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# Dramatic Perception. Foreground and Background in Nineteenth-Century Operatic Concertatos

The study of perceptual behavior in music needs a historical and hermeneutical approach, in order to contextualize styles and conventions which implicate the expectations of the listener (see Meyer 1973, 109-241). In the field of music, subsequent elaboration of the gestalt theory has in fact shown how the basic principles of perception are continually evolving, based on the listener's experience and competence (see Meyer 1956, Sloboda 1985, Guarnieri Corazzol 2004). Away from the laboratory, these principles have been reconsidered on the basis of mental processes tied to live experience in theatres and concert halls and interpreted as the basis of the listener's ability to listen to music (see Guarnieri Corazzol 2004, 63). We have had to overcome the difficulties of dividing up long musical compositions and devise general rules for grouping within them (see Sloboda 1985, 174-175)[1].

It may be useful to carry out case studies of structures and musical forms with a clear meaning which does not necessarily have to be descriptive or, in other words, which is not limited by the painting of images or emotions conveyed through words. In opera, for example, the music is not simply an accompaniment and expression of a poetic text; it brings a dramatic or emotional situation to life, through the compositional structures of the music. Indeed, musical theatre is theatre made up of music, consisting of musical forms. A composer creates a drama by manipulating solid musical conventions which the listener unconsciously recognizes, having absorbed them in the course of time, rather

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[1]But also Bod 2002, 27: "It is widely assumed that the preferred grouping structure of a piece depends on a combination of low-level phenomena, such as local discontinuities and intervallic distances, and high-level phenomena, such as melodic parallelism and internal harmony. Most models of musical segmentation use the Gestalt principles of proximity and similarity … to predict the low-level grouping structure of a piece: grouping boundaries preferably fall on larger inter-onset-intervals, larger pitch intervals, etc.. While most models also incorporate higher-level grouping phenomena, such as melodic parallelism and harmony, these phenomena remain often unformalized". Many distinguished studies by Irène Deliège have looked at the analysis of listening to long musical texts, among them are: Deliège & Mélen 1997. See also Hanninen 2012.

like one would absorb a mother tongue. Both in long musical numbers and in musical and melodic phrases, dramatic realities are created thanks to the music, and they are not to be found in a libretto, on the stage or in expressions.

An example of a long piece of music in dramatic form, which is well known to opera goers, can be found in the second act of Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Nineteenth-century operatic convention required every item within the opera (every aria, duet, terzetto etc.) to consist of 3 or 4 sections. These would be as follows: a possible opening section, a section in a slow, melancholic and dreamy tempo, a section containing a dramatic turn of events leading into the concluding section which had a quick rapid triumphant pace: the celebrated *cabaletta*. In the second act of *Rigoletto*, Verdi respects the convention in the first aria sung by the Duke, with a nice concluding *cabaletta*, rousing and rich in hormones for the tenor, who locks himself in the bedroom with the innocent maiden. However in the aria which follows it, Verdi breaks the rules. The Jester's section against the noblemen is not slow, but fast-paced and furious (*andante mosso*) – the famous "Cortigiani vil razza dannata" is the typical pace of a *cabaletta*, He goes from imploring them in tears to return his daughter Gilda to him, to ending the aria with an unexpected interruption of the *meno mosso* "Ebben io piango". In the conventions of the time, the spectator is completely thrown because there is a lack of clear indicators as to how one should behave (the spectator does not even know if or when to applaud). Gilda's exit after the Duke's aggression launches the duet between father and daughter. Once again the parameters do not make sense. The opening section calls for a long solo from Gilda ("Tutte le feste al tempio"), which would seem to be an aria, but is followed by a short *cantabile* sung by the girl in tears, comforted by Rigoletto. Then at last there is a dramatic turns of events: Monterone enters and miserably bemoans the failure of his curse against the Duke. This passage has a triggering effect: the tension which has been building up is released in the famous *cabaletta* "Sì vendetta, tremenda vendetta" in *allegro vivo.* Although it is the concluding section of a duet, this *cabaletta* is mainly sung by Rigoletto (Gilda briefly intervenes in the background) and it is a truly vigorous, frenzied *cabaletta* where the spectator finally gets to see a turning point in the story, moving effectively towards a proper conclusion (this is actually where the second act ends).

