In order this document comprises of:

Lecture-Recital Script	page 2-9
Full text and translations	page 10-11
Source of musical examples	page 12
References and further reading for audience	page 12
Musical Score used in my performance	
- Batti, batti, o bel Masetto	page 13-20
- Una donna a quindici anni	page 21-25

Mozart and Manipulation

Focusing on character development through music

using two Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart excerpts

Soprano - *Jean Clara Cartwright*Piano - *Rob Challinor*

Programme

- Recitative & Aria "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto!" ('Beat me, dear Masetto') from Act I, Scene IV of 'Don Giovanni'
- Despina's aria "Una donna a quindici anni" ('A woman of fifteen years') from Act II, Scene I of 'Così fan tutte' ('Women are like that')

Zerlina's music throughout shows the same basic two-section structure. For example, a *da capo* aria in the style of *opera seria* like Donna Elvira's "Mi tradi quell'alma ingrata" would not be suited or have been proper for Zerlina's class. The unadorned binary aria form indicates Zerlina's potential to vary and adapt, rather than return to less inventive ideas.¹

Don Juan uses a manner of seduction in many of his literary portrayals called the *manine* lure. A skill that Zerlina learns and then uses in "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto!" Don Juan uses this manner of seduction with a peasant girl, complimenting the beauty of her hands. A noblewoman from a life of luxury would have soft, supple hands due to a lavish life without exerting manual labour. Whereas a peasant girl, like Zerlina, would have calloused hands from working for her living. By complimenting her hands as perfumed and lily fair, Don Juan gratifies her with the concept that she is worthy of his attention.

Act I Scene I

Zerlina returns to her angry and jealous fiance Masetto, who accuses her of infidelity. She tells Masetto to beat her as long as they make up. Yet, Zerlina can see that her offer to let Masetto punish her is not working, quickly, she remembers how effective Don Giovanni's *manine* line was and utilises this on Masetto.

In **Figure 1**, *Zerlina* appropriates the *manine* lure. She does this by singing, "E le care tue manine lieta poi saprò baciar! (And your dear hands I will gladly kiss!)."

Unfortunate Masetto, who is helpless to her charm and the *manine* ploy, gives in. Though he complains after her aria, "Just look how this witch is able to seduce me! We men are really weak in the head!" (Guarda un po', come seppe questa strega sedurmi! siamo pure i deboli di testa!)

¹ Allenbrooke, Wye. *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 268.

Allenbrooke provides a tabular comparison of all three of Zerlina's numbers, showing how they share the same formal organization.

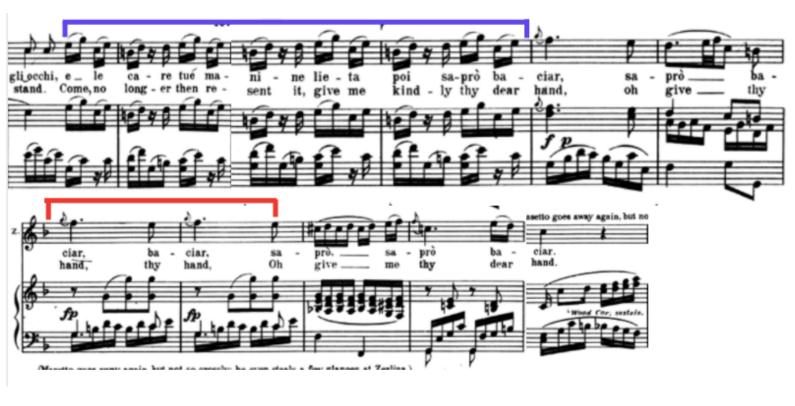


Figure 1

Mozart: "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto!" Featured semi-quavers and dotted crotchets in "E le care tue manine lieta poi saprò baciar!"

A and B sections

The style of the A section of "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto!" is an *andante grazioso* gavotte, which sounds socially removed from the peasant class. **Figure 1** features lilting semi-quavers highlighted in blue, and the longer held notes (dotted crotchets) in red which creates an opportunity for the singer to let the sound swell. These are not common characteristics of a gavotte, having previously witnessed and learnt from Don Giovanni's grandiose style, Zerlina utilises the elegant appeal of this dance to calm Masetto's jealous anger.

