Pasquale)

Act III

- no. 8 Introduzione Atto 3° «I diamanti, presto, presto»
(Coro)
- no. 9 Duetto «Signorina in tanta fretta»
(Norina, Don Pasquale)
- no. 10 Recitativo e Coro «Qualche nota di cuffie... Che interminabile andirivieni»
(Don Pasquale, Coro)
- no. 11 Duetto «Cheti, cheti, immantinente»
(Malatesta, Don Pasquale)
- no. 12 Serenata e Duettino «Com'è gentil... Tornami a dir che m'ami»
(Norina, Ernesto)
- no. 13 Finale Atto 3°
(Norina, Ernesto, Malatesta, Don Pasquale)

Truth be told, Acts I and II seem to form a unit culminating with the traditional middle-finale ensemble (no. 7). Donizetti himself may have perceived the opera as being divided in two parts, since in the autograph score of the opera, he appears to have originally marked «Atto 2do» at the opening of Act III.³¹ Conversely a tripartite subdivision is implicitly present in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, where there is a break in continuity in the middle of Act I, after the duet for Almaviva and Figaro and before Rosina's cavatina.³² Be that as it may, following the success of *Don Pasquale*, the subdivision in two acts disappeared rapidly from the *buffa* stage. After a few lesser-known works in 1843, the latest specimen of comic opera in two acts I have been able to find in the mid-nineteenth century is *Don Procopio*, a pastiche to a libretto by Carlo

³¹ This detail is noted in GOSSETT, *Don Pasquale: Introduction to the Facsimile Edition* cit., p. 143.

³² Gossett points out that by the 1840s the two-act subdivision, albeit followed almost without exception as a compositional convention in opera buffa, in practice was beginning to fall out of favor: «Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, for example, was often performed in three acts, its first act divided into two parts». *Ivi*, p. 92.

Cambiaggio premiered in Trieste on 4 September 1844. The most successful comic operas of the mid and late 1840s (beginning with Rossi's *Il borgomastro di Schiedam*, and continuing with Rossi's *La figlia di Figaro*, Cagnoni's *Don Bucefalo*, and Ricci's *Il birrajo di Preston*) are all in three acts.

The first piece encountered in the score of *Don Pasquale* is a *sinfonia*. The orchestral *sinfonia*, always found at the opening of Rossini's comic operas,³³ as well as in Donizetti's early *opere buffe*, by the early 1830s was no longer necessary. *L'elisir d'amore*, for example, begins with an orchestral introduction directly linked to the *introduzione*, and so do numerous other *buffa* hits of the 1830s and 40s (Raimondi's *Il ventaglio*, Ricci's *Un'avventura di Scaramuccia* and *Chi dura vince*, and Cagnoni's *Don Bucefalo*, to mention only a few examples). This *sinfonia* follows a loosely abridged sonata form, clearly reminiscent of the Rossinian model, and found repeatedly throughout the 1830s and 40s – witness the *sinfonie* of Ricci's *Il nuovo Figaro* (1832), Verdi's *Un giorno di regno* (1840), or Rossi's *Il borgomastro di Schiedam* (1844).³⁴ Compared to the latter pieces, however, the *sinfonia* of *Don Pasquale* stands out for the ease with which it introduces some of the catchiest tunes to be heard in the opera: Ernesto's serenade in Act III provides the theme for the slow introduction, and Norina's cabaletta «So anch'io la virtù magica» is the first subject of the principal section (marked «Moderato» in the score), and is heard again in the coda. Indeed, the melodic spontaneity of the piece takes precedence over its formal design.

Of the thirteen numbers of *Don Pasquale*, only two are proper arias – Norina's *cavatina* in Act I and Ernesto's *romanza* at the beginning of Act II. To these one might add the *Serenata*, which begins with an extended solo for Ernesto. Compared with the profusion of arias (usually more than five) in such works as *L'italiana in Algeri*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and *La Cenerentola*, the limited presence of solo scenes is a typical trait of post-Rossinian opera buffa.³⁵ In an opera buffa of the 1830s

³³ The same does not apply to Rossini's serious operas, especially those composed for Naples. In fact, during his Neapolitan period, Rossini systematically did away with the formal self-contained *sinfonia*. Cfr. PHILIP GOSSETT, *The Overtures of Rossini*, «Nineteenth-Century Music», III, 1979-80, p. 3.

³⁴ For a thorough discussion of the Rossinian overture, cfr. *ivi*, pp. 3-31. The fascinating question of the relation of the Rossinian prototype to the late-eighteenth-century binary overture remains to be fully investigated.

³⁵ Cfr. CRONIN, *The Comic Operas of Gaetano Donizetti* cit., p. 23. However, there are exceptions to this rule. Rossi's *La figlia di Figaro* and Cagnoni's *Don Bucefalo*, for example, contain six and five arias respectively.

and 40s, one can expect to find three or four solo numbers (often with the participation of the chorus or of one or more *pertichini*).³⁶ Furthermore, the *introduzioni* usually contain one or more solo sections involving at least one principal character. Operas written for the Teatro Nuovo in Naples often had even fewer solo numbers. Out of thirteen numbers in Pietro Raimondi's *Il ventaglio*, for example, only one is a formal aria, and even that is punctuated by abundant *pertichini*. Vincenzo Fioravanti's *Il ritorno di Pulcinella da Padova* shows a similar approach. When the latter was presented on the Milanese stage in 1842 in Carlo Cambiaggio's adaptation, three solo numbers (including a final rondo for the prima donna) were added, presumably to make the work more palatable to a Northern audience.³⁷

The form of the arias for Norina and Ernesto deserves attention. In the 1840s, solo numbers usually consisted of several sections, which, in a letter reporting on the premiere of Verdi's *I masnadieri* (London, Her Majesty's, 1847), Verdi's pupil Emanuele Muzio described in these terms: «[f]ino ad ora le cavatine avevano il suo adagio, e poi il suo tempo di mezzo, e infine la cabaletta [...]».³⁸ This formal plan was introduced by an introductory recitative or *scena*. Thus, the «solita forma» of a solo number in the mid-nineteenth century may be schematically described as follows:³⁹

Scena
Slow movement [cantabile]⁴⁰
Tempo di mezzo
Cabaletta

³⁶ In nineteenth-century Italian operatic jargon, a *pertichino* is a secondary intervention by a character in someone else's formal aria.

³⁷ The introduction of new music in the Milanese version of this opera is discussed in Philip Gossett's introduction to VINCENZO FIORAVANTI, *Il ritorno di Pulcinella da Padova [...] in the Revised Version as Il ritorno di Columella dagli studi di Padova, ossia Il pazzo per amore*, New York, Garland, 1989.

³⁸ «So far the cavatinas had their adagio, then their *tempo di mezzo* [middle movement] and finally the cabaletta [...]» Emanuele Muzio to Antonio Barezzi, London, 23 July 1847, cited in LUIGI AGOSTINO GARIBALDI, ed., *Giuseppe Verdi nelle lettere di Emanuele Muzio ad Antonio Barezzi*, Milano, Fratelli Treves Editori, 1931, p. 346.

³⁹ This diagram reflects those included in CHUSID, *The Organization of Scenes with Arias* cit., p. 60, and POWERS, 'La solita forma' cit., p. 69.

⁴⁰ The term *adagio* employed by Muzio does not refer to a specific tempo to be employed in all *cavatinas*. It simply suggests that the first lyrical section of a solo number was normally a slow movement. The slow movements in Norina's and Ernesto's arias are marked respectively «Andante» and «Larghetto». The term «cantabile», used frequently to refer to the eminently melodic nature of this section, is also suitable.