It is not just a question of disorientation; only when the last *cabaletta* begins with Rigoletto in the foreground is the spectator able to fully understand the whole of the second act and reinterpret it as a great piece of drama dedicated to the Jester. Few people realize they have just heard an aria <u>and</u> a duet, they perceive them as joined together and supported by the powerful haranguing of the noblemen in the opening scene and Rigoletto's vow to seek revenge in the closing scene. By toning down the *cabaletta* of Rigoletto's aria and thus violating the rules of

drama, a new musical number was created which coincided more or less with the entire act: the climax of the tragedy seen through the eyes of Rigoletto (not his daughter).

This is where several Gestalt principles come into play, but they are embodied in the precise nineteenth-century syntax still unconsciously adopted by assiduous opera-goers today. For the principle of *prägnanz* in this stylistic context we need to hear the rhythm and the tone of the *cabaletta* in order to perceive a sense of completeness which enables the spectator to make sense of what is happening by virtue of the principles of regularity, symmetry and economy. This irregular pattern invented by Verdi implies expectations, and memory tends to preserve formal coherence disregarding or forgetting the exceptions. This means that the *cabaletta* in the duet, "Sì vendetta, tremenda vendetta", tends to be remembered as a *cabaletta* in Rigoletto's aria and NOT the *cabaletta* in the duet. At the very least, people tend to ignore the fact that it really is a duet, because they think of Gilda's presence as an episode within Rigoletto's aria[2]. For our sense of completeness or closure, the omission of a clear *cabaletta* in Rigoletto's aria does not allow it to be perceived as actually being an autonomous and concluded number. The listener tends to complete it intuitively, thanks to the memory principle where he is induced to take inspiration from models he is already familiar with. Even in the macroform, musical structures, like all forms that happen over time, they are united and always open, their elements unspecified and incomplete until they gain stability, when the last element in the series appears and blocks everything that has gone before (see Martinelli 1999, 219 which starts from an analysis of the melodies of Wertheimer, 1923, 350).

If the principles of Gestalt work in wide-ranging cases like this, which in total last for over twenty minutes and where memory plays an important role, the more will it occur in short musical sections where, thanks to adequate *centrature*, the composer directs the attention of the listener (see Hornbostel 1930). For instance, it occurs in music where it is possible to study the passage of sound perception between foreground and background. Indeed, our minds would organise the polyphony as an accompanied melody (foreground on background) in so far as it is a simpler and more pregnant form (see Meyer 1956, 186-187). Or it would necessarily perceive one melody and the other part as a harmony (according to Sloboda 1985, 169, polyphony is always perceived with a voice in the foreground and others in the background because it is impossible to

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[2] Carrozzo & Cimagalli, 2009, 204 considers the weeping of Rigoletto as a cantabile, therefore a missing cabaletta aria which comes in "Sì vendetta, tremenda vendetta" as "logica conclusione dell'intero complesso costituito dai numeri 9 e 10. Il risultato è quello di prolungare l'attesa della cabaletta relativa al n. 9 fino alla fine del numero seguente" ("a logical conclusion of the whole piece consisting of numbers 9 and 10. The result is to prolong the wait for the cabaletta relating to n. 9 until the end of this number").

