

Staging *Don Giovanni* in Acknowledgment of the “Me Too” Movement Through the Character  
of Zerlina

By

Lindsey Ann Meekhof

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The written project is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Mimmi Fulmer, Professor of Voice and Opera

David Ronis, Associate Professor and Director of University Opera

Martha Fischer, Professor of Piano and Collaborative Piano

Paul Rowe, Professor of Voice

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Thank you to Tarana Burke, whose work continues to inspire me and influence my dream of a better and safer environment for everyone in performing arts.

This project is for the many brave survivors who have come forward to share their stories. May we all be brave and demand that changes are made to work towards a world free of sexual violence.

## Abstract

This written project will focus on addressing the problematic ways in which the operatic character Don Giovanni is often portrayed and offer a staging to acknowledge the “Me Too” movement and its potential impact on future productions. Staging a production that addresses Don Giovanni’s predatory behavior is a way for the opera industry to resist the gender-based violence that runs through many beloved operas. My staging will focus on giving the character of Zerlina more agency in three scenes from the opera. The “Me Too” movement can have a huge impact on informing the creation of a safe and welcoming environment in classical music. It is a momentous opportunity to avoid perpetuating rape culture and to usher opera into a new enlightened era of recognizing the harm that occurs when sexual violence is presented as somehow normal or expected.

## Chapter 1

### **Don Giovanni's "Me Too" Problem**

The popular character of Don Giovanni is typically described as a legendary lover who is seductive and charming. At the same time, the women in Don Giovanni's world are often described as desperate, gullible, or naïve. How Don Giovanni is perceived deeply affects the audience's impression of the women and the critics' discussion of the action and characters. He often is described as a complex person with desirable personality traits, while the women are seen as two-dimensional characters based on their relationships with him. This commentary seems familiar as we see this occur in media coverage of the "Me Too" movement when many brave survivors come forward to share their experiences. Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* is a pivotal work that can acknowledge the work of the "Me Too" movement and lead other productions to consider the importance of the movement, because it is so commonly staged and studied today.

Don Giovanni is one of the most famous predators in the operatic canon, and yet his character is still often described positively. The Mozart opera is famous for its innovative mixing of genres, beautiful ensembles, and earned reputation as a masterpiece of the classical period. However, it is possible to modernize productions in a way that acknowledges the opera's treatment of women, while also elevating their status to give them more complex personalities not based solely on the male gaze. Staging a production that addresses Don Giovanni's predatory behavior is a way for opera to resist the gender-based violence that runs through many beloved operas. It is vital that all opera stagings reflect the very real social and cultural problems of sexual assault. The internationally recognizable platform of the "Me Too" movement benefits survivors in recognizing the sheer number of both men and women that have experienced sexual

assault, and the changes that need to take place to protect people from sexual violence. The way in which we perform even traditional operas can have a huge impact on shaping the classical music world in the future, making way for a safe and welcoming environment. The way *Don Giovanni* is discussed in educational settings has the potential to greatly influence how future generations interact with this story. The opera can be a problematic display of male abusers, or it can be a celebration of resilient survivors and a community that collectively condemns men like Don Giovanni.

Anyone engaged in producing operas at any level can gain perspective from the “Me Too” movement and begin to figure out ways to adapt staging to reflect the issue of sexual violence whether implicit or explicit in the plot. The “Me Too” movement is not a trend to be used solely for relevancy, but a platform that can guide opera into a new era where sexual violence is addressed and acknowledged. The goal of my staging is to recognize that audiences, students, performers, and staff members will have survivors among them. In this recognition, we can demand more from our representation of sexual predators and how we discuss beloved operas. It is a momentous opportunity to not perpetuate rape culture and to usher opera into a new era of recognizing the harm that ignoring sexual violence presents for everyone. It is essential that we give a platform to survivors’ stories by acknowledging the assaults in *Don Giovanni* and relaying the plot in a way that addresses the sexual violence and condemns the perpetrator. Opera can resist normalizing this behavior and give back the voice to the real heroes of *Don Giovanni*, the women who survive.

### **The “Me Too” Movement and Opera**

Operatic works do not exist in a bubble; they can and should engage audiences with the present, including the “Me Too” movement’s work towards a world free of sexual violence.