The introductory *scena* is set apart by its poetry, *versi sciolti*, whereas the following sections are set in *versi lirici*. The slow movement and the cabaletta constitute the lyrical episodes of the number, and form the core of its formal plan. Both the *scena* and the *tempo di mezzo* could be done away with, and the result would be a double aria consisting of two consecutive lyrical sections (slow movement-cabaletta), with no *scena* and no middle movement. This is the case with Norina's cavatina, which begins with a short instrumental prelude leading directly to the cantabile «Quel guardo il cavaliere». The transition from the cantabile into the cabaletta happens within a mere two measures (hardly a *tempo di mezzo*), in which the young woman, in laughter, expresses her amusement at the ridiculous love tale she has just finished reading (undoubtedly a reference to the entrance of Adina in *L'elisir d'amore*). Musically, the function of the two measures is simply to lead from the key of the cantabile (G major) to that of the cabaletta (B^b Major) (see Example 2).

Example 2. *Don Pasquale*, Act I

(ride e getta il libro)

non vol - ge - ria il pen - sier. Ah ah! ah ah!

rall.

ff

p

The implications of the simple formal pattern of Norina's aria are not only musical, but dramatic and generic as well. One of the functions of the *tempo di mezzo*, usually implied in the libretto by a new event (an approaching army, bells ringing in the distance, or an intervention by the chorus or by another character), is to move the action forward, marking a change from stasis to kinesis. For example, in Verdi's *Macbeth* (Florence, La Pergola, 1847), the servant who walks onstage after the Lady's slow lyrical movement, announcing that King Duncan will arrive that evening («Al cader della scena il re qui giunge»), provides a dramatic justification for the ensuing cabaletta «Or tutti sorgete». At times, the *tempo di mezzo* could be extraordinarily long and complex, and even contain additional lyrical sections.⁴¹ By the time of composition of *Don Pasquale*,

⁴¹ The long episode that follows «Al dolce guidami» in the final scene of Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* (1830), for example, is more than two hundred measures long, encompassing several

in serious opera double arias with the slow movement immediately followed by the cabaletta, of the kind of «Tu che accendi» in Rossini's *Tancredi* (Venice, La Fenice, 1813), had become less common, and the *tempo di mezzo* was an essential feature of most solo number. It is likely that Muzio, describing the cavatina pattern, had the serious genre in mind.

In opera buffa, on the other hand, aria numbers without *tempo di mezzo*, along the lines of Rosina's «Una voce poco fa» in Rossini's *Il barbiere* and reminiscent of the double arias common in the late 1700s, continued to be composed into the second half of the century. The other solo number of *Don Pasquale*, Ernesto's *romanza* in Act II, beginning with an extended orchestral prelude and *scena*, is a longer and more elaborate piece than Norina's cavatina. However, in this case too, there is no *tempo di mezzo*; a mere $A\flat^7$ chord, leading to the tonic of the cabaletta, is the only interjection between the slow movement and the cabaletta. *Don Pasquale* is hardly the only opera buffa of this time to include solo numbers without *tempi di mezzo*. Earlier examples include the Contino's «Mi fa Lelio il brutto muso» in Ricci's *Un'avventura di Scaramuccia* and the Marchesa's first aria in Verdi's *Un giorno di regno*. And the convention survived through the 1840s, as demonstrated by Giannetta's «Ma saria poco prudente» in Rossi's *Il borgomastro di Schiedam*, Edmondo's «Non ha core, e se in quel petto» in Rossi's *La figlia di Figaro*, and Rosa's «Colui che mi dice» in Cagnoni's *Don Bucefalo*.

Nonetheless, the presence of a *tempo di mezzo* was a distinct possibility in opera buffa arias. In *Un giorno di regno*, for example, the arias for Giulietta and Edoardo include substantial middle movements with massive choral participation. But numbers like Norina's «Quel guardo il cavaliere» and Ernesto's «Cercherò lontana terra» have sufficient equivalents throughout the contemporary comic repertory to show that at that time the double aria without *tempo di mezzo* had acquired a generic association with opera buffa.

Another relevant aspect of the two arias of *Don Pasquale* is that neither one includes choral interventions or *pertichini*. Both characters are left alone onstage for the entire duration of their numbers, in defiance of the all-romantic dread of empty space that had been affecting opera seria for some time, and in a quest for intimacy associated with the sentimental characters of the opera. This is yet another common trait of contemporary opera buffa, and one which, like the absence of a *tempo di mezzo*,

contrasting episodes as well as an additional cantabile («Cielo, a' miei lunghi spasimi»), and involving the participation of the chorus and numerous *pertichini*.

eliminates the alternation between static and kinetic sections within aria numbers that was typical of the serious genre.⁴²

If sentimental characters are often given important moments of solitude, sometimes resulting in formal arias without external interventions, this is not the case with purely comic characters. Arias for the buffo protagonist, once an indispensable feature of every comic opera, are no longer so at this time. While several post-Rossinian works contain memorable *arie buffe* (for example Dulcamara's «Udite, udite, o rustici» in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* and the protagonist's «Mettiamoci andantino» in Cagnoni's *Don Bucefalo*), Raimondi's *Il ventaglio* and Verdi's *Un giorno di regno* have several comic duets, but no *buffa* arias. The same goes for *Don Pasquale*, which does not have a formal aria for the protagonist. Don Pasquale's only moment for solo display, aside from several engaging recitatives, is the final movement of the Act-I introduzione.

While Donizetti was rather wary in his use of formal arias in *Don Pasquale*, he was quite liberal in inserting duets into the opera. Indeed, even from a visual standpoint, it is likely that a spectator leaving the theater after a performance of *Don Pasquale* would remember this as a duet opera. With four specimens (nos. 2, 4, 9, and 11), to which one may add the *serenata e duettino* towards the end of Act III, and the *introduzione*, which – as we shall see below – has some characteristics of the duet, the duet is the most common type of number in *Don Pasquale*. This is hardly surprising, coming at a time in the history of Italian opera in which confrontations between two characters acquired unprecedented importance.⁴³ Writing in the comic genre, Donizetti had already managed to include four duets in *L'elisir d'amore* (1832), setting a record among *opere buffe* of its time. The duets of *Don Pasquale* are the principal vehicle for the protagonist, who sings in three of them, fully compensating for his not having an aria. As well as the two solo numbers, the duets of *Don Pasquale* show evident affinities with other common features of contemporary opera buffa. Some of those features stand out as distinctive traits of the comic genre.

In order to examine the formal features of the duets of *Don Pasquale*

⁴² There are exceptions to this rule in the serious genre, which however tend to point to older models. Amelia's cavatina in Verdi's *I masnadieri* (1847), for example, written for Jenny Lind, includes no choral interventions or *pertichini*. Verdi himself considered that piece a very old-fashioned form.

⁴³ On the rising importance of the duet during the *primo ottocento*, cfr. ASHBROOK, *Donizetti and his Operas* cit., p. 256, and HAROLD S. POWERS, *Verdi's Monometric Cabaletta-Driven Duets: A Study in Rhythmic Texture and Generic Design*, «Il saggiatore musicale», VII, 2000, p. 282.

and other comic operas of the time, it is necessary to discuss briefly recent theoretical models for the analysis of the *ottocento* duet. In his article on the «solita forma», Harold Powers described the structure of the multi-movement duet, or «grand duet», as a sequence of four movements, and claimed that this type of number was eminently an *ottocento* invention.⁴⁴ There is a similarity between the multi-movement duet pattern described by Powers and that of solo numbers. The main difference between the two is the presence in the former of an additional introductory section in *versi lirici* before the cantabile. Using an expression taken from Basevi's *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi*, Powers defined this opening section *tempo d'attacco*.⁴⁵ As well as the opening movement of arias, the *tempo d'attacco* is often preceded by a *scena*:

Scena
Tempo d'attacco
 Slow movement [cantabile]
Tempo di mezzo
 Cabaletta

Duets such as the one for Gilda and Rigoletto in Act I of *Rigoletto* and the one for Alfredo and Violetta in Act III of *La traviata* conform to this model perfectly. Their *tempi d'attacco* are eminently introductory, and lead rapidly to the cantabile section, which constitutes the emotional core of the number.