simultaneously perceive all the voices together). However, analysis of operatic *concertati* reveals some interesting insights. In fact these are polyphonic sections where the drama is there in the single voices present, but also inevitably in the whole polyphonic group. Indeed, the music organises a new dramatic structure, each with its own meaning, which is reflected in the single voices of the characters. Like the famous drawing by Rubin, these sections must be *reversible*, because the attention must be able to pass from the single voices expressing the characters' contrasting emotions to the entire piece which defines the complete musical number[3]. Therefore the composer must oblige the listener to change perspective and shift the centre ground (*centratura)* of the sound image[4] because among different possible alternative groupings, the listener can only perceive one at a time[5]. In order to highlight the focus of interest he has chosen, the composer uses strictly formal (and therefore Gestalt) principles, but within the constraint of a specific formal syntax, because among the varying degrees of formality of these significant Gestalt principles the structural rules imposed by the composer[6] will be re-adapted to the listener's concrete frame of mind (see Riccardo Martinelli 1999, 227).

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[3] In formal terms, we can consider them successive alternative phrases between background and foreground, therefore *Gestaltmehrdeutigkeit* musical forms ("polivocità figurale"), "situazioni-stimolo identiche" ("identical stimulus situations") in as much as they are the basis for an interchangeably harmonic or polyphonic perception of a passage: see Martinelli 1999, 171 which takes into account the positions of Witasek 1897, 401-35. See also Guarnieri Corazzol 2004, 65.

[4] "Nel percepire l'una o l'altra di queste possibili *Gestalten* noi operiamo una diversa "*centratura*": una riconfigurazione che consiste nell'attribuire all'oggetto percepito un senso differente nei due casi. Analogamente, per Hornbostel, il compito dell'analisi stilistica non consiste nel far emergere singoli stilemi, ma nell'individuare prospettive e "*centrature*" adeguate assumendole a parametro definitorio dello stile di un compositore, di una scuola, di un popolo o di un periodo. L'analisi stilistica non consiste nel far emergere singoli stilemi, ma nell'individuare prospettive e "*centrature*" adeguate, assumendole a parametro definitorio dello stile di un compositore, di una scuola, di un popolo o di un periodo" ("In the perception of one or other of these possible *Gestalten* we operate a different "*centratura*": a reconfiguration which consists in attributing to the object perceived a different meaning in both cases. Similarly, for Hornbostel, the task of stylistic analysis is not to bring out individual styles but to identify adequate perspectives and "*centrature*", adapting them to the appropriate defining parameter of the style of a composer, a school, a population or a period. The stylistic analysis does not bring out the individual style, but it identifies adequate perspectives and "*centrature*", adapting them to the defining parameter of the style of a composer, a school, a population or a period.") (Martinelli 1998, 109).

[5] "One of the main challenges in modeling musical segmentation is the problem of ambiguity: several different grouping structures may be compatible with a sequence of notes while a listener usually perceives only one particular structure": Bod 2002, 27.

[6] "Which of these various organizations or combinations of them the mind imposes upon the sensory materials presented to it depends upon the psychological demand for good shape (upon the law of Prägnanz) and upon the attitude and expectations of the experienced and practiced listener … For example, if the over-all articulation is simpler when a piece for a single instrument is understood as implying several "lines" or voices, then this mode of organization is the one that will probably appear; while if the final result of articulation is more distinct and the patterns perceived of better shape when the stimuli are apprehended in terms of a figure-ground distribution, then this mode of organization will probably emerge" and in every case "'where the center of our interest lies there, *ceteris paribus*, a figure is likely to arise'" (Meyer 1956, 186-187 which quotes Kofka 1935, 211).

