

Window to the Work, or Mirror of Our Preconceptions? Peter Sellars's Production of *Così fan tutte*

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At the end of a bet in which the affections of two young women have been deliberately transferred from their own lovers to each other's, the "philosopher" who initiated the bet returns the women to their original partners. The new-old couples settle in quickly, the philosopher presides with wit and wisdom, the serving maid who engineered various bits of the plot returns to her subordinate role, and as the camera recedes into the auditorium the characters line up on the stage and cheerfully agree (in ensemble) that they will find "bella calma" through a reasoned approach to their emotional lives. Final credits begin once the stretta is underway; the opera ends with the camera panning back into the auditorium, the applauding audience visible and audible as the smiling characters conclude this classic comedy by acknowledging the audience and taking bows.¹ The set evokes the rococo with a minimum of frilliness, as do the costumes—there are panniered skirts and décolleté bodices but few ribbons and little lace, and no powdered wigs for the women; white stockings, breeches, and military coats for the men, but no beauty spots, pomanders, or swords, and, as with the women, no powdered wigs. The women occasionally carry parasols; the philosopher carries a cane to emphasize his age and wisdom. This 1975 videotape of Adrian Slack's classic² Glyndebourne production of Mozart's and Da Ponte's *Così fan tutte* uses its sets and costumes to suggest both the

1. The video includes the curtain calls, then concludes with Don Alfonso wryly overlooking the applauding audience from a balcony.

period of the work's origin and its connection to today (for all its evocations, both set and costumes are stark in a rather modernist way). The camera work at the end likewise indicates both the specifically theatrical frame of the event as the proscenium arch becomes visible, and the "universal" applicability of the opera's message as the widening glance of the camera absorbs the living room viewer into the auditorium. Further connection between "them" and "us" is suggested by the little crowd of costumed characters looking on from a balcony (as if they were among us) at the end. The singers cooperate with the camera in acting as an ensemble, in bowing, in looking out as we applaud, and the celebratory tone of the music reinforces the good cheer and common spirit of the moment. The neatly packaged end of this production leaves no doubt that resolution—however tenuous, as it often is in comedy—has been achieved. In assimilating the opera into the default notion of great eighteenth-century art and closure, that the end puts the rest of the work both formally and emotionally into proportion, the producers assure us that the familiar tenets of the canon are alive and well: we have indeed watched a masterpiece. In assimilating us into the audience at the very end, they make us agree not only that the work is properly closed, but that its two-hundred-year-old message of reconciliation and redemption through reason has "universal" resonance.

Fourteen years later, the experiment is refilmed in modern dress at "Despina's," a Long Island diner with a large neon sign, green plastic booth seats, and a lot of chrome. The philosopher Don Alfonso is a jaded Vietnam veteran wearing a tired Hawaiian shirt over a singlet and black jeans, whose bet with the unformed, slightly preppy young lovers is made from some

2. I use this word advisedly. Andrew Porter, in "Mozart on the Modern Stage," *Early Music* 20 (1992): 133, describes John Copley's Mozart (and similar productions, of which I take this to be one) as "a shapely, helpful frame for detailed and sensitive individual characterizations." Porter's language of understatedness and flexibility clearly invokes "the classic."

sort of personal compulsion rather than as a lofty demonstration of an abstract principle. In the second-act finale Don Alfonso blesses the union of the "wrong" couples. The women, dressed in frilly wedding gowns that sit oddly on their rangy frames and beneath their short, spiky hair, promise eternal love and fidelity to the new lovers; immediately following this, in a ravishingly choreographed moment, they switch back to the old ones. Right and wrong couples continue dancing, glancing, and coupling until it is completely unclear who belongs with whom. Shortly before the end of the opera the group makes a collective attempt at a bow as the camera backs off; they come to the front of the stage in a line, raising their joined hands as if to acknowledge the audience. This turning of the stretta into a collective bow and general resolution, reminiscent of the 1975 Glyndebourne production, fails utterly as the line breaks up and each character retreats into a demonstration of his or her own obsession or neurosis. Fiordiligi, for example, whirls crazily as a hysteric, Don Alfonso drops into one of the diner's booths with his head on the table, his outside arm swinging like that of a broken robot or recently dropped marionette, Despina is immobilized, and Ferrando spins in place like a mechanical top. The camera recedes to show us this final tableau (figure 1),³ but no audience is visible, and there is no final bow in the film. Thus, as the words proclaim the reign of reason, the gestures indicate its complete breakdown; as the music indicates proper and decorous closure, the gestures suggest untimely cessation. Where a "classic" production might invite a range of individual responses, or at least a range of intensities, this one leaves little room for critical distance. Peter Sellars's production of *Così* refuses resolution despite the closure of