Black activist and survivor Tarana Burke founded the hashtag movement on MySpace in 2006 to help support victims of sexual abuse and rape, particularly survivors in underprivileged communities of color.<sup>1</sup> Tarana Burke described her motivation to *Ebony* magazine, “It wasn’t built to be a viral campaign or a hashtag that is here today and forgotten tomorrow. It was a catchphrase to be used from survivor to survivor to let folks know that they were not alone and that a movement for radical healing was happening and possible.”<sup>2</sup> The #MeToo began trending on Twitter in 2017, as celebrities shared their own experiences, and many high-profile men were accused of sexual misconduct.<sup>3</sup> According to a study done by the *Columbia Journalism Review*, the #MeToo was used 19 million times on Twitter from October 2017 to October 2018.<sup>4</sup> A search of the hashtag today shows it is still being used frequently on Twitter and other social media platforms. What began as a community movement grew to millions of voices around the world. As more people added their voices to the hashtag, the problem became impossible to ignore. This movement began with Tarana Burke’s work to bring support to survivors and has brought necessary attention to the prevalence of sexual violence that people of all genders face daily. It would not have been possible without Burke’s courage, and the realization that saying, “me too” and sharing one’s story can make people feel less alone.

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<sup>1</sup> Camille Gibson, Shannon Davenport, Tina Fowler, Colette B. Harris, Melanie Prudhomme, Serita Whiting, and Sherri Simmons-Horton, “Understanding the 2017 ‘Me Too’ Movement’s Timing,” *Humanity & Society* 43, no. 2 (May 2019): 217–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597619832047>.

<sup>2</sup> Zahara Hill, “A Black Woman Created the ‘Me Too’ Campaign Against Sexual Assault 10 Years Ago,” *Ebony*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.ebony.com/news/black-woman-me-too-movement-tarana-burke-alyssa-milano/>.

<sup>3</sup> Gibson et al., 217-24.

<sup>4</sup> “The Reach of #MeToo,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, Summer 2019, [https://www.cjr.org/special\\_report/reach-of-metoo.php](https://www.cjr.org/special_report/reach-of-metoo.php).

With Burke's vision, radical healing can also happen in the operatic world, not just within companies, but also in how we convey works onstage. The more voices we add to the story, the more we can push back against systems that uphold rape culture. To have real and lasting change, the future of the movement must consider an approach of intersectionality, and how identities play into the larger systems of abuse. In *Rejoinder* magazine's Spring 2019 issue Professor Zakiya Adair noted, "The Me Too movement has the potential to be a platform for all survivors of sexual assault to come forward and fight for justice. However, the movement's radical potential to change prevailing and problematic discourse on sexual assault can only happen if it decenters whiteness, heterosexuality, and binary gender constructs."<sup>5</sup> Opera can also benefit from decentering whiteness, heterosexuality, and binary gender constructs and addressing the many identities that factor into someone's risk of sexual violence. The identities of the individuals cast in these roles should also have an impact on the application of the production concept, and directors need to be flexible as they work to make sure the concept is suitable for all performers cast in a production. An inclusive approach will be important to encourage all productions to be adaptable to who is in the cast, and who is in the audience.

Having these important conversations about sexual violence throughout the rehearsal process makes for a safer environment for performers bringing challenging topics to the public. Rehearsing difficult material should always be given the time for discussion and room for the performers to express any concerns. Hiring intimacy coordinators as a regular part of operatic productions would have a huge impact on making all aspects of productions a more comfortable environment. The Royal Opera House recently hired an 'intimacy coordinator' for their

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<sup>5</sup> Zakiya Adair, "Ain't I A Woman? Race, Gender, and the Me Too Movement," *Rejoinder*, Spring 2019, <https://irw.rutgers.edu/rejoinder-webjournal/issue-4-me-too>.



production of Handel's *Theodora*.<sup>6</sup> This first for the Royal Opera House marks a welcome step forward for how we approach operatic repertoire and the performers tasked with portraying sexual violence. Incorporating an intimacy coordinator as a crucial part of an opera production's budget helps to build trust with the performers and allows topics of abuse to be portrayed responsibly. It is one possible way to rethink how operas have been traditionally staged and to not recreate unsafe conditions for performers in rehearsals and viewers of the content. Opera will benefit from more careful consideration of plots that have been treated in similar ways for years.

Researchers are still trying to quantify the prevalence of sexual violence, particularly highlighting the risk of sexual violence faced by young women on college campuses. The U.S. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control Division of Violence Prevention found almost one in five women reported having been raped in their lifetime compared with one in 71 men.<sup>7</sup> A campus climate survey found that "1 in 5 female students in their fourth year of college had experienced attempted or completed sexual assault while in college."<sup>8</sup> The reality is that women face a higher risk of sexual violence. "Over their lifetime, 44% of women will experience some

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<sup>6</sup> Sophia Alexandra Hall, "Royal Opera House Hires 'Intimacy Coordinator' for Sex Scenes, In Historic First for British Opera," *Classic fm*, Winter 2022, <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/periods-genres/opera/intimacy-coordinator-royal-opera-house/>.