For the third act of *Rigoletto*, Verdi composed one of the most famous *concertati* in the whole of nineteenth-century melodrama: the scene where, outside the inn, Rigoletto and Gilda spy on the Duke's rather vulgar courtship of the prostitute Maddalena. This is a quartet which really renders the idea of the concept of *grottesco*: Gilda's sublime emotions, devastated by the Duke's betrayal, and Rigoletto eager for revenge, join the Duke and Maddalena's obscene games in a scene where tragedy and comedy, refined and coarse expression are inextricably mixed together. Nineteenth-century critics were both shocked and fascinated by the "contrasto di questi quattro sentimenti che si alterno, si congiungono, s'avviluppano, senza che si perda un solo istante la traccia del loro accento distintivo[:] nasce un gruppo melodico di sublime bellezza, di straziante complicazione" ("contrast of these four alternating emotions which join together, and which become entwined, without losing for a single moment traces of each of their distinctive voices[:] a melodic group, sublimely beautiful and desperately intricate, is formed.")[7]. Thus Verdi has to present us with a complete picture as well as the single emotions of the four characters.

On the one hand he distinguishes the four voices so they are clearly audible. 1) Each character sings their part at a different pitch: Gilda and Rigoletto preside over the extreme ends of the polyphonic texture, one on the acute notes (soprano) and the other on the low notes (baritone), while Maddalena (mezzosoprano) and the Duke (tenor) are in the middle of the texture. 2) Moreover, each voice sings a different melody at a different speed. They all sing verses of eight syllables, which are equally rhymed, but Maddalena is very fast and she sings each verse in half a measure while Gilda uses a whole one. The Duke is even slower and he expresses each verse in two bars, while Rigoletto doubles that, giving his part a longer lasting 'muddy' effect (Sloboda 1985, 173): in this way he tends to mask the voices of the Duke and Maddalena, while Gilda's high-pitched voice is always perfectly audible[8].

The four emotions are quite distinct and Verdi makes sure they are recognisable together. So he uses a technique well known to the opera-goers of the time:

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[7] *Giuseppe Verdi*, in "il Fuggilozio", III(9), 28 March 1857, pp. 139-144. See, among the many articles, also Marcello M. (1856): Rassegna musicale. Rigoletto, parole di Piave, musica di Verdi, Teatro Carignano, in Rivista contemporanea, IV (8), 128-136: 117: "Qui si ride la si piange, e ciò forma un complesso solo che fa maravigliare gli intelligenti" ("Here they laugh, there they cry, and this forms a whole that makes the intelligent marvel").

[8] Sloboda 1985, 172-174 studied the relationship between external and internal voices in polyphonic texts, especially the relationship between external and internal voices of musical texture, using the concept of masking introduced by Moore 1982[2]. The masking of low frequencies covers up to an octave, but if an abnormally high-pitched sound stands out from the shadows, the intermediate voices will remain hidden. In the same way, sounds too close in time and pitch will outshine each other. "However, as one moves the test tone further away from masking tone in pitch there comes a point where the masking tone no longer has any effect on the threshold. … for particular tone it becomes possible to estimate its critical bandwidth".

*groundswell*, which had been used for decades to put a voice to collective feelings of dismay. It consists of two successive gradual *crescendos*, which, like waves, subsequently rise and swell to a melodic-tonal-dynamic climax, like an explosion (often highlighted with cymbals or the base drum). Usually the chorus would also be present, but here Verdi only applies *groundswell* to a simple quartet where it is only Gilda, not the other characters, who feels shock and surprise.

The quartet mediates between these 5 elements – the 4 emotions at stake and the grottesque ensemble – alternatively confining some of them to the background and putting others in the foreground. The Duke starts off the lyric number with a complete melody (the song) [mss. 49-64[9]]. It is syllabic, in middle range without any remarkably high notes; thus establishing the register and a standard singing speed. Next comes Maddalena's entrance, *a solo* characterized by tapped sounds like laughter [ms. 64] and then Gilda with her smooth, connected sounds, doubled by violins [ms. 65]. These two parts are repeated twice in order to memorise them appropriately [mss. 66-67]. Rigoletto enters last [mss. 68-70] on Gilda's ending notes and he continues with his lengthy melody masking the middle voices, moreover blocked on long notes or repeated sounds. Before he finishes his melody, Gilda starts the first *groundswell*. The frequency of the next entrances by one character after another briefly draws the attention to a new melody sung by Rigoletto as the other singers withdraw into the background, but the conclusion of his melody is hidden by Gilda singing *a solo* doubled by the violins [mss. 69-73], both because Gilda soars from register hidden by her father's low-pitched sounds, and because the listener perceives the trigger of this very well-known formal pattern. Once it has started and has been recognised, it prevails over the single voices which move into the background as a whole and the characters are no longer heard individually but as a harmonious wave[10]. It is almost as if Verdi first shows us the single emotions at stake, then the whole picture.