3. Susan Reiter, "Sellars Meets Mozart," *Classical* 3 no. 2 (February 1991): 38-46. Reiter quotes Sellars as saying that he had chosen to keep the camera close to the characters throughout the operas; there are thus very few stage tableaux, and the denial of the customary "universalizing" moves is particularly striking when we do finally see the full stage.

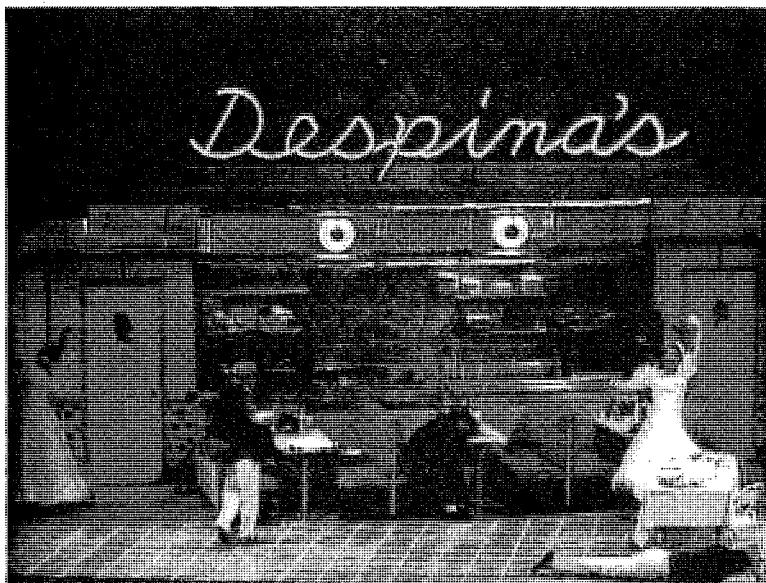


Figure 1

music and text, it denies the power of society to mitigate individual traumas despite the appeal to community in both the text and in the ensemble singing at the end, and it shuts out good cheer despite the generic expectation of the *lieto fine*.

The ending is this production's most extreme example of going against the grain; I confess that I do not like it as a reading of the work. Nevertheless, in refusing the gestures that make the Glyndebourne production seem smug, and also in refusing the almost sly substitution of the lovers with which some other productions end,⁴ Sellars's angst-ridden, atomized ending forces us to think about what the end of this most unsettling of comedies is "really" about, and even where one might look for its essential or irreducible truth. Sellars's paradoxical capacity in this production to make the work (in all its

4. For example, Willy Decker's 1984 Drottningholm production (Philips laser disk 440 070 516-1 [1990]) switches the lovers, as does the 1992 Paris production staged and conducted by John Eliot Gardiner (Archiv Productions laser disk 440 072 536-1 [1993]).

phases and dimensions) reemerge by means of a thoroughly contradictory reading is for me its most valuable and most interesting aspect, and it is precisely this effect of separating the values of the performance from the values of the work that I want to explore briefly here.

What is it, though, that reemerges through contrary readings? To what are Sellars's readings contrary? What is "the work"? Does it begin and end with what Mozart and Da Ponte wrote? If so, do some written instructions have more value in identifying the work than others? (For example, are the notes higher in an identity-hierarchy than the stage directions, even though both are written?) To what extent is a shared sense of a given work part of its identity? When does a performance fail to meet the criteria for representing "the work"? These and related questions have formed a subfield within aesthetics, and have sometimes been explored in relation to specific works of music, though operas are almost never among them;⁵ and while the relation between performance and work in the abstract is a staple of such discussions, they almost never examine particular performances in any detail, perhaps because almost any given performance is, in its multiplicity and fluidity of layers and codes, not susceptible to analysis within the terms that philosophers can set themselves. The present essay is more a reflection on my reactions to Sellars's *Così* than a rigorous philosophical study; I am not trying to answer the ontological question of when a performance entitled *Così fan tutte* ceases to represent the work *Così fan tutte* or of what elements more or less strongly constitute "the work itself," and I will not question the commonsense assumption that a performance purporting to be *Così* and reproducing Mozart's notes and Da Ponte's

5. One obvious exception is Jerrold Levinson's essay "Song and Music Drama" in Philip Alperson, ed., *What is Music?* (New York: Haven Publications, 1986; with an updated bibliography, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 283-302. This essay does not, however, deal with performance.

words is in fact a performance of *Così*. I do, however, want to use some of the distinctions characteristic of philosophical writing on the identity of the musical work to clarify what aspects of the cultural entity we call *Così fan tutte* Sellars illuminates by contrariety.