The B section goes back to the pastoral theme with a faster 6/8 meter, suggesting that Zerlina has returned to her place, a little wiser, but pleased with her faithful lover. In the libretto written by Lorenzo Da Ponte, textually it creates the impression that Zerlina gives power to Masetto, as she asks him to beat her, surrendering to his punishment, as long as there's reconciliation after. However, she knows full well that he would never hurt her. This ploy of hers is highlighted by Mozart with trills of laughter in the strings as she suggests Masetto tear out her hair or scratch her eyes. Her apology is thus laced with an underlying feeling of getting away with unfaithfulness while laughing at her fiancé. Therefore, manipulating him with the *manine* lure and her 'feminine wiles'. These trills are featured in **Figure 2** below, red lines are drawn over them to show where they occur.

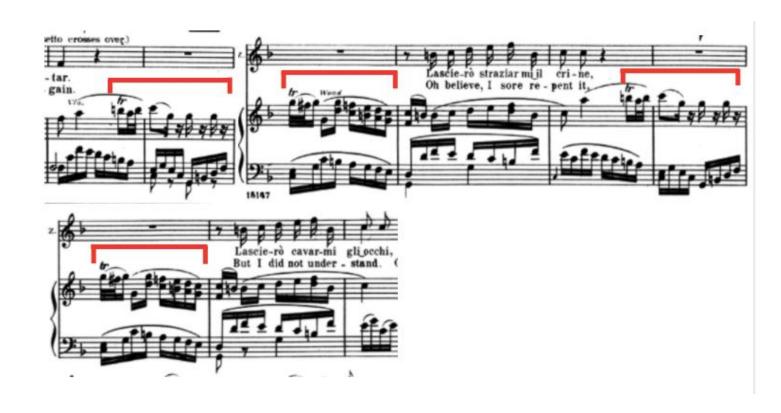


Figure 2

Mozart: "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto!" Trills featured before "Lascierò straziarmi il crine" and "Lascierò cavarmi gli occhi".

Zerlina to a certain extent is the strongest female character in *Don Giovanni*. In *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* by Kristi Brown–Montesano, she explains that Zerlina is "the only woman in the opera who incontrovertibly refuses Don Giovanni's sexual advances even after having once welcomed them".² Zerlina publicly exposes Don Giovanni in the Act I finale: "Tutto già si sa! (Everything is known now!)". Where she then returns to Masetto for a presumably happy future together.

Zerlina's ability to denounce Don Giovanni in itself displays her strength of character; past *buffa* servants could have outsmarted or undermined their lord's plots, but to publicly condemn him as Zerlina does would have been culturally unthinkable.

The character Despina is a maid to two teenage girls: Fiordiligi and Dorabella, who have recently been engaged. The plot of the opera revolves around these two girls being manipulated into cheating on their fiances by Despina and Don Alfonso (an old philosopher).

"Una donna a quindici anni", is a turning point for Despina, from a serving maid to an equal of her mistresses Fiordiligi and Dorabella. It is a classic example of Mozart's elevation of the lower class above the nobility. A character of key power and importance, who becomes an influential voice to listen to, affecting their mindset and options, by advising them to succumb to the "Albanians" in the first scene of Act II.

The setting of the aria is in Fiordiligi and Dorabella's bedroom, where Despina is cleaning. Despina tries again to convince the girls that they should give in to their suitors' attention, encouraging them to give in to the temptation. She displays her confidence and charm in a way that hints her status is to be the sovereign, as she says "E qual regina"

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² Brown–Montesano, Kristi. *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007) p. 62.

dall'alto soglio, Col posso e voglio farsi ubbidir (And this queen from her high throne, can make them obey with, "I can," and "I want")".

She lists all the powers a woman must hold over men by fifteen years of age: to know what's good and what's bad; to know the little malices that enamour lovers; to feign laughter and tears; to know a number of excuses; pay attention to many; to speak (flirt) with your eyes; to be able to bewilder someone without becoming confused and to lie without blushing. Despina seems to praise her own advice - not only over men but over the women to whom she is speaking. She realizes her position of authority, holding the upper hand, she is indeed able to manipulate them to her will - through the methods she is teaching them.