In fact, the *groundswell* does not come to an end: it should be repeated twice, but the Duke breaks the good continuation with a prolonged high note *ad libitum* [ms. 73] which breaks away from the masking of Rigoletto and draws the attention to himself in order to come back to the original song ("Bella figlia dell'amore"). It is as if the quartet is starting all over again from the beginning. Although this time the Duke is interrupted by Maddalena, Gilda and Rigoletto who enter between one phrase and another, the listener follows his melody [mss. 74-81] because they have heard it before[11]: because for the attentional conservatism, the

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[9] You can find a public vocal score at http://burrito.whatbox.ca:15263/imglnks/usimg/4/46/IMSLP65744-PMLP117952-Rigoletto_Act_III_Vocal_Score.pdf, p. 181: I count the measures of this edition.

[10] IIIb e V (F flat major and A flat minor): see Abbate & Parker eds. 1989, 164-165.

[11] On the function of memory in listening music, see Sloboda 2005, 195-199.

listener's attention tends to be drawn to a melody they know already, and because it initially appeared as a monodic structure and so it continues to be perceived in the new polyphonic texture[12]. In this way the Duke pushes the other characters' singing to the background (Basevi observes that "Rigoletto e Gilda procedono insieme con un canto *largo* in modo tale ordinato che non disturba le altre due parti" ["Rigoletto and Gilda continue together with a *wide* canto in such an orderly manner so as not to disturb the other two parts"] (Basevi 1859, 197). At the end of the full version of "Bella figlia dell'amore", Verdi brings the reactions of the two women to the foreground and leaves Rigoletto and the Duke in the background, in an indistinguishable ensemble [mss. 79-87]. Even the voices of the two women could blend together, both because they sing in similar tones, which the Gestalt principles of grouping tend to assimilate as units, and because we perceive similar tones which originate from the same source (see Sloboda 1985, 160). In order to distinguish them, Gilda continues with her connected legato notes, but they are continuously interrupted by her sobbing (which Basevi defined as "troncature", or cutting off, useful for distinguishing "note che tenderebbero, per attrazione, ad unirsi tra sé" ["notes which, attracted to each other, would tend to be united"] (Basevi 1859, 197) and Maddalena with her disconnected sounds whose repeated onset transients make it easier to perceive the sound source (see Sloboda, 1985, 156) and avoids being hidden by inferior voices or being absorbed by Gilda's part.

The reactions of the two women start a new *groundswell*: it takes shape after two false starts [mss. 79; 89] and as soon as the listener recognises its good continuation, Verdi brings it into the foreground pushing the single melodies to the background. However, he cannot allow this mechanism to proceed automatically to the end. In fact, he needs to bring to the foreground once again the voice of Rigoletto [mss. 85-88] who, unlike the other characters, has not yet come to the end of his part of the song, due to the slow speed at which he sings. Therefore, at the height of the first *crescendo* [mss. 88], instead of the crash of cymbals we would expect, Verdi reduces Maddalena's part to repeated notes, with a rhythmic rather than a melodic movement. He interrupts Gilda's sobbing on long held notes and on this still background he gives Rigoletto a cascade of stressed semiquavers. By orienting response (see Sloboda, 1985, 174) the attention of the listener shifts to his dramatically announced plan for revenge. In the established repetition of the *groundswell* [mss. 89], Maddalena is absorbed