Philosophers generally agree that although in the Western classical tradition a musical score is part of a work's identity, it is by no means the whole story: to reproduce exactly the indications in the score is not necessarily to communicate the work, and it is impossible to choose a single perfect or ideal performance from a group of acceptable or admissible ones. Thus scores necessitate a range of performances or interpretation, and any single musical work includes a penumbra of possible performances.⁶ Michael Krausz, for example, writes:

If we do not accept the idea of a complete score for a performance as classically construed, we must allow that there is a certain latitude between a characteristically incomplete score and an admissible performance of it.⁷

Frances Sparshott's pithy formulation about the score offering "opportunity" rather than "specification" makes a similar point in somewhat different terms.⁸ Sellars and his performers reproduce Mozart's notes and Da Ponte's words with very little alteration⁹ (though the translations which appear as subtitles

6. Michael Krausz, while noting the ways in which "performance" and "interpretation" overlap, takes them for his own purposes to be essentially synonymous. *Reasons and Rightness: Interpretation in Cultural Practices* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 18-19. I shall do the same.

7. Ibid., 17.

8. Frances Sparshott, "Aesthetics of Music: Limits and Grounds" in Alperson, ed., *What is Music?*, 82-84.

9. Apart from his inclusion of the "razor duet" in *Don Giovanni*, Sellars's most striking musical changes both occur in *Così*. The first is an arrangement of the opening theme of the Piano Concerto in G major before Dorabella and Guglielmo go out to "the garden" in act II, sc. 5, and the second is the substitution of Mozart's substitute aria "Vado ma dovè" for Dorabella's "È amore un ladroncello."

on the video version are intended to reproduce the effect rather than the literal meanings of the words). Conductor Craig Smith's tempi are well within the bounds of plausible readings of Mozart's markings, though the many pregnant pauses both in and between recitatives and concerted numbers are difficult to justify on the basis of the score.¹⁰ Beyond the notes, the words, and other musical indications like tempi and articulations, however, Sellars clearly takes the score and libretto as "opportunities" rather than "specifications." With the exception of singers being on stage when they are actually singing, Mozart's and Da Ponte's stage directions are largely ignored. For example, Despina is present during Don Alfonso's recitative setting up the plot ("Che silenzio! Che aspetta di tristezza"), and Guglielmo¹¹ watches Fiordiligi's and Ferrando's love duet, "Fra gli amplessi," from a distance of about a foot. The stage set never changes from the diner counter and booths, though the edges of the stage beyond the screen door are used for Guglielmo's and Dorabella's "Il core vi dono";¹² the only ship visible is the toy battleship that Don Alfonso manipulates as the chorus sings "Bella vita militar," and there is no hint of garlands, grassy knolls, decorated benches, or any other pastoral paraphernalia. To reproduce the words and notes more or less literally and the ancillary written indications with some degree of looseness is standard practice in operatic production and does not in philosophical terms compromise the identity of the work; Sellars has not in any fundamental way reorganized the role of the performer/producer, and it is not by disturbing the hierarchy of work-constitutive elements that his

10. No more, though, than common practice interpolations like Despina's laugh at the end of the introduction to "In uomini."

11. This character's name is properly Guilelmo, as both versions of the original libretto show. However, it seems appropriate here to retain the conventional—and Sellars's—appellation.

12. Porter, "Mozart on the Modern Stage," 137, notes the audience's greater awareness of the garden, as well as its beauty, in the stage production compared to the video.

productions of Mozart operas have stimulated reactions from ecstasy to apoplexy.