Small ornamentations can be seen throughout the aria, mimicking laughter or simply a manifestation of her own self-confidence. These ornamentations are featured in yellow in **Figures 3** and **4**.



Figure 3

Mozart: "Una donna a quindici anni". Ornamentation giving the impression of laughter.



Figure 4

Mozart: "Una donna a quindici anni". Ornamentation giving the impression of laughter.

Towards the end of the aria Mozart creates a false ending, it has been presumed that the aria has ended with Despina's "I can and I will" moments. However, what is learnt from her nature and the text provided by Da Ponte, she still manages to get the last word in. Repeating "Par ch'abbian gusto di tal dottrina, Viva Despina che sa servir! (It seems they like this doctrine, Long live Despina, who knows how to serve!)" one last time. "Sa servir!" - to serve. Having a double meaning: literally, to serve as Despina is a maid; and she is offering up some real advice to these girls. This passage is shown in **Figure 5**.

This aria is a turning point for her character in the opera. As Despina is of sound mind and chooses her own path, deciding to pair up with Don Alfonso by accepting his bribe. Yet she does his bidding on her own accord, a female character that is not portrayed as stupid or easily manipulated.



Figure 5

Mozart: "Una donna a quindici anni". The false ending - "Par ch'abbian gusto di tal dottrina, Viva Despina che sa servir!"

Manipulation is a key tie for both of these roles. One can see the power Zerlina holds over Masetto, in "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto" Zerlina placates Masetto, who turns his anger into contentment by the end of the aria. Also with Despina evolving from simple handmaiden to having the influencing upper hand over her young mistresses.

"Batti, batti, o bel Masetto!" - Act I, Scene V from 'Don Giovanni'

Translation from Italian to English provided by Camila Argolo Freitas Batista, 1997³.

Recitative

Ma se colpa io non ho, ma se da lui But it was not my fault;

ingannata rimasi; e poi, che temi? If for the moment his flattery pleased me,

Tranquillati, mia vita; How could I help it?

non mi toccò la punta della dita. Now, think of him no longer,

Non me lo credi? Ingrato! There was no harm, his words I scarcely answered.

Vien qui, sfogati, ammazzami, fa tutto Say, you believe me, ungrateful! Come here, strike me

then,

di me quel che ti piace, I'll bear it all, kill me if you think my fault is so heinous,

ma poi, Masetto mio, ma poi fa pace. And then, my own Masetto, peace be between us.

Aria

Batti, batti, o bel Masetto, Beat me, dear Masetto,

La tua povera Zerlina; beat your poor Zerlina.

Starò qui come agnellina I'll stand here as meek as a lamb

Le tue botte ad aspettar. and bear the blows you lay on me.

Lascierò straziarmi il crine, You can tear my hair out,

Lascierò cavarmi gli occhi, put out my eyes,

E le care tue manine yet your dear hands

Lieta poi saprò baciar. gladly I'll kiss.

Ah, lo vedo, non hai core! Ah! I see you've no mind to:

Pace, pace, o vita mia, let's make peace, dearest love!

In contento ed allegria In happiness and joy

Notte e dì vogliam passar, let's pass our days and nights.

³ Translation provided by 'Camila Argolo Freitas Batista'; The Aria Database, 'Batti, batti, o bel Masetto' 4th November 1997,

http://www.aria-database.com/search.php?sid=cb44f5463aa213aa7df6b5e76c45320a&X=1&individualAria=81 [accessed 20/10/20].

"Una donna a quindici anni" - Act II, Scene I from 'Così fan tutte'

Translation from Italian to English provided by Naomi Gurt Lind, 1997⁴.

<u>Aria</u>

Una donna a quindici anni A woman of 15 years

De'e saper ogni gran moda Must know all the good methods,

Dove il diavolo ha la coda Where the devil keeps his tail,

Cosa e bene, e mal cos'e. What's good and what's bad.

De'e saper le maliziette She must know the little malices

Che innamorano gli amanti That enamour lovers:

Finger riso, finger pianti

To feign laughter, to feign tears,

Inventar i bei perche. And invent good reasons.

De'e in un momento dar retta a cento She must pay attention to a hundred at a time

Colle pupille parlar con mille Speak through her eyes with a thousand

Dar speme a tutti, sien belli o brutti, Give hope to all, be they handsome or ugly,

Saper nascondersi senza confondersi, Know how to obfuscate without getting confused

Senz'arrossire saper mentire. And know how to lie without blushing.