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[12] "…the case where a theme which originally appeared as part of homophonic texture is subsequently used in conjunction either with other equally well-articulated shapes or in imitative counterpoint with itself. Here there is often a conflict, though only a minor one, between the subjective organization, which the listener attempts to impose, and the objective facts of the textural distribution. In such cases the introduction of additional figures which are well shaped appears as an intrusion, as a disturbance of what was supposed to be homophonic texture" (Meyer, 1956, 189).

into the background (her tone becomes quieter, she is hidden by deep voices and the repercussion notes lose pauses so that they become one continuous indistinct tone). Only Gilda's sobbing initially stands out against the other voices and they vie for the foreground of the structure together. But in the final part [mss. 97-101], in the end even they are absorbed into the grotesque picture (*tableau).* They break into short notes alternated with short pauses, which Rigoletto fills with an identical but asynchronous movement. Together they create a uniform texture which wraps round and hides the pace linked to the middle voices.

In the case of the quartet in *Rigoletto*, the dramatic action unfolds in front of the spectators and in front of Gilda, who is distraught. Therefore, the music must organize a dramatic action *in fieri* as well as express the passions of the four characters. On the other hand, there are cases where the dramatic tempo stands still. In a deep-rooted theatrical convention, from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, towards the end of every act a totally unexpected *coup de théâtre* would stop the actors in their tracks in an expression of stunned bewilderment. At that point, it was as if they had formed "nel loro tutto un dipinto della musica imitativa" ("a picture with the music imitating it": Lichenthal 1836, *s.v. 'concertato'*). This was called a *tableau* or a *quadro* (painting) because the pictorial features were very much in evidence, given that in relation to the position of the others, each character adopted a pose in keeping with their emotional state. It was the purpose of the music to make the picture last. Therefore, the music stops the dramatic tempo. The moment of surprise, which stuns the actors on the stage, spreads out and stays in front of the audience for several minutes. The lack of dialogue means that the singing allows the contrasting emotions of all the characters to grow in strength in a musical number, where they all sing to themselves simultaneously.

For example, Meyerbeer in his *Crociato in Egitto*, written in 1825, builds the obligatory *concertato* on Armando, the main character, being recognised as a Christian and not a Muslim. The Sultan summons him in front of the court to offer him his daughter's hand in marriage (in actual fact, they are already secretly married), thus naming him heir to his throne. However, when faced with the assembled court and the Christian knights who have come to negotiate a truce, Armando can no longer pretend and he admits to the deception. He is a Christian knight and he refuses to embrace the Muslim religion. This triggers the *concertato* where the surprise and scandal which astound everyone are clearly significant. We have the deceived Muslims and the proud Christians, and Armando and his secret bride who see their dream of being together dissolve before their eyes. But also relevant is the contrast between the theme of "<u>love</u>" revealed by Armando and his bride and the themes of "<u>honour</u>" and religious "<u>faith</u>" which spur on the Sultan and the Christian knights. The quadruplet of text which the librettist

Rossi wrote for Meyerbeer plays on this double meaning and alternates "amore/onore" with "pace/fede".

> Sogni, e ridenti
> di pace, amor
> furo i contenti
> di questo cor.
>     Non v'è più pace/fede,
> non v'è più amor/onor.