Moments like the ending of *Così* have strained the enthusiasm of even Sellars's most ardent admirers,¹³ not only because they use ancillary and implied elements of the text like stage directions to contradict or obliterate the literal meanings of the words,¹⁴ but because they seem to subvert the meanings of whole works. How can a *dramma giocoso* end in neurotic collapse? How can a work with music as beautiful as that of *Così* be about the impossibility of human communion? How can the "redemptive"¹⁵ music of Mozart be used to communicate such an unrelievedly bleak vision? How can there be such a gap between a performance and a work? Writers have used the terms "painfully shrunk" or "drag[ged]...down to the comic-book level" to describe what they feel these performances do to these works.¹⁶

What seems to be at issue here is something bigger than the text. Indeed, for David Littlejohn it is Mozart himself who is shrunk by Sellars's productions. The most useful philosophical formulation of what is meant when a work is invoked

13. Porter mentions on more than one occasion the lack of (presumably aesthetic and emotional) balance caused by the unrelieved intensity and darkness of Sellars's vision. See, for example, "Mozart on the Modern Stage," 137.

14. Porter, for example, finds "piquant" the frequent superficial mismatches between, say, a textual reference to a sword and the appearance of a pistol or a table knife (review, *New Yorker*, 15 August 1988, 63). Unlike other critics who are infuriated by the lack of congruence between the literary Italian and the seedy or vulgar sets and gestures, Porter finds that the Italian "adds another strand to the play of meanings." ("Musical Events: All-American Mozart," *New Yorker*, 21 August 1989, 75.)

15. The word is David Littlejohn's, from "What Peter Sellars Did to Mozart," in *The Ultimate Art: Essays Around and About Opera* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 155. The essay appeared first in *Opera Quarterly* 7 no. 2 (summer 1990): 6-36.

16. The first is from Littlejohn, "What Peter Sellars Did," 155, and the second from Donal Henahan, "When Auteur Meets Opera, Opera Loses," *New York Times*, 9 December 1990, H23, col. 1.

separately from its performance is that of Roman Ingarden, who works his way in the course of *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity* to the notion of the musical work as on one hand the “schema” (essentially the score) and on the other a “single, intersubjective, dominant aesthetic object,” that is, “the equivalent...of the...opinions of the musical public in a given country at a given time.”¹⁷ He argues that this “intersubjective dominant aesthetic object” necessarily changes over time as performance conventions change, even as the text stays the same. And it is this commonly understood but historically variable *Così*—the range of meanings that Sellars’s contemporaries and elders have attached to this text—against which Sellars performs. I would suggest that one of the most precious gifts that Peter Sellars gives his audiences is a chance to be jolted into facing our “intersubjective dominant” *Così*, or what we have done to Mozart.¹⁸

Sellars’s ending to *Così* is so extreme and so contrary to usual performing practice that its capacity to jolt us into considering our normal assumptions about the work becomes evident (or became evident to me) only in direct comparison with other performances. That is, to start with, it seemed to me so wrong that it merely reinforced the default notion of the work without making me think about the cultural values embedded there. It was not until I watched other productions in the context of Sellars’s *Così* that I thought about the implications of their familiarizing and universalizing strategies. The two moments I will describe below draw us back to our “intersubjective dominant” notion of the work in interestingly different

17. Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity*, trans. Adam Czerniawski, ed. Jean G. Harrell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 154.

18. I do not mean to suggest by this that “we” have made a single monolithic entity out of every detail of *Così*, but merely that there are certain modern assumptions about the work (for example, it is a comedy, it balances laughter with tears and the social with the individual) that most mainstream scholars and critics accept without much discussion.

ways. They are both less wrenchingly wrong than the ending, but like it, they are so vivid and intense on their own terms that they vitiate any sense of the work "behind" the performance, or of the performance as an apparently transparent window to the work in its customary range of meanings. Rather, one finds oneself drawn back to the customary configuration of the work partly by surprise at the intensity and persuasiveness of the new reading.