E qual regina dall'alto soglio And this queen from her high throne

Col posso e voglio farsi ubbidir. Can make them obey with, "I can," and "I want."

(Par ch'abbian gusto di tal dottrina, (It seems they like this doctrine,

Viva Despina che sa servir!)

Long live Despina, who knows how to serve!)

⁴ Translation provided by 'Naomi Gurt Lind'; The Aria Database, 'Una donna a quindici anni' 21st March 1997,

 $[\]frac{\text{http://www.aria-database.com/search.php?sid=cb44f5463aa213aa7df6b5e76c45320a\&X=2\&dT=Full\&fC=1\&searching=yes\&t0=all\&s0=una+donna+a+quindici+anni&f0=keyword\&dS=arias}{\text{[accessed 20/10/20]}}.$

Musical Examples:

W. A. Mozart, *Don Giovanni* (vocal score), New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., http://conquest.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/1/1a/IMSLP68957-PMLP36804-Mozart - Don Giovanni it-eng Vocal Score.pdf, accessed 24/10/2020.

W. A. Mozart, *Cosi fan tutte* (vocal score), Leipzig: C. F. Peters. https://www.free-scores.com/download-sheet-music.php?pdf=77315, accessed 25/10/2020.

References and Further Reading:

Allenbrooke, Wye. *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

Brown–Montesano, Kristi. *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

Fisher, Burton D. *Mozart's Cosi fan tutte: Opera Classics Library Series*, (Boca Raton: Opera Journeys Publishing, 2004).