The same pattern, however, becomes problematic if applied indiscriminately to analyze all *ottocento* duets, especially duets from the early part of the century, and opera buffa duets. For example, as Charles Cronin has stated, during the Rossinian period duets in comic operas were unlikely to follow a four-movement pattern.⁴⁶ Indeed, none of the duets in Rossini's most famous comic operas – *L'italiana in Algeri*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and *La cenerentola* – conforms to that model. Rather, the duets in these operas tend to begin with an extended opening section, which we shall name not *tempo d'attacco* (an expression never employed before 1859), but *primo tempo*, a term consistently employed in the correspondence of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and other *primo ottocento* composers. Unlike the *tempo d'attacco*, which has an eminently introductory function, and is usually extremely concise, the *primo tempo* is the musical and dramatic heart of the duet.

⁴⁴ POWERS, 'La solita forma' cit., p. 75.

⁴⁵ Cfr. *ivi*, p. 68, and BASEVI, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* cit., p. 191.

⁴⁶ CRONIN, *The Comic Operas of Gaetano Donizetti* cit., p. 48.

Usually the poetry of the *primo tempo* consists of two parallel stanzas of poetry for the two characters (4+4 or 8+8 lines), followed by a passage of dialogue. The *primo tempo* leads to the cabaletta, sometimes (but not always) by way of a *tempo di mezzo*. Rossinian examples of this structure can be found in the duets for Isabella and Taddeo and for Lindoro and Mustafà in *L'italiana in Algeri*, in the two duets in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Almaviva-Figaro and Rosina-Figaro), and the two duets in *La Cenerentola* (Angelina-Ramiro and Dandini-Don Magnifico). Table 2 illustrates this poetic form and its correspondence with the two- or three-movement duet.

TABLE 2. The structure of the Rossinian comic duet

text structure	music structure
2 parallel stanzas (4+4 or 8+8 lines)	1. <i>primo tempo</i>
dialogue	[<i>tempo di mezzo</i>]
2 parallel stanzas (4+4 or 8+8 lines)	2. cabaletta

The dialogic section following the *primo tempo* and leading to the cabaletta is similar in dramaturgical function and musical style to the *tempo di mezzo* of the four-movement pattern described by Powers. In both cases, the dialogue usually unfolds in *parlante* style over a fast-moving orchestral accompaniment, and, depending on length, can be articulated in various episodes. When the *primo tempo* is fast, the parallel stanzas generally flow directly into the dialogic section. When it is slow, the parallel stanzas are set to significant portions of a 2 singing, and usually end with a fermata. A radical change of tempo marks the beginning of the *tempo di mezzo*.

The dramatic implications of the pace of the *primo tempo* are significant. A duet with fast *primo tempo* has a predominance of interactive moments (the only introspective movement being the closing cabaletta), and lends itself beautifully to the depiction of fights, comic anger, plotting, etc. A duet with slow *primo tempo* and *tempo di mezzo*, on the other hand, tends to be more introspective, and is suitable for lyrical and sentimental situations.⁴⁷ It is no wonder that Rossini used a slow *primo tempo* for the love duet in *La Cenerentola*, and a fast one for comic or otherwise brilliant duets that contain little or no trace of sentimentality.

⁴⁷ The distinction between interactive and introspective moments in the duet is discussed in SCOTT BALTHAZAR, *The 'Primo Ottocento' Duet and the Transformation of the Rossinian Code*, «Journal of Musicology», VII, 1989, p. 475.

Of the four duets in *Don Pasquale*, two begin with a fast *primo tempo*. These are the purely comic situations of conspiracy: Norina and Malatesta setting up their amusing scheming against Don Pasquale in Act I, and Malatesta and Don Pasquale plotting to surprise the guilty lovers in the garden in Act III. The structure of both pieces is clearly delineated in the libretto. Both begin with parallel stanzas of poetry for the two characters, followed by a dialogue, and by two more parallel stanzas. Table 3. reproduces the full texts of the two duets, and outlines their musical structure.

TABLE 3. *Don Pasquale*: Text and musical structure of nos. 4 and 11

text of no. 4	structure of no. 4	text of no. 11	structure of no. 11
<p>Norina Pronta son; purch'io non manchi All'amor del caro bene, Farò imbrogli, farò scene, So ben io quel ch'ho da far.</p> <p>Malatesta Voi sapete se d'Ernesto Sono amico, e ben gli voglio; Solo tende il nostro imbroglio Don Pasquale a corbellar.</p>	1. <i>primo tempo</i> (parallel stanzas)	<p>Don Pasquale Cheti cheti immantinente Nel giardino discendiamo; Prendo meco la mia gente, Il boschetto circondiamo; E la coppia sciagurata, A un mio cenno imprigionata, Senza perdere un momento Conduciam dal podestà.</p> <p>Malatesta Io direi ... sentite un poco, Noi due soli andiam sul loco; Nel boschetto ci appostiamo, Ed a tempo ci mostriamo; E tra preghi, tra minacce D'avvertir l'autorità, Ci facciam dai due prometter Che la cosa resti là.</p>	1. <i>primo tempo</i> (parallel stanzas)
<p>Norina Siamo intesi. Or prendo impegno. Malatesta Io la parte ecco vi insegno. Norina Mi volete fiera, o mesta? Malatesta No, la parte non è questa. State un poco ad ascoltar. Convien far la semplicità. Norina Posso in questo dar lezione. Mi vergogno, son zitella, Grazie, serva, signor sì. Malatesta Brava, brava, bricconcella! Va benissimo così.</p>	(continuation: dialogue)	<p>Don Pasquale È siffatto scioglimento Poco pena al tradimento. Malatesta Riflettete, è mia sorella. Don Pasquale Vada fuor di casa mia. Altri patti non vo' far. Malatesta È un affare delicato, Vuol ben esser ponderato. Don Pasquale Ponderate, esaminate, Ma in mia casa non la vo'. Malatesta Uno scandalo farete, E vergogna poi ne avrete.</p>	(continuation: dialogue)