My first example is the trio "Soave sia il vento" (act I, no. 10), where the young men have left and the young women bid them a safe journey in one of the most purely beautiful moments of music in all opera. Don Alfonso joins them in this trio, which combines a softly undulating string accompaniment with long lines in the voices and wind instruments. Don Alfonso's line, unlike that in the earlier, and equally lovely, farewell ensemble "Di scrivermi," is not topically or rhythmically distinct from the women's. The piece is relatively short, maintains essentially the same character throughout, and does not modulate. Dramatically speaking it is somewhat puzzling, as Don Alfonso's unironized participation has no obvious psychological motivation, is not dramatically necessary, and is lamely explained away in his words immediately following the trio as a demonstration of his acting skills ("Non son cattivo comico," act I, sc. 7). The Sellars performance is faithful to the schema of this piece with the perpetual exception of the stage set. It is faithful to various aspects of our sense of the piece in that it comes across as the spellbound moment critics have often described, and Don Alfonso joins in the music without obvious irony. Sellars has the three characters stand in a line and create a perfectly synchronized, unnaturalistic, formalized dance (figure 2).¹⁹ They mime the waves on the ocean with undulating movements of their hands, they cross their hands over

19. This number was apparently choreographed by Mark Morris, with whom Sellars also collaborated on his production of *Le nozze di Figaro*. Thanks to Carolyn Abbate for pointing this out to me.

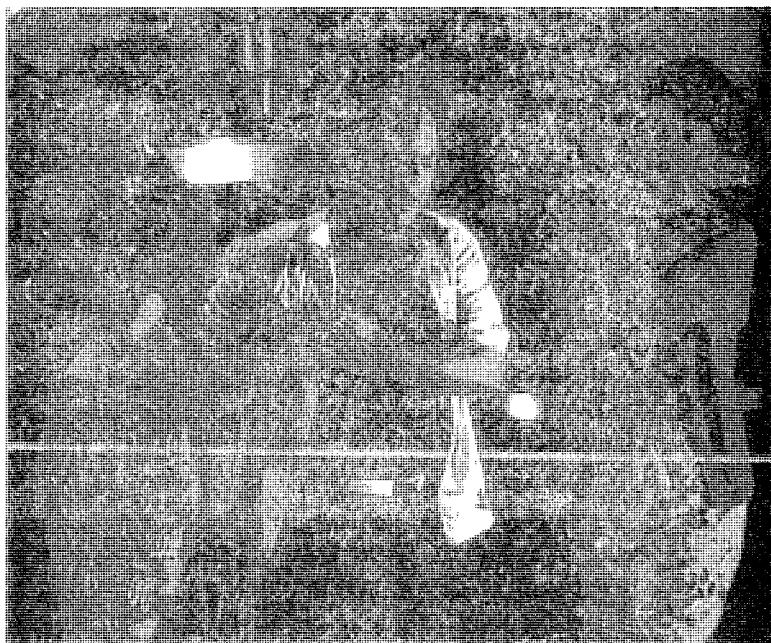


Figure 2

their hearts for the word “desir,” and Don Alfonso (in the middle) covers his eyes as the women reach out in symmetrical supplication. The uniformity or symmetry of these movements across the characters, combined with their continuity through the whole number, are unique in the production and bring to the surface a discontinuity in the opera’s pace and address that many productions seem to want to minimize. That is, while most performances of “Soave sia il vento” that I have seen keep the characters relatively still, they do not turn the stillness into dance and thus so radically change the mode of apprehension for this number. While stillness itself may in any modern opera production change the dominant mode of apprehension from that of following the story to listening to the music, the addition of dance in the Sellars production takes the number out of the realm of the behaviorally plausible and moves it into the realm of ritual and generalized spiritual or social experience.

With this production we do not need to ask *why* any of these characters (and especially Don Alfonso) should indulge in this moment of gorgeous beneficence, but are, rather, encouraged or invited to perceive this moment as a collective and generalized reflection on departure, return, and what happens in between. Perhaps paradoxically, the de-psychologizing of this moment makes Don Alfonso's committed participation psychologically plausible; one is led to understand that he too has endured departures which permit no real return, and however silly the two women may seem to him, the process of discovery is, as he himself notes, not to be taken lightly: "O pazzo desire! / Cercar di scoprire / Quel mal che, trovato, / Meschini ci fa" (act I, no. 1).