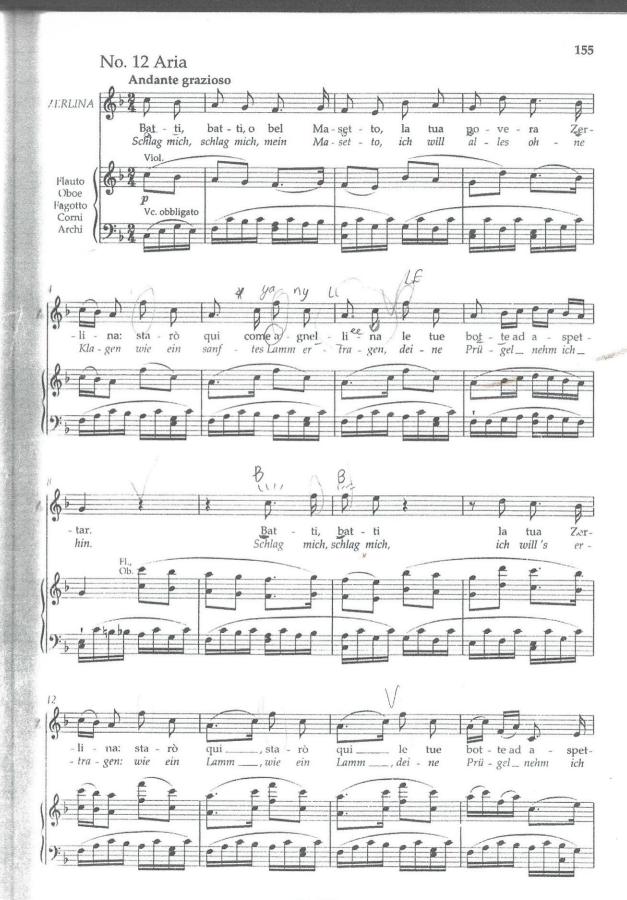
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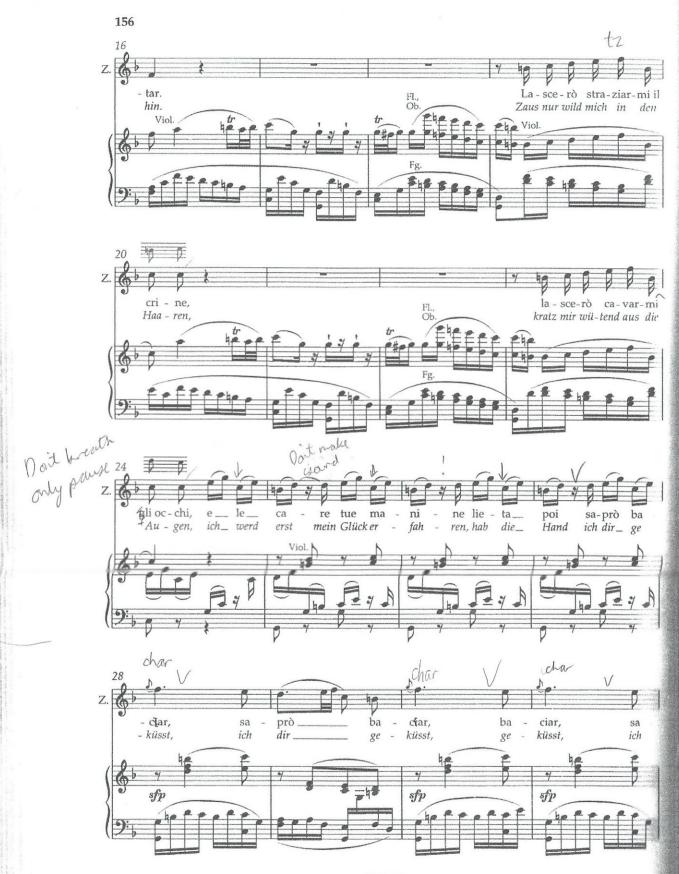
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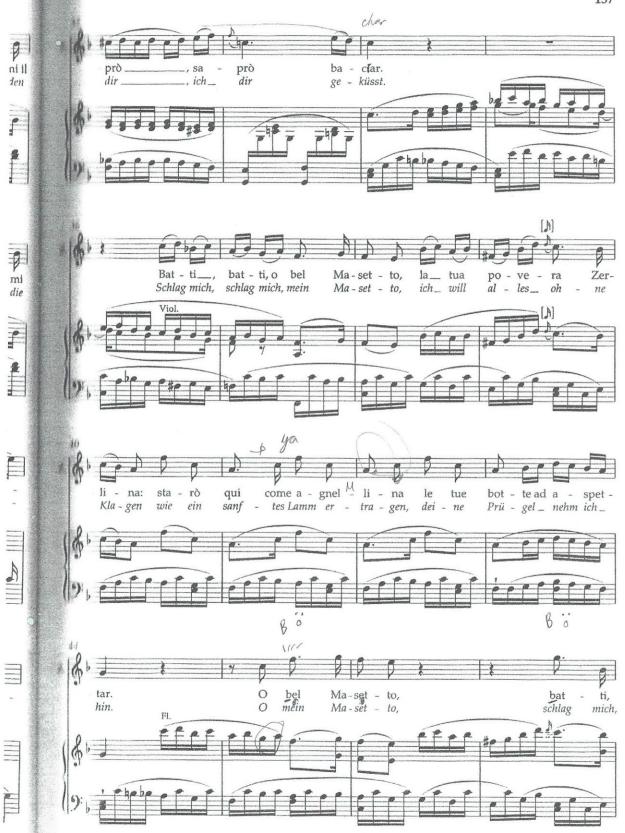
Charming Maxetto