text of no. 4	structure of no. 4	text of no. 11	structure of no. 11
<p>Norina Collo torto.</p> <p>Malatesta Bocca stretta.</p> <p>Norina Mi vergogno.</p> <p>Malatesta Oh, benedetta! Va benissimo così.</p>		<p>Don Pasquale Non importa ... non importa.</p> <p>Malatesta Non conviene, non sta bene: Altro modo cercherò.</p> <p>Don Pasquale Non sta bene, non conviene ... Ma lo schiaffo qui restò.</p> <p>Malatesta L'ho trovata!</p> <p>Don Pasquale Oh! benedetto!</p> <p>Dite presto.</p> <p>Malatesta Nel boschetto Quatti quatti ci appostiamo Di là tutto udir possiamo. S'è costante il tradimento La cacciate su due piedi.</p> <p>Don Pasquale Bravo, bravo, va benone! Son contento, bravo, bravo.</p>	
<p>Norina e Malatesta Vado, corro al gran cimento, Si corriam Pieno ho il core d'ardimento. A quel vecchio affé la testa Questa volta ha da girar.</p>	2. cabaletta		
<p>Norina Già l'idea del gran cimento Mi raddoppia l'ardimento, Già pensando alla vendetta Mi comincio a vendicar. Una voglia avara e cruda I miei voti invan contrasta. Io l'ho detto e tanto basta, La saprò, la vo' spuntar.</p> <p>Malatesta Poco pensa Don Pasquale Che boccon di temporale Si prepari in questo punto</p>	(parallel stanzas)	<p>Don Pasquale (Aspetta, aspetta, Cara sposina, La mia vendetta Già s'avvicina; Già già ti preme, Già t'ha raggiunto, Tutte in un punto L'hai da scontar. Vedrai se giovino Raggiri e cabale, Sorrisi teneri, Sospiri e lagrime. Or voglio prendere La mia rivincita Sei nella trappola V'hai da restar.)</p> <p>Malatesta (Il poverino sogna vendetta. Non sa il meschino Quel che l'aspetta;</p>	2. cabaletta (parallel stanzas)

text of no. 4	structure of no. 4	text of no. 11	structure of no. 11
Sul suo capo a rovinar: Urla e fischia la bufera, Vedo il lampo, il tuono ascolto; La saetta fra non molto Sentiremo ad iscoppiar.		Invano freme, Invano arrabbia, È chiuso in gabbia, Non può scappar. Invano accumula Progetti e calcoli; Non sa che fabbrica Castelli in aria; Non vede il semplice Che nella trappola Da sé medesimo Si va a gettar.)	

Setting to music the final section of no. 4, Donizetti utilized the *a 2* «Vado, corro al gran cimento», for the cabaletta proper, keeping the two eight-line stanzas («Già l'idea del gran cimento» / «Poco pensa Don Pasquale») for the retransition and the coda. Except for this aspect, the correspondence between textual and musical structure in these two numbers is identical. In both cases the transition from the parallel stanzas to the dialogic section of the *primo tempo* happens smoothly. There is no tempo indication at this point of no. 4, whereas no. 11 has «Poco più» at the beginning of the dialogue. The beginning of both cabalettas, however, is preceded by a fermata on the dominant, which resolves to the tonic in coincidence with a change to a faster tempo («Allegro» in no. 4, «Moderato mosso» in no. 11).

Many other comic operas of the 1830s and 40s contain duets in two movements. The first duet for Adina and Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore* and the duet «Tutte l'armi si può prendere» in Act II of *Un giorno di regno* follow exactly the pattern described above. A significant variant of this duet type is the one in which the *primo tempo* begins not with two parallel stanzas, but with a dialogic episode. In this case, the parallel stanzas may appear later in the movement (as in the Palmetella-Everisto duet in Raimondi's *Il ventaglio*), delivered with *a 2* singing. The *primo tempo* of the duet for Nemorino and Dulcamara in *L'elisir d'amore*, for example, begins with a passage of dialogue, leading to the lively refrain «Obbligato, ah! sì, obbligato!», consisting of four lines of poetry for each character, sung simultaneously.

In general, throughout the Rossinian and post-Rossinian period, the two-movement duet is associated with comic situations, in which action and humorous verve take precedence over sentimentalism and pathos. However, the three-movement duet type described in Table 2 became

quite rare by the early 1830s.⁴⁸ In its place, composers often used *seria*-style duets in four movements, closer to the «solita forma» described by Powers: *primo tempo* (with parallel stanzas and/or dialogue), cantabile lyrical section with *a 2* singing, *tempo di mezzo*, and cabaletta.⁴⁹ Specimens prior to *Don Pasquale* include the duet for Nemorino and Belcore in *L'elisir*, the one for the Contino and Scaramuccia in *Un'avventura di Scaramuccia*, and the one for Edoardo and Belfiore in *Un giorno di regno*.

Don Pasquale contains two duets in four movements: the duet for Ernesto and Don Pasquale in Act I (no. 2), and the one for Norina and Don Pasquale in Act III (no. 9). The articulation of the four sections in no. 2 is implied in the metric structure of the poetry, which alternates between *ottonari* (for the *tempo d'attacco* and the *tempo di mezzo*) and *settenari* (for the slow movement and the cabaletta), whereas no. 9 is set in *ottonari* for the first three sections, and switches to *senari* for the cabaletta.

Both duets begin with a concise dialogic movement without parallel stanzas, which moves quickly towards the slow movement. Here it is appropriate to utilize Basevi's expression, *tempo d'attacco*. In these pieces, the slow movement constitutes the lyrical climax of the grand duet. In this section, the two characters invariably sing *a 2*, manifesting their innermost feelings. The text consists of two stanzas of poetry in which the two characters do not interact, but speak to themselves in parentheses. In no. 2 the focus is on Ernesto, who bids farewell to his love dream, while Don Pasquale, true to his buffo nature, grumbles nasty things (the entire slow movement of no. 2 is reproduced below in Example 6). In no. 9, it is Don Pasquale's turn to sigh over his conjugal troubles, while Norina shows a hint of compassion for the old man, at the same time continuing to moralize on the just purpose of the «lesson» she and her friends are teaching him. (A portion of this movement is reproduced below in example 8.) After the slow lyrical section, both numbers end with a standard *tempo di mezzo* (marked by an increase in speed as well as a return to interaction), and a cabaletta.

Compared to the other two duets in *Don Pasquale*, no. 2 and no. 9 are far more sentimental. Even though both pieces involve the buffo protagonist, the lyricism of the slow movement makes these numbers shift away from humorous brio, while sentimentality and pathos make their way into the comic frame. The association between four-movement pattern and sentimental contents in these duets is representative of a com-

⁴⁸ An interesting exception is the peculiar love duet for Emilio and Elisa in Act I of Ricci's *Chi dura vince*.

⁴⁹ Cfr. above, note 44.

mon trend in opera buffa of the 1830s and 40s. For example, the situation depicted in the slow movement of the duet for Amalia and the Baron in Ricci's *Il nuovo Figaro* is analogous to the one of no. 2 in *Don Pasquale*: the high-voiced sentimental character (in this case Amalia) sighs over her love troubles, and the buffo opposes her feelings. Of course, most love duets are cast in the four-movement frame, with the slow movement standing out as the most effusive episode of the number, and often of the entire opera. At times, irony and comic wit substitute for the conventional sentimental vein of the slow movement. As in the duet for Sandrina and Tomaso («Se vuoi far la banderuola») in Act II of Ricci's *Un'avventura di Scaramuccia*, where the two characters, in the middle of an exhilarating fight, address each other with affected tenderness, and imitate the sound of each other's voice. In this case there is no *a 2* singing, and the performers take turns singing the same tune.

The importance of the duet in post-Rossinian opera buffa could hardly be overestimated. Some of the finest music is to be found in this type of number, which, together with the aria, at times acquires formal connotations that are specific to the comic context to which it belongs. Aside from conventional formal procedures, there are other relevant generic aspects of the duet (i.e., the combination and treatment of different voice types, and of the *parlante* technique), which will be discussed in the next section.