<sup>7</sup> M.C. Black, K.C. Basile, M.J. Breidling, et al, "National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report," National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (U.S.). Division of Violence Prevention, (Atlanta, GA, 2011), <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/11637>.

<sup>8</sup> US Department of Justice, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Campus Climate Survey Validation Study Final Technical Report*, by Christopher Krebs et al., (Washington, DC, 2016), [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ccsvsfr.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ccsvsfr.pdf).

form of sexual violence.”<sup>9</sup> The statistics in the CDC study are even higher when considering race, gender, age, and other aspects of identity. These studies don’t even mention the risks the LGBTQ community face that the *Rejoinder* issue highlighted. With these harrowing numbers in mind, we must be conscious of the survivors present in our operatic community, including the students being introduced to *Don Giovanni* for the first time.

The “Me Too” movement continues to consider how we can empower survivors and communities to be a voice for the voiceless. If we want people to continue to enjoy *Don Giovanni* for years to come, we must responsibly stage instances of sexual violence. Even by identifying Don Giovanni as a predator and acknowledging his behavior, we are taking a necessary step forward. Holding him accountable is one way we can continue this essential conversation in the opera world. The way a production of *Don Giovanni* is staged could influence the thoughts of the audience, the cast, the way it is taught in classrooms, and particularly the way future productions are staged. This potential impact extends to those who are not victims of abuse but are part of the community that can build a better world for survivors. Addressing this popular story can help open the conversation for real progress to be made in the opera industry.

### **Don Giovanni: Legendary Villain**

To achieve my goals in updating the character of Don Giovanni, I examined representative productions that happened after the “Me Too” movement gained international recognition. A disappointingly low number of these productions made creative choices that

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<sup>9</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization - National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2011*, by Matthew J. Breiding et al. (Atlanta: CDC, 2014), [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6308.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6308.pdf).

allowed Don Giovanni to be an anti-hero, with the women reciprocating his sexual advances. The character of Donna Anna continued to be often portrayed as desiring Don Giovanni and crying rape only because of the effect their relationship would have on her reputation. One review of the Royal Opera House's 2019 production pondered, "Was she raped by Giovanni or was she a willing victim? Of course, once her father is murdered by her 'lover', she must keep up a holier than though [*sic*] front with her fiancé Don Ottavio."<sup>10</sup> This reviewer is not alone in questioning whether Donna Anna is a victim or consents to Don Giovanni's actions. When companies choose this way to frame the story, they are making Donna Anna and the other women liars bent on pursuing Don Giovanni to protect their reputations. They perpetuate rape culture by insinuating her accusations are not true, and women are not to be believed because they change their minds. In the Schirmer opera score, there is a direct translation of "Sforzar la figlia" (Leporello: Act 1, Scene 2) as, "To rape the daughter."<sup>11</sup> According to the *Collins Dictionary*, the verb *sforzare* means to strain or to force.<sup>12</sup> In both the original Italian and this English translation, the libretto refers to a sexual assault in the initial scene of the opera. Productions that proceed as if this opening is consensual and all part of the charm of Don Giovanni, are insulting to the pain Donna Anna displays in her words, music, and actions throughout the opera. It dismisses Donna Anna's feelings and gives power to our anti-hero to frame the assault from his perspective. In a production that recognizes the significance of the

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<sup>10</sup> Vera Liber, review of *Don Giovanni* at The Royal Opera House, *British Theater Guide*, Fall 2019, <https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/don-giovanni-royal-opera-hou-18158>.

<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Don Giovanni: Opera in Two Acts* (NY: G. Schirmer, 1961).

<sup>12</sup> *Collins Italian-English Dictionary*, s.v. "Sforzare," accessed December 13, 2020, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/italian-english/sforzare>.

“Me Too” movement, we believe the interpretation of events from Donna Anna’s view, instead of being swayed by Don Giovanni’s lack of guilt.