Unlike Sellars's ending, his "Soave sia il vento" does many of the things we expect any "good" production to do. It points unambiguously to the work both as schema and as social object, and unites the voices of composer, producer, and characters in what seems to be a coherent moment of meaning. In a sense, the choreographed denaturalization of this moment in the opera works to naturalize one strand in the reception of *Così fan tutte*, which is that Don Alfonso's experiment has deep, serious, and generalizable implications, and that "Soave sia il vento" is the portal to the crucial part of the experiment.²⁰

At the same time, in moving so graphically and so abruptly from a stage mode in which individual psyches are emphasized to a mode in which ritual takes over, or in which someone else seems to be speaking through or for the characters, Sellars foregrounds the cracks and hinges, the irreconcilability of different voices in the work. In making us wonder what three minutes of mime is doing in this piece, Sellars makes palpable the

20. Stefan Kunze in *Mozarts Opern* (Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1984), 450, notes that the whole opera is about farewells; not only personal ones, but cultural and political ones as well. By this reading, "Soave sia il vento" is a particularly clear manifestation of a general theme in the opera and does not necessarily need to be psychologically plausible.

longstanding critical head-scratching about this moment (why is it so gorgeous? what is Don Alfonso doing anyway?), but—and this is what connects this moment with the ending—he also makes a space in which we can consider what cultural needs are satisfied by the more familiar notion of a seamless comedy taking place on a single (or within a very narrow range of) psychological level(s).²¹ What are our expectations of *Così* in particular, or of opera in general, that we need to wonder why Don Alfonso would join in? What sort and level of psychological plausibility do we expect of this work, and if we worry about Don Alfonso's motivation in "Soave sia il vento," should we worry equally or in the same way about Fiordiligi's initiation of "E nel tuo, nel mio bicchiero" (the champagne quartet in the second-act finale)? In this instance, it is not Sellars's contrary or antithetical reading of the single intersubjective dominant aesthetic object "Soave sia il vento" that makes us look anew at it, but rather his radical intensification of aspects that critics and listeners have always noticed.

My final example is Despina's first aria, "In uomini," where she chides the young women for being so upset at the departure of their lovers. Dressed in a clingy white blouse, short tight black skirt, fishnet stockings, and stiletto-heeled ankle boots (which costume necessitates considerable contortions to stay decent while cleaning the floor), she is cook, waitress, cleaner, and general dogsbody in the diner, and she has had an on-again off-again affair with Don Alfonso for years. At this point in her life she is more wounded than optimistic, she finds herself in the course of the aria unable to keep up the façade of non-chalance she begins with and ends up furiously squirting

21. I do not, of course, mean that the common notion of *Così* is that it is univocal or monovalent, merely that on the level of character, the current commonsense notion is that once a character is established as a representative of an individual psyche, s/he is generally expected to remain "in character" for the majority of the opera. And in a production so intensely about individuals as Sellars's *Così*, the switch from character-as-verisimilar-individual to character-as-ritual-figure is particularly striking.

mustard (l'uno) and ketchup (l'altro) at the wall while singing "Amiam per comodo, per vanità." This version of Despina differs radically from our general understanding of this character as a cheerfully hardbitten type, but her singing of this aria neither contradicts the score's written indications,²² as the ending does, nor, like "Soave sia il vento," does it intensify a problem of verisimilitude already present in the text. Rather, Sellars's reading of this character as exemplified in this aria adds another layer of meaning both to the text and to the work as we generally understand it.

Sellars's understanding of Despina fits with certain recent readings of the work, but does this in ways that question much of what we take for granted about it. For example, in a recent dissertation, Brigitte Hammer reads Despina as a *Platzhalter* in society, necessarily immobilized by her social position.²³ Sellars conveys the same image, but makes her stuck not only by virtue of her class but also by virtue of her particular history and psychology. Although she and Don Alfonso end up perhaps more "on" than "off" as lovers, the ending, in which Despina and Don Alfonso are as isolated as the young lovers, suggests that any progress this couple may have made during the experiment is only one phase in a static and endlessly recurring cycle of attraction and repulsion. Sellars makes Despina and Don Alfonso the most believable characters in the opera, with histories that explain why they treat the lovers as they do.

Giving a theatrical character a history also essentially gives him or her a psychology, and the provision of a psychology for a character normally played as an unmitigated archetype, whether a typical serving maid, or a pastoral figure,²⁴ returns us

22. She even interpolates the conventional laugh between the 2/4 and 6/8 sections, but rather than a trilling giggle, this laugh is a strained, ironic "ha, ha."