Carlo Ritorni, who only a couple of years before the premiere of *Don Pasquale* had complained bitterly about the excessive presence of the chorus in nineteenth-century opera buffa,⁵⁰ must have been delighted to see the curtain rise at the beginning of Act I of *Don Pasquale* and unveil a single character onstage, and no chorus. For several decades, the model for the first number of any Italian opera of any genre was that of Rossini, which Philip Gossett has described as consisting of «a) an opening movement for the chorus, sometimes with solo parts for minor characters; b) a slow movement, often introducing a major character; c) a final cabaletta for the major character, with assistance from the chorus and others on stage».⁵¹ Ritorni criticized the use of the *introduzione*, particularly in comic opera, and praised the *opere buffe* whose *introduzioni* involved the chorus only to a marginal extent:

Se l'introduzione è antidrammatica nell'opera tragica, è affettazione in una favola comica, e fastosità importuna riesce nella musica buffa. Il [...] Barbieri

⁵⁰ Cfr. above, note 3.

⁵¹ PHILIP GOSSETT, *Gioachino Rossini and the Conventions of Composition* cit., p. 54.

veramente non ha introduzione, ma un'aria di serenata con cori; [...] né l'Elisir d'amore, abbenché aprasi la scena con ricchezza di melodie.⁵²

From this statement, it may be inferred that he also appreciated the *introduzioni* of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* and of Raimondi's *Il ventaglio*, and in general those in which the chorus had a function of mere support, and lacked an opening movement of its own. But perhaps he did not go as far as to imagine an *introduzione* with no chorus whatsoever, which is what Donizetti composed in *Don Pasquale*. The structure of the first number of the opera is in fact a good example of «solita forma» in four movements, in which Don Pasquale and Malatesta interact in the opening movement and the *tempo di mezzo* much as they would in a duet, whereas the lyrical sections are rather conceived as solos – the slow movement («Bella siccome un angelo») for Malatesta, and the cabaletta («Un foco insolito») for Don Pasquale. Although this is only speculation, it is tempting to regard the opening number of *Don Pasquale* as a musical response to the theoretical discussion set forth by Ritorni.

Be that as it may, this *introduzione* is unique in the context of post-Rossinian opera buffa – all the more so if one considers that even the *introduzione* of *Don Pasquale*'s direct source, Stefano Pavesi's *Ser Marcantonio*, presents the protagonist not in solitude, but surrounded by several other characters and by the chorus. The revolutionary conception of Donizetti's number, however, was not influential. During the mid and late 1840s composers of opera buffa continued to include the chorus in their *introduzioni*, as Rossi's *Il borgomastro di Schiedam* and *La figlia di Figaro*, Cagnoni's *Don Bucefalo*, and Ricci's *Il birrajo di Preston* demonstrate.⁵³

Having renounced the presence of the chorus in the *introduzione*, Donizetti did the same in the middle finale of *Don Pasquale* – the large-scale ensemble that, in both serious and comic opera, conventionally called for all the characters as well as the chorus onstage at the dramatic climax of an opera. In operas in two acts, the middle finale occurs invari-

⁵² «If the *introduzione* is anti-dramatic in tragic opera, it is affectation in a comic story, and inopportune pomp in opera buffa. [...] The [...] *Barbiere* truly does not have an *introduzione*, but a serenade with choruses [...], nor [does] *L'elisir d'amore*, although the action begins with a wealth of melodies». RITORNI, *Ammaestramenti* cit., p. 208.

⁵³ Donizetti's *introduzioni* are discussed at length and with great acumen in ASHBROOK, *Donizetti and His Operas* cit., p. 243-249. Surprisingly, however, Ashbrook refrains from comment on the *introduzione* of *Don Pasquale*. Another excellent study of the typology of the *introduzione* in mid-nineteenth-century Italian opera is DAVID ROSEN, *How Verdi's Operas Begin: An Introduction to the Introduzioni*, «Verdi Newsletter», XVI, 1988, pp. 3-18.

ably at the end of Act I, whereas in *Don Pasquale* it occurs at the end of Act II – a habit which dominates *opere buffe* in three acts of the 1840s.⁵⁴ Here Donizetti allowed the four principals to carry out the fake wedding of Don Pasquale and Norina and the chaos that follows entirely by themselves, except for the brief intervention of the notary.⁵⁵ Thus, the participation of the chorus in this opera is limited to Act III, where it sings in the *introduzione* (no. 8), in the *recitativo e coro* (no. 10), in the first part of the *serenata e duettino* (no. 12), and in the *finale* (no. 13).⁵⁶

Another path-breaking feature of *Don Pasquale*, often mentioned by Donizetti scholars, is the suppression of the *secco* recitative with continuo accompaniment, which had long disappeared in serious opera, but continued to flourish without exception in the comic genre. In its place, Donizetti employed recitatives as simple in declamatory style as *secco*, but accompanied by the strings. Lauro Rossi took up this technique in *Il borgomastro di Schiedam* and *La figlia di Figaro*, whereas other composers continued to use the conventional *secco* with continuo accompaniment into the second half of the century.

To sum up: in *Don Pasquale* Donizetti employed formal procedures solidly rooted in the conventions of Italian opera of the early nineteenth century. Many of those conventions (e.g., the double aria without *tempo di mezzo*, and the duet in two movements), suggest an exclusive association with the comic genre, whereas others (e.g., the *introduzione* and the middle finale without chorus) reveal an effort to undermine some of the compositional commonplaces of early-nineteenth-century opera buffa, and others (e.g., the *seria*-style grand duet) overlap with the conventions of serious opera.

The close but multifaceted relation between the forms of *Don Pasquale* and those of a number of other contemporary comic works indicates that opera buffa defined itself as a genre through a rhetorical code of which form appears to have been an essential component. At the time of *Don Pasquale*, such structural models as Norina's aria or the duet

⁵⁴ Many serious operas in three acts have their middle finale at the end of the first act. In comic opera, however, the separation of the long first act of the Rossinian specimens into two acts (actually in *Pasquale*, in performance in *Barbieri*) led to the large-scale finale coming at the end of Act II.

⁵⁵ Even after *Don Pasquale* became known and successful throughout Italy, librettists and composers of *opera buffa* for the most part continued to give a prominent role to the chorus in their middle finales. In one opera, however, Lauro Rossi's *La figlia di Figaro*, Act II ends with a sextet without chorus – a number clearly indebted to the middle finale of *Don Pasquale*.

⁵⁶ The presence of the chorus at all in *Don Pasquale* may well have been a late decision on Donizetti's part. Cfr. ASHBROOK, *Donizetti and His Operas* cit., p. 490.

for Malatesta and Don Pasquale were grounded so firmly in the context of the *buffa* genre as to deserve the appellation of «comiche forme», or, to push the argument a step further, to be defined themselves as genres. Indeed, the connotations of these and other formal patterns employed in *Don Pasquale*, as well as in contemporary comic works, are not merely structural and devoid of meaning, but are also functions of the genre to which they belong.⁵⁷

PARLANTI

The treatment of musical form is not the only aspect of *Don Pasquale* which relates to conventional *buffa* practices. The association between characters and vocal types in *Don Pasquale* is also in line with a well-established code. The two lovers, Norina and Ernesto, are played by a soprano and a tenor, while the other two principal characters are given to basses: the title role to a *buffo caricato* (the traditional buffo bass), and Doctor Malatesta to a *buffo cantante* (a role commonly given to modern baritones).⁵⁸ Similar quartets were already conventional in the Rossinian comic repertory (*L'italiana in Algeri*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *La Cenerentola* are all suitable examples), and recur through the 1830s and 40s: for example in Ricci's *Il nuovo Figaro*, Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, and Lauro Rossi's *Il borgomastro di Schiedam*. There are a few noteworthy exceptions to this rule, for example in Ricci's *Un'avventura di Scaramuccia*, which includes a male role *en travesti* (the Contino, played at the premiere by the famous alto Marietta Brambilla). At the world premiere of *Don Pasquale* in Paris, the four principal roles were played by an extraordinary vocal quartet featuring soprano Giulia Grisi, tenor Mario, and basses Antonio Tamburini and Luigi Lablache. Except for Grisi, who is mainly remembered for her interpretations of tragic heroines in the operas of Bellini and Donizetti (although she made her debut at La Scala in 1831 in an opera buffa, Feliciano Strepponi's *L'ullà di Bassora*), these singers excelled as much in the comic repertory as they did in serious opera.