The women in *Don Giovanni* are all victims of his brutality and various stagings have featured many interpretations of their characters and motivations surrounding their relationship with him. The woman with the lowest position in the society of the opera is Zerlina, who is most often portrayed as an innocent young woman, easily falling for the charms of Don Giovanni. Many reviews give her character a passing mention, not deeming her important enough for deeper character analysis. In a 2019 review of a production at the Metropolitan Opera, the performer of Zerlina is described as having a “stiletto-sharp voice that didn’t quite fit this ingénue role.”<sup>13</sup> Critics are even expecting a quality of voice to fit in with their predetermined ideas of the identity of Zerlina. The typical treatment of Zerlina in the opera discredits her voice and tries to diminish the harm Don Giovanni has caused her. Don Giovanni has power and influence, but Zerlina’s actions are put under scrutiny during their interactions.

When productions call Don Giovanni a monster, they stand in support of the testimonies of the women in the opera. This label for Don Giovanni has struggled to gain support in the operatic community. Criticism of stagings that prominently portray Don Giovanni as a villain ponder, “What are we supposed to think of Elvira (Laura Wilde) pursuing the Don so obsessively or Zerlina (Jasmine Habersham) tempted by him if we can’t see what they see in him?”<sup>14</sup> Most

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<sup>13</sup> Corinna Da Fonesca-Wollheim, “Review: A Lifeless Revival of ‘Don Giovanni’ at the Met,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/03/arts/music/don-giovanni-review-met-opera.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Gavin Borchert, “A ‘Comedy’ About a Seducer? Seattle Opera Tackles New Version of ‘Don Giovanni’ with Skill and Caution,” *The Seattle Times*, March 15, 2021, <https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/classical-music/seattle-opera-films-its-new-version-of-don-giovanni-with-skill-and-caution/>.

directors of these productions and critics still expect that the only plausible path forward for Zerlina is one in which she is initially seduced by Don Giovanni, and welcomes his advances. Zerlina's station as a lower-class woman makes it clear she does not have the power to say no to Don Giovanni, as he ignores all her protests. This also does a disservice to people of all genders who begin a relationship believing the initial character their partner presents, which can be a deception to lure them into a false sense of security. Abusers often dismiss consent and boundaries with their partners and then present a very different front to the public. We have seen in the media how people respond to allegations that shock them and are quick to defend people publicly accused of sexual assault. When audiences view Zerlina as consenting, they are equally quick to dismiss the claims that do not align with their own vision of the piece. Zerlina trusts Donna Elvira's testimony about Don Giovanni right away, showing the audience the women believe each other without question. The opera would be stronger if we offer the women the same courtesy in our views of Don Giovanni's behavior and center the focus on believing the survivors.

With this interpretation of the multiple assaults in the libretto, my vision was to loosely base the character of Don Giovanni on a notoriously recognizable villain, the Joker from DC Comics. Other productions have likewise given *Don Giovanni* a darker edge. Recent reviews were mixed as to the success of these interpretations. Stephen Mudge in a review of Paris Opera's production remarked, "This dark, destructive concept lacked sensuality and any hint of charm," and that "There was not much to smile about."<sup>15</sup> He ends his review by commenting on the positive audience reaction, which makes one wonder why the performance for him seemed to

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen J. Mudge, review of *Don Giovanni* at the Opéra National de Paris, *Opera News* 84, no.3 (September 2019).

lack any enjoyment. Does *Don Giovanni* need to be an opera we constantly smile during, or can we enjoy the opera for the story it is? With such serious situations on stage as rape and murder, having fun should not be the opera's chief goal. The goal should rather be responsibly providing our audience with a trigger warning and addressing the crimes as the assaults they are. Though Paris Opera and other companies are beginning to envision a *Don Giovanni* that is a monster, many companies have not yet reimagined how women can be represented in this new interpretation. In an article for the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Richard Will points out that some of the efforts to make *Don Giovanni*'s actions more explicitly violent have given way to portrayals that can then shift the narrative away from holding him responsible for his behavior. "In the theater, depictions of his offenses have become more forthright, but with an emphasis on social and psychological causes that attenuate the responsibility of the perpetrator."<sup>16</sup> These settings focus too much on creating a plausible backstory that caused him to behave this way. They also still put the focus of the work on creating *Don Giovanni* in a menacing manner, without considering how to address the way the women can be centered as the heroes of the story. Though some productions are beginning to mention the "Me Too" movement as inspiration for their sinister *Don Giovanni*, many more are still allowing for him to seduce the women successfully and acceptably. The Royal Opera House 2019 promotional video shows a confident and masculine *Don Giovanni* flirtatiously leaving a trail of heartbroken women behind.<sup>17</sup> These productions are what lead to reviews and discussions in classrooms that

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Will, "Don Giovanni and the Resilience of Rape Culture," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 71, no. 1 (2018): 218–22.