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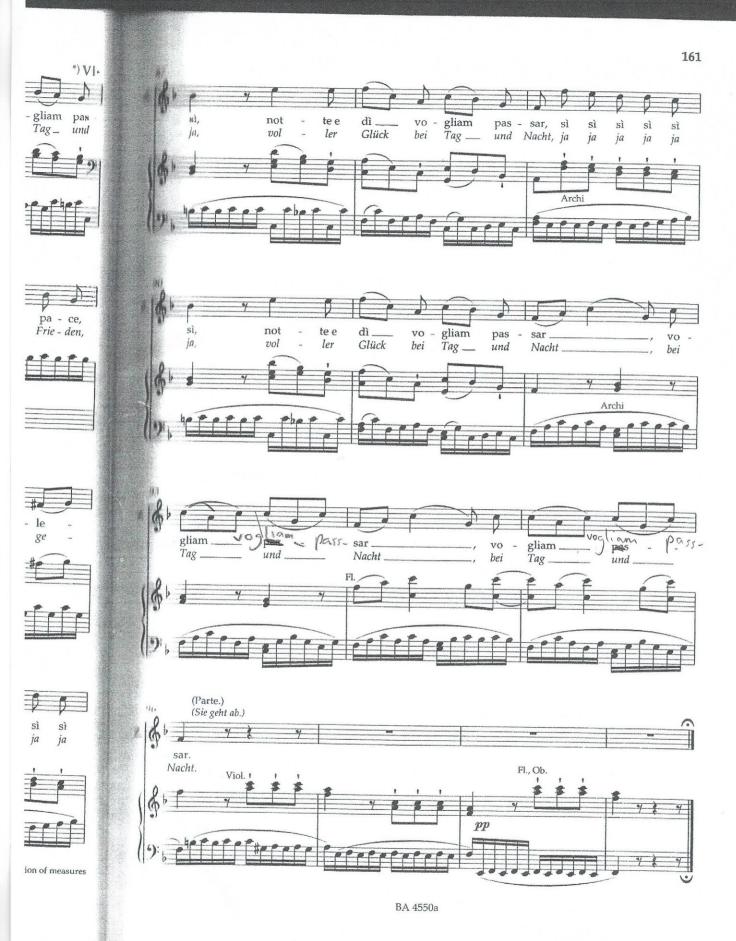
*) T. 60: Die Fermate sollte ausgeziert werden. / M. 60: The fermata should be embellished.

**) T. 60: Vor dem Takt- und Tempowechsel steht im Autograph kein Taktstrich. / M. 60: No barline is found in the autograph before the change of meter and the new tempo marking.