⁵⁷ On the distinction and interconnectedness between form and genre cfr. JAMES HEPOKOSKI, *Genre and Context in Mid-Century Verdi: 'Addio del passato' (La traviata, Act III)*, «Cambridge Opera Journal», I, 1989, pp. 251-253. Hepokoski elaborated further on this concept in his 'Ottocento' Opera as Cultural Drama: Generic Mixtures in 'Il trovatore', in *Verdi's Middle Period (1849-1859): Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice* cit., pp. 147-196.

⁵⁸ For a thorough discussion of these terms, cfr. MARCO BEGHELLI, *Sulle tracce del baritono*, in *Tra le note: Studi di lessicologia musicale*, ed. Fiamma Nicolodi and Paolo Trovato, Fiesole, Cadmo, 1996, pp. 57-91.

The vocal writing of *Don Pasquale* exploits to a full extent the talents of its legendary first performers, at the same time paying its respects to the honorable *buffa* tradition. All roles contain numerous *parlanti*, the technique of text setting that Lichtenthal and Basevi regarded as an essential component of every comic opera.

In his study of Verdi's operas, Basevi provides a thorough discussion of *parlante* techniques:

Nei *parlanti*, il *motivo* sta nella parte strumentale, anziché nella vocale. Non per questo chi canta dee venire trascurato dal maestro, tanto che nei *parlanti* in verun modo desti l'attenzione dell'uditore. La melodia dell'accompagnamento, salvo quei casi, ne' quali per proponimento si voglia volger l'attenzione generale altrove, dee riferirsi totalmente al personaggio che canta, in modo da accrescergli, e non levargli le attrattive; operando come le ricche vesti reali, che aggiungono nuovo splendore alla autorità del principe.

In tre specie principali si possono distinguere i *parlanti*. Una delle quali nominerò *parlante melodico*, perché, mentre nell'istrumentazione si svolge completamente il *motivo* dominante, la parte vocale, per alquanto tratto, e talora non piccolo, seguita il detto *motivo* o all'unisono o di terza o di sesta. [...] In alcuni casi riesce difficile di scorgere alla prima, se si tratti di *parlante melodico*, o di canto accompagnato dagli strumenti all'unisono o di terza o di sesta; ma ove ben si considerino le parti, si potrà discernere quanto il *motivo* appartenga principalmente alla voce o agl'istrumenti. Havvi un altro ordine di *parlanti*, che a me sembra si possano chiamare *armonici*, imperciocché la parte vocale non ha melodia propria rilevante, ma fa quasi un contrappunto al *motivo* dell'accompagnamento. Nelle Opere buffe troverai molti esempi di cotale specie di *parlante*. Ove Figaro, nel *Barbiere del Rossini*, canta sulle parole «Numero quindici a mano manca ec.» egli, per molte battute non adopera altra nota se non un *re*, mentre l'orchestra eseguisce un leggiadrissimo *motivo*. Anche nelle Opere serie sono simili *parlanti*; uno de' quali è nel *duetto* [tra Giselda e Oronte, prima dell'Andantino], che dette occasione a queste mie considerazioni. [...]

La terza specie di *parlanti* risulta dall'unione degli altri due, costituendo un *parlante misto*, di cui non ha luogo intrattenerci maggiormente.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ «In the *parlanti*, the *motive* is in the orchestral, rather than in the vocal part. [However,] the composer should not for this reason neglect the singer, to the point that the latter would not be able to awaken the attention of his listener in the *parlanti*. The melody of the accompaniment, except in those cases in which on purpose one wants to direct the general attention elsewhere, must refer totally to the character who is singing, so as to increase his attractiveness, and not to take it away from him; functioning like royal garments, which add new splendor to the authority of the prince.

The *parlanti* can be divided into three principal species. I will call one of them *parlante melodico*, because, while the dominant *motive* unfolds completely in the orchestra, the vocal part, for a certain portion, sometimes not short, follows that *motive* in unison, or in thirds or in sixths. [...] In some cases it is difficult to see at first if it is *parlante melodico*, or a melody ac-

As Basevi points out, the *parlante* is by no means an exclusive *buffa* device, nor is it an innovation of post-Rossinian opera buffa. In fact, it goes back to the eighteenth century, and is used in full force throughout Rossini's comic works. In the 1820s, Giuseppe Carpani, who attributed the invention of this technique to Paisiello, had complained about the inflation of *parlanti* and of the light dance-like orchestral tunes associated with them:

Usato con parsimonia, certo è che il ritrovato era felicissimo; ma preso per regola di ogni maniera di composizione, egli finisce per rovinare tutti i cantanti, pareggiando i buoni ai cattivi, e per farne della musica teatrale un miscuglio di contraddanze inglesi, di polacche, di walzer e di fandanghi, dietro ai quali si fanno miseramente sgambettare le parole non solo, ma gl'interi poemi.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, the use of the *parlante* technique remained extraordinarily extensive through the whole nineteenth-century buffa tradition.

A particularly fine example of what Basevi called *parlante melodico* is found in the dialogic section of the duet for Norina and Malatesta in Act I. As the two are plotting against Don Pasquale, Norina playfully rehearses various moods and attitudes that might serve to deceive the old man. While the orchestral melody takes the lead here, Norina's voice joins the *violini primi* and woodwinds in several places, while Malatesta's interventions are set in *parlante armonico* (see Example 3).⁶¹

companied by the orchestra in unison or in thirds or in sixths; but when one well considers carefully the parts, one will be able to distinguish how much the *motive* belongs principally to the voice or to the orchestra. There is another category of *parlanti*, which, it seems to me, can be called *armonici*, because the vocal part does not have a relevant melody of its own, but makes almost a counterpoint to the *motive* of the accompaniment. In opera buffa you will find many examples of this species of *parlante*. When Figaro in Rossini's *Il barbiere [di Siviglia]* sings on the words «Numero quindici a mano manca etc.», for many measures he doesn't use any note other than a D, while the orchestra performs a most graceful *motive*. Even in serious operas there are similar *parlanti*, one of which is in the duet [for Giselda and Oronte, from Verdi's *I lombardi alla prima crociata*] that gave the occasion to these considerations of mine. [...]

The third species of *parlanti* results from the union of the other two, constituting a *parlante misto*, on which it is not necessary to remain any further». BASEVI, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* cit., pp. 30-32.

⁶⁰ «Used with moderation, it is certain that the invention was a very happy one. But used as the rule in every manner of composition, it ends up by ruining all the singers, equalizing the good with the bad, and by making theatrical music a mixture of English contradances, polonaises, waltzes, and fandangos; along which they make miserably trot along not only [some of] the words, but also the entire librettos». GIUSEPPE CARPANI, *Lettere di un viaggiatore ad un amico sopra i Teatri di Venezia*, in ID., *Le Rossiniane ossia lettere musico-teatrali*, Padova, Tip. della Minerva, 1824, p. 20.

⁶¹ The formal features of this number are discussed above. The text is found in table 3.