<sup>17</sup> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, "*Don Giovanni – Live in cinemas 8 October 2019*," directed by Kasper Holton, Royal Opera House, London, UK, October 8, 2019, promo video, [https://youtu.be/2\\_qzHnh\\_AjA](https://youtu.be/2_qzHnh_AjA).

negatively view the female characters. Sensual interactions with the women communicate to the audience that Don Giovanni was welcomed into these women's lives, and they are upset only because he moved on. It perpetuates the idea that the responsibility of the interactions was on the women, and Don Giovanni has a supernatural ability to make all women fall for him.

This is one reason I have chosen the fictional character of the Joker to represent Don Giovanni. The character of the Joker has been interpreted in many ways and continues to be featured in popular culture. Occasionally he is given a psychological backstory to explain his villainous ways, but often he is simply viewed as an evil person bent on destruction. Recent studies have tried to do the same for Don Giovanni, in a way that could persuade people to feel sorry for him instead of desiring him to be held accountable. Psychiatrist John Cordingly diagnosed our character as being "histrionic and narcissistic" as well as "hypersexual."<sup>18</sup> Referring to Don Giovanni's behavior as an addiction does nothing to support the women who are traumatized by his behavior. Focusing on Don Giovanni's problems and conveying them as uncontrollable allows for a narrative that is sympathetic to him. An elaborate explanation is not necessary to show that men should be held responsible for being sexual predators, regardless of what traumatic personal events they may have experienced. The Joker as an agent of chaos is a perfect model, without adding in any excuses for his behavior. He is well aware of how others fear him, and that is part of the thrill. There is no time to feel sorry for him because one is led to fear him as well as root for the women trying to take him down. People do what he says because they sense the violence that is always ready to come to the surface. The signature Joker smile

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<sup>18</sup> John Cordingly, "The Historic and Narcissistic Personality: Don Giovanni and Onegin," in *Disordered Heroes In Opera: A Psychiatric Report* (London: Plumbago Books, 2015), 113-122.

will help to set the unease in even Don Giovanni's famed aria, "Fin ch'han dal vino." Don Giovanni as the Joker is certainly enjoying himself, but now in a way that unsettles the audience instead of encouraging them to join in on the fun. The unpredictability of the Joker helps captivate the audience's attention and makes the familiar story also suddenly seem uncertain.

The portrayals of the Joker by Heath Ledger and Joaquin Phoenix led people to be equally terrified and thrilled by the character. Being disturbed by his actions did not stop viewers from enjoying themselves and continuing to flock to theaters to see more actors take on the role. Jared Leto's Joker in *Suicide Squad* is much less of an outsider than previous portrayals. His Joker has a partner in Harley Quinn, and plenty of lackeys to help do his bidding. His penchant for white makeup and colored hair doesn't stand out as much in this world, with all the bright color and fashion choices in Gotham.<sup>19</sup> In this vibrant environment, a Don Giovanni as a monster does not suck the fun from the production; rather, it distributes it to other deserving characters. In this world where he can transform himself to hide or strike fear in others as the villain, the Joker is having fun creating chaos. Though the Joker is amused by his own antics, the audience is always aware that what he is doing is wrong and unsettling. The opera with Don Giovanni as a more villainous character, as opposed to a flirtatious charmer, is still worth seeing and does not lose its impact. The heart of the opera was always in the women who steadfastly persisted despite everyone telling them to move on.

Portraying Don Giovanni as the Joker helps to explain many parts of the libretto that are essential to the story, particularly the location. The opera features multiple events that take place with witnesses that are more than happy to blend into the background. Gotham City is an

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<sup>19</sup> *Suicide Squad*, directed by David Ayer, featuring Jared Leto and Margot Robbie (DC Films, 2016).



incredibly corrupt environment where many in power that are supposed to help uphold order are complicit in the rampant crime and dangerous atmosphere. This rings true to the events of *Don Giovanni*, where the women are often left to fend for themselves without outside support. The murder of Donna Anna's father seems less spontaneous at the hands of the Joker, who could harm anyone at any time. This Don Giovanni is dangerous, and the audience should be afraid to see what he will do next. The colorful costumes, hair, and makeup necessary to create the comic book land of Gotham City also help to easily disguise our leads throughout the opera. The setting will work to help transform the characters in believable ways and make the deceit seem plausible. The vibrant world also helps to create an environment in which people use costumes and makeup to intimidate others or to stand out. The Joker himself, with his signature vivid green hair and white makeup, represents a very sinister clown. Audience members who hear of Don Giovanni as the Joker might be wondering who will take on the role of Batman. Is it possible to have a Joker without the Batman to stand in his way? Audiences will expect a Batman figure to come to save the day, but there will be no Batman present in this Gotham City. The women are going to get their justice and take up the mantle of the vigilante, without needing to don a Batsuit. They are the obstacle that the Joker will never see coming, and they will continue to survive long after the villain is defeated.