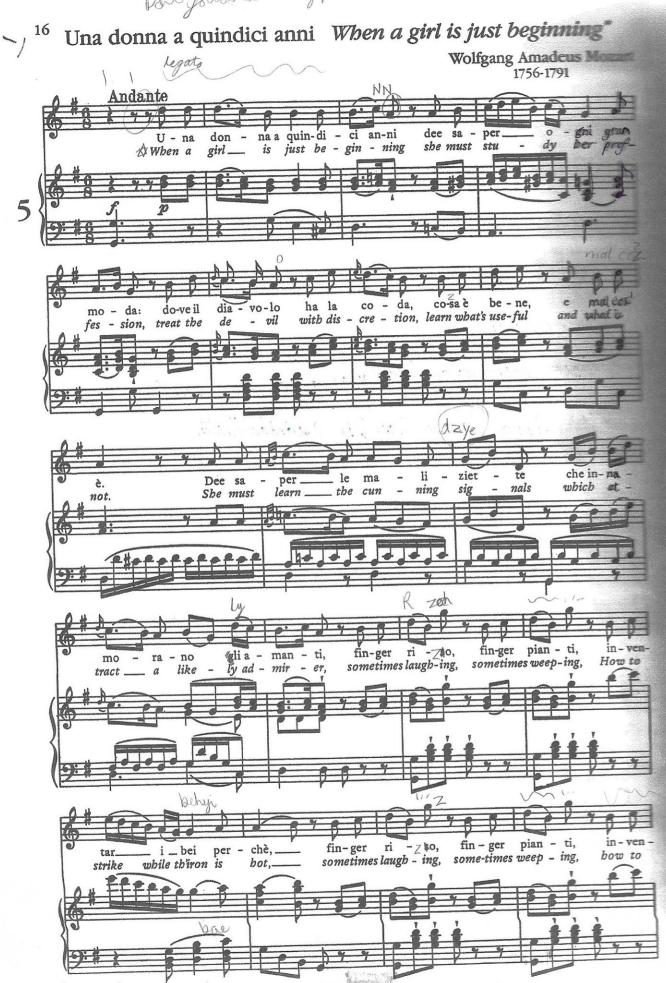




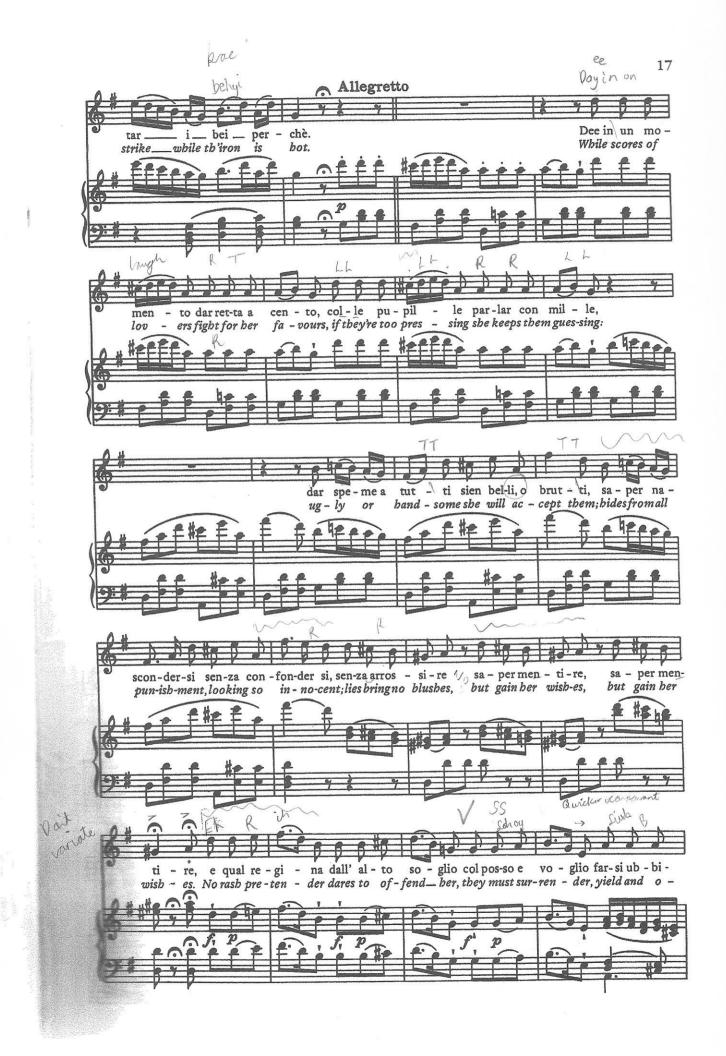
*) Die Streichung der Takte 78-85 ist von Mozart für die "Wiener Fassung" (vgl. Vorwort) vorgenommen worden. / The deletion of meaning 78-85 was made by Mozart for the "Vienna version"; cf. Preface.



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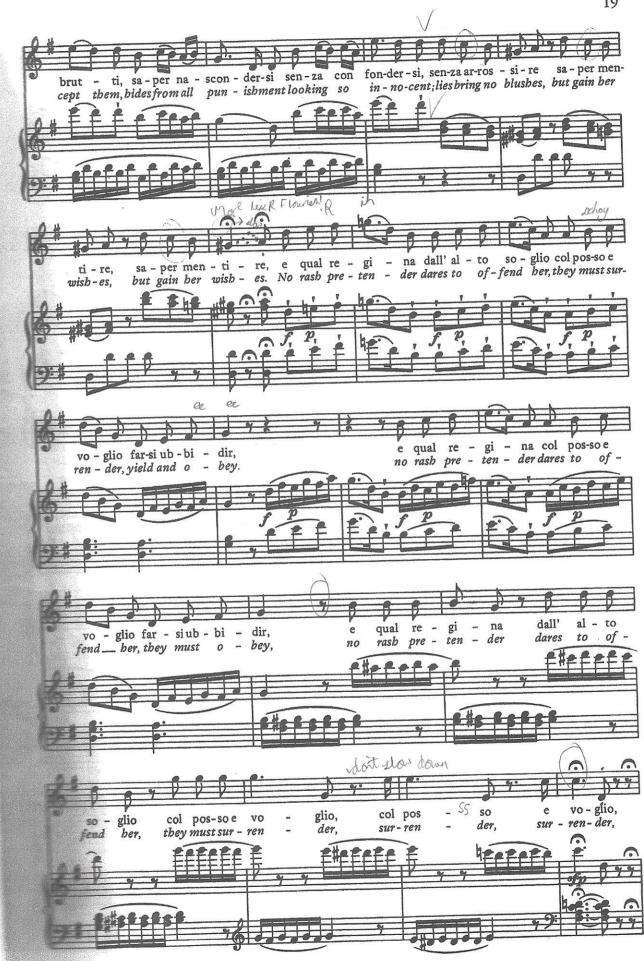


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