Let us examine how Meyerbeer draws the attention each time to the general astonishment fixing the scene on the stage, which either concentrates on the love uniting the unhappy bridal couple or the honour which sovereigns, priests and soldiers call upon. This passage also begins in a monodic way and only later becomes polyphonic. In the quartet in *Rigoletto* it was an unexpected change because we were not at the end of an act and because the Duke starts with a simple song. However, in the *Crociato* it was predictable because it was one of the most obvious composing techniques for the picture of astonishment, normally polyphonic and based on *imitation*. The melody at the beginning is sung by the knight Armando, and it is divided into two parts. In the first part [mss. 1-8[13]], the sounds are clearly separated by pauses, while the other [mss. 8-12] more continuous part stresses the word "peace" with *sforzandi*. *Abbellimenti* and *gruppettos* highlight some words such as "ridenti", "amore", and "contenti", and they provide contrasting material which will be useful in the polyphonic section without destroying the constancy of the melody. In effect, until Adriano's *imitative* entrance [mss. 13-24], these *gruppettos* are useful because Armando joins in with Adriano singing just on the word "onor" [ms. 22], slightly out of phase by a *half note*, so that the embellishment first of one and then the other clearly highlights the contrasting words. After the double solo, the melody is picked up by the whole quintet [mss. 25ss]. The polyphonic context comes to the foreground, the significant words stand out again when Armando twice sings a long acute note *ad libitum* on "amore" [mss. 34, 39], and Adriano and the Sultan break in immediately after that on his pause with *sforzandi* of the words "onore" and "fede". The second time [ms. 41-44], Adriano even sings a chromatic melody and new representations which, by the orienting response, draw more interest than the already familiar soundscape (Sloboda 1985, 174).

There is another instance where Adriano's *gruppetto* animates the phrase "non v'è" [ms. 47], but the listener follows his melody until it falls on "onor" [ms. 47], even though the other voices repeat the familiar initial melody. Indeed, for

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[13] You can find a public manuscript score at http://imslp.nl/imglnks/usimg/e/e5/IMSLP96901-PMLP145001-Meyerbeer_-_Il_Crociato_in_Egitto_-_Act_1_part_2.pdf, f. 244*v* fw.: I count the measures of this manuscript.

homogeneity and completeness, the emergence of the high note enforces the continuation along those lines, filling in the empty space left by the same high note[14], rather than returning to the familiar melody which, due to saturation, has been pushed into the background. Next [ms. 52], a similar tactic brings Armando to the foreground with the word "amor". In the second part of the *concertato* [mss. 55-87] the new ensemble prevails, but the *gruppettos* alternating on the words "amore/onore" and the *sforzandi* on the words "pace/fede" alternately emerge from the background [mss. 69-72].

This music of astonishment is therefore arranged around the tension between the principle of return[15], which allows the repetition of the melody of the *falso canone*, and the principle of completion, above all based on the difference between Armando and Adriano. Indeed, the two characters are situated on distant sound bands so that the two familiar melodies are easily perceptible. According to convention, Meyerbeer uses the high voice of the castrato (Giovanni Battista Velluti). Indeed, even if Armando had sung with the manly voice of a tenor, the two melodies would not have been distinguishable enough because, as experiments have shown (see Sloboda 1985, 160 who goes back to Dowling 1973, 322-337), they would have tended to blend together.

*(transl. by Halina West)*

## Summary

Gestalt studies on perception of long musical pieces have considered polyphonic music in order to understand if and how, according to perception laws, the listener is able to identify each voice that has melodic autonomy. John A. Sloboda (*Musical Mind*, 1985) assimilates listening to this sort of music to multistable perception that pops back and forth unstably between two or more alternative interpretations. He considers how the two plans can be mutually exchanged: either for *frequency masking* (Brian Moore, *An Introduction to the Psychology of Hearing*, 1982), or for the composer's manipulation of the Gestalt laws that introduce effects of variety and change, breaking the laws of continuity.

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[14] "Process continuation is the norm of musical progression, and disturbances in continuation are points of deviation. These disturbances in the process of continuation may be of two kinds: a) gaps in the process in which a process is temporarily halted and then continued again, and b) changes in changes in process, in which there is usually, though not necessarily, a break in line and one manner of progression takes the place of another. Both kinds of disturbances may occur together as when a process change takes place after a halt in the progress of the music" (Meyer 1956, 93, also p. 189).