### **Redefining Zerlina**

Zerlina is the woman Don Giovanni becomes obsessed with obtaining, orchestrating many events to try to get her alone. When we first see her, all we know is that she is a lower-class woman celebrating with her friends before her wedding to Masetto. Then Don Giovanni comes forcefully into her life, threatening her plans throughout the course of one traumatic day. Her behavior is often attributed to her being young and naïve, and she is seen as needing to be

rescued by those around her. However, Zerlina is so much more than a woman who falls for the deceit of Don Giovanni, seeking only an advantageous marriage. Throughout the entire day she is often given the least amount of control, following along with the other characters onstage while Don Giovanni blazes through their lives. She has so much more to offer than being a secondary character always giving way to the controlling men around her. Traditionally, many productions limit Zerlina's options. In the three scenes I am interpreting, Zerlina will reclaim the narrative and provide opportunities for future productions to consider how we construe consent in operatic plots. These scenes consist of two well-known encounters, and one often cut scene "Per queste tue manine," where we see how Zerlina can act when given the chance to express her true feelings.

My staging of these scenes offers alternatives for Zerlina and focuses on the power of hands to convey a great depth of emotions, both spoken and unspoken. The intimacy of handholding sends a clear message about the strength of a relationship between two people who feel confident publicly displaying their bond with each other. Hands can also be powerful weapons that can be used to harm another person. Zerlina's hands lead her through these key moments in the story as she faces a predator, a lover, and a man she can use her power against. Hands are mentioned prominently in all three scenes and the physicality of using one's hands has great importance to how Zerlina can gain strength in these scenes. I will be focusing on the subtle ways Zerlina can use her hands to subvert the problematic elements in traditional modes of staging to provide resistance and present her point of view.

Zerlina is a character with the potential for an incredible amount of growth if given the chance to explore alternative stagings. As Tarana Burke's movement tries to accomplish, Zerlina's relationship with the male characters can reflect a survivor's way to liberation. Her

hands are resisting the path many have set out for her, changing the conversation around the actions of the men. The classical music community can collectively redefine this public health crisis of sexual violence by giving Zerlina more power and disrupting Don Giovanni's intended seduction as something Zerlina does not want. Using Zerlina's hands is one way of representing that no always means no.

In this Gotham City setting, Zerlina and Masetto are bartenders at a club frequented by men like Don Giovanni. Don Giovanni tries to exploit her feelings about her station to get Zerlina to submit to him by offering her a chance to live a bigger life. This is often the explanation for why Zerlina would consent to a relationship with Don Giovanni, that she is enchanted by the idea of what marriage to him could mean for her. But Zerlina's text never mentions that she is unhappy with her place in society. Kristi Brown-Montesano notes, "She may have taken pleasure thinking about the wealth, power, and leisure of the nobility, but Zerlina does not heave a sigh at the end of the opera. Rather, the contadina happily retires with her rustic bridegroom to their dinner and their bed, leaving others to worry about what might have been."<sup>20</sup> Zerlina doesn't need to be charmed by Don Giovanni's promises, as she is already living the life she chose for herself. Instead of collectively deciding Zerlina is unhappy with her station, we can allow her text to guide her outrage that Don Giovanni would suggest she isn't meant for that life. In Gotham City, Zerlina might finish the day with Masetto, but she is there because she chose him. This is a relationship that might not last, but she has survived Don Giovanni and asserted her right to choose whatever partner she deems a good fit. Including the often cut scene with Leporello shows us a side to Zerlina I believe can be present from the moment we meet her. We

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<sup>20</sup> Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

see that she will speak her mind and do what she needs to do to protect the life she has built for herself.