Example 3. *Don Pasquale*, Act I

N *mi vo-le-te fie - ra? Mi vo-le-te me - sta?*
 D *No.*
 N *me - sta? Ho da*
 D *No, no, la par-te non è que - sta.*
 N *pian - ge-re? o - gri da - re? me - sta?*
 D *No, no, no, no. No, la par-te non è que-sta, non è que-sta, non è*

Continued: Example 3

N
 fie - ra? Nè pian - ger. nè gri - dar
 D
 que - sta, non è que - sta; sta - te un po - co. sta - te un po - co ad as - scol - tar.
 Piano accompaniment with chords and melodic lines.

Other comic operas of the same period contain passages of *parlante melodico*, often in association with female characters, and in particular lyrical or emotional moments. In Act I of Lauro Rossi's *Il borgomastro di Schiedam*, for example, the female protagonist, Giannetta, discovers the parchment revealing that her master, Ilarione, is destined to become burgomaster of their village. This important moment is underscored by a melodic passage in the orchestra (see Example 4). Initially, Giannetta's suspense allows her to utter only a few words in *parlante armonico*. However, as she becomes overjoyed at her discovery, she enthusiastically joins the accompaniment in an outburst of *melodico* to be sung «con slancio». Finally, the passage develops into a full-scale *cantabile* section for Giannetta. This number is certainly one of the «new» and «free» forms of *Il borgomastro* that pleased Alberto Mazzucato so much. The seamless transition from *parlante armonico*, to *melodico*, to *cantabile* proper within the same movement is a masterful example of Rossi's compositional skill.

Example 4. *Il borgomastro di Schiedam*, Act I

Sostenuto
 (Quasi parlante per aprire)
 legato
 o - ra a me...
 p assai con espress.
 Piano accompaniment with chords and melodic lines.

Continued: Example 4

(con gioja) (Traendo fuori una)

tre-man - te son... bal - za il cor... a-per-ta è già!

catena)

o-ro è que-sto bel-lo e buo-no... un mo-bi-le sì è que-sto

(con trasporto, prima di leggere la pergamena che sarà rinvenuta nella cassetta.)

- qua. Oh, leg - gia - mo! ah — dal pia - ce - re que - sta con

legge

slancio - vol - ta im-paz - zi - rò.

f p rall.

Parlante armonico, on the other hand, was one of the most characteristic features of opera buffa throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. *Don Pasquale*, as all other comic operas of the 1830s and 40s, contains numerous examples. A look at the duet for Ernesto and Don Pasquale in Act I is well worthwhile, for this piece encompasses a number of different approaches to the technique. Don Pasquale's part is almost entirely in *parlante armonico*. The opening movement of the duet,

filled with textual repetitions and delivered over a quick orchestral accompaniment mostly on a single pitch, is a paradigmatic example of this technique, which was regularly employed by Rossini, and which composers of opera buffa continued to use consistently during the 1830s and 40s.⁶²

Example 5. *Don Pasquale*, Act I

Io, Pa-squa-le da Cor-ne-to, pos-si-den-te, qui pre-sen-te, qui pre-sen-te in car-ne ed
 os-sa, qui pre-sen-te in car-ne ed os-sa, d'an-nun-ziar-vi ho l'al-to o-no-re, io, Pa-squa-le da Cor-
 ne-to, che mi va-do ad am-mo-gliar, che mi va-do ad am-mo-gliar.

In this duet, as is usual for duets in which a buffo interacts with one of the sentimental roles (usually the primadonna or the tenor), the melodic lines are all given to Ernesto. In the cantabile section, Ernesto introduces the tune, and a few measures into the piece Don Pasquale intervenes with a *parlante* beneath the tenor's effusive phrases. The vocal lines are reproduced in example 6. Similarly, Ernesto presents the cabaletta by himself, and Don Pasquale's *parlante* joins only in the retransi-

⁶² The example cited by Basevi from the duet for Almaviva and Figaro in *Il barbiere* is an excellent instance.

tion and during the partial reprise of the section. A similar combination of a lyrical tune for a high voice and a *parlante* for the buffo is encountered frequently in the comic operas of Donizetti and his contemporaries. Fine examples prior to *Don Pasquale* include the duet for Adina and Dulcamara in *L'elisir d'amore*, the duet for Amalia and the Baron in Ricci's *Il nuovo Figaro*, and the duet for Edoardo and Belfiore in Verdi's *Un giorno di regno*.

Example 6. *Don Pasquale*, Act I

Cantabile



(So - gno so - a - ve e ca - sto
de' miei prim'an - ni ad - di - o. Bra - mai ric - chez - ze e
fa - sto so - lo per te. ben mi - o:
DON PASQUALE
(Ma veh, che o - ri - gi -
po - ve - ro ab - ban - do - na - to, ca -
na - le! che tan - ghe - ro osti - na - to, che tan - ghe - ro osti -
du - to in bas - so sta - to, pria che ve - der - ti
na - to! che tan - ghe - ro osti - na - to, che tan - ghe - ro osti - na - to!
mi - se - ra, ca - ra,
A - des - so man - co ma - le, mi par ca - pa - ci - ta - to: ben so do - ve gli duo - le, ben so do - ve gli

Continued: Example 6

E ca - ra, ca - ra, ri - nun - zio a
 P duo - le, ma è des-so che lo vuo - le, ma è des-so che lo vuo - le, non al - tri che sè stes - so e gli in - col - par ne

E te, pria che ve - der - ti mi - se - ra, ca - ra, ri - nun - zio a te, — si, — ca - ra, —
 P de', ben so do - ve gli duo - le, ben so do - ve gli duol.

E ca - ra, ca - ra, — ri - nun - zio, ri - nun - zio a —
 P non al - tri che sè stes - so e gli in - col - par ne de'.

E te, ri - nun - zio, a
 P A - des - so man - co ma - le, man - co ma - le, man - co ma - le.

E te, ri - nun - zio, pria che ve - der - ti mi - se - ra ri -
 P a - des - so man - co ma - le, mi par ca - pa - ci - ta - to,

E - nun - zio, o ca - ra, a te. —
 P mi par ca - pa - ci - ta - to: me - no ma - le.)

Other passages of *Don Pasquale* show different expressive uses of *parlante*. At the opening of the Introduzione to Act I, for example, when Don Pasquale is eagerly waiting for Doctor Malatesta, Donizetti decides, rather than to portray the protagonist in frantic impatience, to create a pensive atmosphere, in which fragments of text appear now and again over a melody in tempo Moderato played by the violins (see Example 7). Eventually, Don Pasquale joins the orchestral theme in a short phrase of *melodico* (m. 31), and the passage is resolved with a perfect cadence upon the arrival of Malatesta.

Example 7. *Don Pasquale*, Act I

DON PASQUALE (passeggiando coll'orologio alla mano)
 1 VUOTA Son no.

6 -v'ore; di ri-torno il Dottore esser do.v'ria.

11

16 (ascoltando)
 12 Zitto!... parmi...

Continued: Example 7

20

è fan.ta - si.a... for.se il ven.to che sof - fiò.

legato

23

Che boe con di pil.lo - li.na, ni po.ti.no, vi pre.pa.ro!

27

vo' chiamar.mi don So - ma.ro, vo' chiamarmi don So - ma.ro se ve.der non ve la

30

fo, vo' chia.mar.mi don So - ma.ro, vo' chiamar.mi don So - ma.ro se ve.der non ve la fo.

Don Pasquale has a *parlante armonico* even at one of the emotional climaxes of the opera, the duet with Norina in Act III. Here, after his presumed wife gives him a slap, he sees his end approaching, and contemplates drowning himself. At this point, a slow and heartfelt lyrical melody in A minor accompanies the singing. Donizetti instructs the singer to perform this piece «quasi piangendo» (almost weeping), a realistic effect that projects this traditional comic device into the realm of romantic comedy (see Example 8). The only sung melody is given to Norina, who intervenes in the *Larghetto* as the orchestral tune takes a turn to the relative major (mm. 21 ff.). This is certainly the most individual *parlante* episode in the entire opera; its deeply felt pathos is unparalleled in opera buffa of this period.