23. Brigitte Hammer, "Szenische gestaltete Librettoreform auf der Bühne im Josephinian Zeitalter: Ein Kapitel zur Ausgestaltung der italienischen Literaturoper in Wien" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Vienna, 1986), 394-440.

to the meaning of the normal interpretation of Despina as a tough cookie in eighteenth-century costume, or a pert but unfeeling wench. More conventional productions make her not only the representative of her class but also of activity rather than feeling—a mechanical cog in the plot rather than a participant in its emotional life. In other words they objectify her. Conventional objectification of the servant character may have more basis in late eighteenth-century practices than Sellars's sentimentalization. Nevertheless, it took Sellars's sense of Despina as a subject to bring to my consciousness the idea that she is normally an object, which in turn raises fascinating questions about the historical and social/political responsibilities and obligations of performance and about the relations between those obligations.

I have been treating this production as though it were, if not a cover of Mozart's original, a complicated mirror of it, in which we may simultaneously experience *Così* itself in all its latent possibilities, Sellars's *Così* in its particularity, and, in oblique reflection, a common practice *Così* with all its un- and partly-examined assumptions. I have argued that it is in the interstices of these instantiations of Mozart's opera that Sellars does his most brilliant and valuable work. Sellars himself would probably not agree. Unlike my discussion of gaps, interstices, and shadow-versions of other *Cosis*, and, indeed, in contradistinction to the "cover" metaphor used by Katherine Bergeron and Wye J. Allanbrook, Sellars's comments on his work are couched entirely in terms of connection and certainty. Mozart's opera is autobiographical; it is "too truthful, too direct, too honest, too authentic."²⁵ Don Alfonso is burned out, in the second act "the dramma [does] supersede the giocoso," and so on.²⁶ In some

24. See Edmund Goehring, "Despina, Cupid, and the Pastoral Mode of *Così fan tutte*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 7 (1995): 107-133, for this reading of Despina.

ways, Sellars's comments here are no different in metacontent from the remarks of the most conservative classical performers, though the results are obviously quite different. The assertion that the performer's job is to find the truth "in the work itself" and in the historical circumstances surrounding it, and to communicate that truth as directly and efficiently as possible, is very much the sort of discourse used by, say, Alfred Brendel in writing about the philosophy of performing:

Mozart is made neither of porcelain, nor of marble, nor of sugar. The cute Mozart, the perfumed Mozart, the permanently ecstatic Mozart, the "touch-me-not" Mozart, the sentimentally bloated Mozart must all be avoided.²⁷

Brendel's Mozart is not Sellars's Mozart (one imagines Brendel might find the latter both "permanently ecstatic" and "sentimentally bloated"), but Brendel and Sellars share a certainty about their place in the world as purveyors of Mozart to the public. Sellars also connects with the "rocked out" versions of Cole Porter songs discussed in this journal by Bergeron, in seeming to be trying to "blow Mozart's cover"—to revive the "real" man and the "real" works for modern consumption, to suggest that Mozart's political opinions were congruent with late twentieth-century, left-wing American concerns, to indicate that Mozart's understanding of the human psyche was

25. From the introduction to the February 1991 PBS broadcast of *Cosi*. Despite the theatrical and perfervid delivery of this introduction it does not differ in content from the more measured interviews in the documentary *Destination Mozart: a Night at the Opera with Peter Sellars* (Arcadia Pictures; distributed as Kultur 1288). This documentary includes interview-clips with many of Sellars's singers; the extent to which they share his understanding of the Mozart operas is both remarkable and moving.

26. This last observation is from Sellars's program notes to the 1989 Pepsico Summerfare productions in Purchase, New York of all three Mozart operas, "The Mozart-da Ponte Operas."

27. Alfred Brendel, "A Mozart Player Gives Himself Advice" in *Music Sounded Out* (London: Robson Books Ltd., 1990), 6.

post-Freudian, and to reproduce the effect rather than the sight-and-sound of the originals.

Perhaps ironically, it is the uncertainty generated by Sellars's certainty about who Mozart is today, and about what *Cosi* might mean that seems to me particularly exciting and valuable. Although I don't agree that Mozart is in any simple way more meaningful when he is made into someone who might vote for Bernie Sanders and go to therapy once a week, Sellars's production of *Cosi* has made me think in new ways about what it might mean to present a canonical work not only in its historical specificity, as Heather Macdonald might say, but also in a manner replete with meaning that is socially and politically, as well as emotionally, immediate.²⁸ The most valuable and important performances of canonical works, then, may be precisely the ones we find the most troubling or the least "correct" in relation to their currently popular configurations, providing that they retain or illuminate some core values of the work in all the senses of the word.

28. Heather Macdonald, "On Peter Sellars," *Partisan Review* 58 (1991): 707-712.