## Chapter 2

**“Là ci darem la mano” (There we will give each other our hands)****Summary: Zerlina and Don Giovanni’s Dance**

In this chapter, I will give a summary of the duet “Là ci darem la mano” as it was originally written, then I will discuss how productions have typically staged the scene. Finally, I will give my interpretation of Zerlina’s role that reclaims the narrative through the lens of the “Me Too” movement. For a more streamlined reader experience, I have created English translations of the libretto to facilitate the explanation of my stagings. The original texts and translations for this can be found in Appendix A.<sup>21</sup>

In Act I, Scene 9, it is the day before Zerlina and Masetto’s wedding and they are celebrating their upcoming marriage with friends. Don Giovanni has set his sights on Zerlina and decided he wants to be alone with her. This is the first time Don Giovanni has laid eyes on Zerlina, and through aggressive manipulation, he manages to successfully entrap her. Laying his hand on a weapon, he demands Masetto leave Zerlina with him. This threat of violence and Don Giovanni’s authority makes it impossible to disagree with him without dire consequences. Zerlina helps to convince Masetto to leave, trying to spare him and take some control over the potential fight. At the opening of the scene, after Don Giovanni succeeds in getting rid of Masetto, he declaims to Zerlina, “at last we are free.” This bold statement suggests that Zerlina desired freedom from her current partner Masetto. His use of the word *we*, automatically links him with Zerlina and attempts to convince her that they are in this together. The conniving suggestion of freedom for Zerlina is only the start of his constantly putting words into her mouth

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<sup>21</sup> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Nico Castel, Julius Rudel, and Eugene Green, *The Libretti of Mozart's Completed Operas: In Two Volumes* (Geneseo, NY: Leyerle, 1997).

as if she chose to go away with him. Throughout the exchange, he interrupts Zerlina any time she is about to voice her opinion and changes the direction of the conversation to his designs. Don Giovanni is a man who will not take no for an answer, boldly declaring, “you will say yes.”

After realizing Zerlina is not altogether thrilled with his plans, Don Giovanni promises Zerlina that they will be married. In Don Giovanni’s mind, this promise is what Zerlina needs to hear to be convinced to leave with him. This proposal is his way of getting through the obstacle of Zerlina’s protests, imagining if he says he will marry her then he can have his way with her. At the end of the duet, Zerlina does agree with his insistent demands, mirroring his words of “let us go.” Many interpretations imagine the two of them finally being on the same page, with their desires aligning. What if instead, Zerlina’s echoing Don Giovanni’s pleas to leave was not an agreement that she desired, but a clever tactic to convince him she would do what he wanted? This then allows the scene to be read as giving Zerlina space to turn the tables on her attacker. Her agreement then becomes an assertion of what Don Giovanni wants, buying Zerlina time to gain her version of “freedom,” and giving her a chance to show everyone what she wants, instead of the men around her always deciding for her.

### **Analysis: Typical Interpretations of the Scene**

In many previous iterations of the scene “Là ci darem la mano,” when Don Giovanni touches Zerlina, critics and audience members interpret his actions as acceptable and do not view Zerlina’s actions as physically embodying “No.” When we are introduced to Zerlina in the opera, she is often the doe-eyed prey caught by Don Giovanni’s advances, easily falling under his spell. These concepts fail to portray Zerlina’s potential to decide what she wants and leave her powerless to the whims of Don Giovanni. They do not consider how Zerlina feels and how Don Giovanni’s status alone makes the power dynamic between them unbalanced. Consent is

essential for every relationship, especially when one person holds so much power over the other. Mozart's opera characterizes Masetto and Zerlina as lower-class peasants who do not have the same standing in society as the other characters in the opera. Some would suggest that the details of the duet "Là ci darem la mano" clearly imply that Zerlina is seduced by Don Giovanni and agrees to leave with him because she wants to. They interpret the mention of their innocent love as a sign Zerlina is convinced that Don Giovanni will marry her and change her circumstances.

One recent production follows this usual pattern of representing Zerlina, only hesitant at first in her surprise at being chosen by Don Giovanni. The Royal Opera House's 2019 production has Zerlina initiating most of the contact with Don Giovanni in this duet.<sup>22</sup> Don Giovanni only has to smile suggestively at her, and she willingly bridges the gap between them. Conveyed as a moment of weakness, Zerlina is the one who first reaches out to touch his hand. She is so drawn to him, that even as she mentions her hesitation, she continues to get closer to him. This production has characterized Don Giovanni as an irresistible artist, and that every woman is helpless in the face of his charms. Portraying their relationship this way misses the opportunity to give Zerlina a reason to not be charmed by Don Giovanni. By having Zerlina fall for Don Giovanni quickly, it immediately dismisses her affections for Masetto in favor of Don Giovanni. This common interpretation paints Zerlina as flighty, immature, and easily swayed by those around her. It casts Don Giovanni as someone who is saving Zerlina and doing her a favor by agreeing to marry her. The entire encounter is then depicted as romantic, rather than as a powerful man taking advantage of a woman who has already made her relationship status clear.