Example 8. *Don Pasquale*, Act III

1 (da solo, quasi piangendo)
 P (E fini.ta, don Pa.squale, e fini.ta, don Pa.
 Larghetto
 p

6
 P -squale, hai bel romperti la te.sta, hai bel romperti la
 p

11
 P testa! Altro fa.renonti re.sta, altro fa.renonti
 p

16
 P resta che d'andarti ad affo.gar, che d'andarti ad affo.
 p

21
 NORINA (fra sé)
 (E du.ret.ta la.le.zio.ne,
 P -gar. E fi.nita, si,...

At the opposite end of the expressive range of the *parlante armonico* technique is the patter song in the cabaletta of the duet between Don Pasquale and Malatesta later in Act III, when Don Pasquale anticipates his revenge over his unfaithful bride (see Example 9). An impetuously fast delivery of the poetry beginning in the third system, with numerous textual repetitions over an uninterrupted stretch of sixteenth notes, is

reminiscent of famous moments of comic rage in Rossini (for example the closing section of Don Bartolo's aria in *Il barbiere*). And it is a perfect example of «the speed and frequent repetitions of the words» which Lichtenthal considered one of the best means to convey humor.⁶³ The duet between Don Pasquale and Malatesta belongs in the musico-dramatic *topos* of the buffo duet discussed in section 2., in which the *parlanti* achieve a comic effect not by means of contrast (as in the duets between a buffo and a sentimental character), but by means of repetition. In this cabaletta, Malatesta repeats Don Pasquale's music to different words. It is a procedure that derives directly from Rossini («Un segreto d'importanza» in *La Cenerentola* is perhaps the most perfect Rossinian specimen of buffo duet), and it recurs in most comic operas with at least two buffo basses. Act II of Ricci's *Il nuovo Figaro*, for example, contains an exhilarating duet for Leporello and the Baron, and Verdi's *Un giorno di regno* contains no fewer than three comic duets for the Tesoriere and the Barone. The *parlante* technique, frequently associated with textual repetition and musical parallelism, plays an essential role in each of these pieces.

The liberty with which Donizetti employed the *parlante* in *Don Pasquale* is emblematic of the widespread use of this technique throughout the history of nineteenth-century opera buffa, and is perfectly in line with Lichtenthal's comments on its importance, as well as with Basevi's call for clarity of declamation. Indeed, quick *parlante* passages such as the one encountered in example 9 may seem to be conservative gestures of the kind that so displeased Signor O.T. But the passages in which the *parlanti* are associated with introspective or sentimental moments (as in examples 4, 7, and 8) indicate that by the early 1840s this technique had acquired an unprecedented musical and dramatic flexibility. In particular, the *parlanti* of *Don Pasquale* show an attention for the contents of the poetry that in many cases goes well beyond the typical *buffa* mechanism of a «repeating gesture [which] may seem to contribute nothing to advance the action, may seem to be gratuitous activity».⁶⁴ While the relevant presence of the *parlante* is indeed a sign of continuity with past traditions of opera buffa, its treatment in *Don Pasquale* is certainly not old-fashioned, and, we might fancy, would not have left Giuseppe Carpani dissatisfied.

⁶³ Cfr. above, note 9.

⁶⁴ JANET M. LEVY, 'Something Mechanical Encrusted on the Living': A Source of Musical Wit and Humor, in *Convention in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Music: Essays in Honor of Leonard G. Ratner*, Stuyvesant, NY, Pendragon Press, 1992, p. 232.

Example 9. *Don Pasquale*, Act III

p

(A. spet.ta, a spet - ta, ca.ra spo - si - na: la mia ven - det - ta già s'avvi -

22 Moderato mosso

p

- ci - na, già, già ti pre - me, già t'ha rag - giun - to, tutte in un pun - to l'hai da scon -

p

- tar. Ve.drai se gio.vi.no raggi.rie ca.ba.le, sor.ri.si te.ne.ri, so.spi.rie

p

la.grime, ve.drai se gio.vi.no, ve.drai se gio.vi.no sor.ri.si te.ne.ri, so.spi.rie

p

la.gri.me: or vo.glio prende.re la mia ri - vin.ci.ta, or voglio prende.re la mia ri -

p

- vin.ci.ta, sei nel.la trappo.la, v'hai da re - star, si, sei nel.la trappo.la, v'hai da re -

p

- star; la mia ven - det - ta già t'ha rag - giun - to, tutte in un pun - to l'hai da scon -

Continued: Example 9

- tar, tutte in un pun - to l'hai da scon. tar, tutte in un pun - to l'hai da scon.
 - tar.)

In closing, the foregoing discussion of the forms and *parlanti* of *Don Pasquale* leads to a twofold conclusion. First, it suggests that Donizetti's last opera buffa is not a masterpiece in splendid isolation, but rather one example of a still thriving tradition. Second, it shows that the music of this work, and, by extension, that of contemporary comic operas, carries generically relevant traits that contribute to the genre an autonomy from its serious counterpart.

This, of course, is not meant to impose an Olympian perspective upon the contemporary criticism explored at the beginning of this study, according to which post-Rossinian opera buffa was not clearly defined as an autonomous musical genre. There are numerous circumstances in which the *seria* and *buffa* conventions overlap. This is due in part to the semantic abstraction of the musical language of the *primo ottocento* (which made it possible, for example, to borrow melodic ideas or even entire numbers from one generic context and recycle them in another without any particular textual or dramatic reason), and in part to the increasing presence of serious dramatic situations in opera buffa of this period. As the literary component of contemporary opera buffa presented heroic or pathetic moments, so did the musical component. And it did so to such an extent that, at least in some situations, the rhetorical code of opera buffa inevitably became ambiguous.⁶⁵ The use of typical *seria* forms, such as the grand duet in four movements, and its association with sentimental and even overtly serious moments is a case in point. Conversely, a piece such as Ernesto's pathetic aria at the beginning of

⁶⁵ On the concept of rhetoric of genre, cfr. JEFFREY KALLBERG, *The Rhetoric of Genre: Chopin's Nocturne in G Minor*, «Nineteenth-Century Music», XI, 1987-88, pp. 238-261.

Act II of *Don Pasquale* suggests that the code of the double aria without *tempo di mezzo* or *pertichini* (a formal pattern that by the early 1840s had acquired a close generic association with musical comedy) could be employed to reverse the generic ambiguity of the verbal text of the scene. The same is true of Don Pasquale's *parlante* in Act III (see example 8), in which the character remains faithful to his buffo nature even in his most extreme emotional moment.

The interaction between music and genre at this moment in the history of Italian opera is a particularly complex phenomenon, which deserves further exploration. This article has only begun to shed light on the ways in which music, often together with the literary component, but sometimes beyond and even in opposition to it, contributes to shape the elusive generic identity of opera buffa of the mid-nineteenth century. The investigation could be extended to encompass other aspects, such as harmony, orchestration, and vocal types. More importantly, this study provides a stimulus not only to reassess the significance of *Don Pasquale* in the context of the ongoing tradition and conventions of nineteenth-century opera buffa, but also to extend the inquiry beyond this and the few other well-known comic masterpieces of this period. The operas by Ricci, Rossi, Cagnoni and others, which come partly into view in this discussion, were indeed important and successful in their own times, and deserve to feature far more prominently in our perception of post-Rossinian opera buffa.