[15] "…other things being equal, it is better to return to any starting point whatsoever than not to return". Meyer examines it, distinguishing between *recurrence* and *reiteration*: recurrence is repetition which takes place after there has been a departure from whatever has been established as given in the particular piece. … Reiteration, whether exact or varied, is the successive repetition of a given sound term which, even if it is very extensive, is nevertheless perceived as a unit. Reiteration does not necessarily give rise to expectations of further repetition. On the contrary, if repetition is fairly exact and persistent, change rather than further repetition is expected, i.e., saturation sets in (see Meyer 1956, 151-152).

Leonard Meyer (*Emotion and Meaning in Music*, 1956; *Explaining Music*, 1973) has shown how Gestalt laws of grouping depend also on the syntax and style of each specific music repertoire, if these are shared by the composer and the listener. We can corroborate these instances by analyzing music written to express some specific emotion or object, where meaning does not reside exclusively in the sound structures. Strictly formal conventions force inclusion, in the *finale* of nineteenth-century operas, a section in which all the characters sing *apart* and are arranged to form "nel loro tutto un dipinto della musica imitativa," a scenic tableau that expands the conflicting emotions arising from the plot twist. The analysis of these *concertati* shows how complex musical pieces, that are not reducible to the sum of their vocal parts, can highlight some dramatically pregnant words or some specific positions of the characters against the background. Compositional techniques lead the listener's perception in the polyphonic texture**.**
**Keywords:** Music, polyphony, concertatos, opera, *Rigoletto*.

## Zusammenfassung

In Gestaltstudien über die Wahrnehmung langer Musikstücke wurde insbesondere die polyphone Musik zur Frage, ob und wie es Hörern möglich ist, in Übereinstimmung mit den Wahrnehmungsgesetzen jede einzelne Stimme, die melodische Autonomie besitzt, zu identifizieren, in Betracht gezogen. John A. Sloboda (*Musical Mind,* 1985) bringt das Hören dieser Musik in Übereinstimmung mit multistabiler Wahrnehmung, die instabil zwischen zwei oder mehreren alternativen Interpretationen hin und her springt. Er prüft, wie die beiden Schemata wechselseitig getauscht werden können: entweder zum Zweck des *frequency masking* (Frequenzabdeckung) (Brian Moore, *An Introduction to the Psychology of Hearing*, 1982), oder zur Veränderung der Gestaltgesetze durch den Komponisten, wodurch unter Ausschaltung der Gesetze der Kontinuität Effekte der Vielfalt und des Wechsels eingearbeitet werden.

Leonard Meyer (*Emotion and Meaning in Music*, 1956; *Explaining Music*, 1973) hat gezeigt, wie die Gestaltgesetze der Gruppierung auch von der Grammatik und dem Stil jedes einzelnen Musikstücks abhängen, sofern diese von Komponist und Hörer geteilt werden. Wir können diese Beispiele durch die Analyse von Musikstücken, die geschrieben wurden, um spezifische Emotionen oder Ziele auszudrücken und bei denen die Bedeutung nicht ausschließlich in den Klangstrukturen zu finden ist, bestätigen. Strenge formale Konventionen erzwingen im *Finale* der Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts die Inklusion, wobei das *Finale* ein Abschnitt ist, in dem alle Figuren *apart* (zur Seite) singen und arrangiert sind, um "nel loro tutto un dipinto della musica imitativa" entstehen zu lassen, ein szenisches Tableau, das die konfliktkhaften Emotionen, die aus den Wendungen der Handlung hervorgehen, ausbreitet. Die Analyse dieser *concertati* zeigt, wie komplex Musikstücke, die nicht auf die Summe ihrer vokalen Teile reduziert werden können, dramatisch bedeutungsvolle Worte oder spezifische Positionen der Figuren vor ihrem Hintergrund herausheben können. Kompositionstechniken führen die Wahrnehmung der Hörer in der polyphonen Textur.
**Schlüsselwörter:** Musik, Polyphonie, *concertatos*, Oper, *Rigoletto*.

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