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<sup>22</sup> *Don Giovanni*, directed by Kasper Holten, The Royal Opera House, 2019, on Marquee tv, [https://www.marquee.tv/videos/roh-dongiovanni?gclid=Cj0KCQiAjc2QBhDgARIsAMc3SqQdliR1V8-9gzg5P8nCX38LRC9B33fLiPa0XJLKRRXdIb4wFLAXV8aAv0oEALw\\_wcB](https://www.marquee.tv/videos/roh-dongiovanni?gclid=Cj0KCQiAjc2QBhDgARIsAMc3SqQdliR1V8-9gzg5P8nCX38LRC9B33fLiPa0XJLKRRXdIb4wFLAXV8aAv0oEALw_wcB).

Some notable productions have begun to address the brutality of Don Giovanni's behavior, like the 2021 production of *Don Giovanni* at the Salzburg Festival featuring a naked woman behind Zerlina during this famous duet.<sup>23</sup> There are over a hundred women in their underwear on stage in this production, meant to address the scores of women Don Giovanni has conquered mentioned in the famous and problematic catalog aria sung by Leporello in Act I. In "Là ci darem la mano," this unnamed naked woman shows up unexpectedly as Don Giovanni and Zerlina come together on a mattress. She has a matching hairstyle to Zerlina, down to the crown of flowers, assumingly meant to represent Zerlina's inner desires. During the scene, Don Giovanni slowly ties up Zerlina and she makes no attempts to get away from him as the naked woman touches both Don Giovanni and Zerlina the entire time. The naked woman seems to fuel the desire for Don Giovanni to be a successful seducer of women. Zerlina in this production appears to be a prop for the men, gamely going along with whatever they happen to be doing. This staging does paint the male characters as predators, but it fails to give Zerlina a chance to be more than a pretty part of the scenery as her naked twin is interchangeable with her. The naked woman behind Zerlina is only a silent participant in the scene and is not given a name or singing role. Including naked women throughout the production certainly highlights how thoughtlessly Don Giovanni views his past conquests, forgetting them the moment he leaves them. It also presents the women in a vulnerable light to the audience, having them exposed again in the name of representing how much of a monster Don Giovanni is. There are ways to effectively represent his callousness, without forcing women to relive their abuse. This production leaves us with

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<sup>23</sup> *Don Giovanni*, directed by Romeo Castellucci, Salzburg Festival, 2021, on medici.tv, <https://edu-medici-tv.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/en/operas/mozart-don-giovanni-currentzis-salzburg/>.



traumatized women that are living their abuse out for the audience. It is asking more from the survivors than truly holding Don Giovanni accountable for his violent actions.

As performing artists and interpreters of art, we understand that the words on the page tell only part of the story. The real magic of bringing stories to life is in the delivery, and the responsibility we have in taking a critical look at plots through the lens of the knowledge we have today. The “Me Too” movement focuses on helping survivors heal, and community responsibility in addressing sexual assault. Having avenging women onstage is a wonderful way for them to address their abuser together, but we do not need to ask these women to strip down to know that Don Giovanni took advantage of them. Emphasizing Zerlina’s discomfort with Don Giovanni’s intense affections better represents the many women that have come before her.

### **My Interpretation**

Giving survivors a space to voice their own stories is one of the pillars of the “Me Too” movement that helps reclaim Zerlina’s narrative. By reimagining her response to the events, we are giving Zerlina a crucial voice in what happens to her. It is possible to interpret her lines as having great thought and intent behind them, even when she appears to be aligning with Don Giovanni’s plans. Zerlina’s initial protests are a valid response to Don Giovanni’s suggestions. She knows what kind of man he is and that her part must be carefully played to avoid falling into his trap.

My vision for the production characterizes Don Giovanni as similar to the Joker from DC Comics and creates an anti-hero who desires for the world to be crafted exactly in the way that he sees it. This celebrated villain is a man that will also not hear “No” and is unaffected by the harm he brings to others. In his world, there is a vision for what impulses make him happy, and he obeys every spontaneous compulsion. Similarly, Don Giovanni wants Zerlina, and he cannot

fathom a world where she won't eventually give in to him. Gotham City is a dark and corrupt world, but Zerlina's survivor instincts could work in any location. Her actions would be fitting in any setting, as a woman using the tools she has available to navigate a dangerous situation. The belief that Zerlina was not consenting is an interpretation that can exist in all versions of *Don Giovanni* as we make it clear we believe women. Individuals are allowed to withdraw consent at any time, and physical cues should not be ignored. When Zerlina says "let us go," because she is too afraid to say, "I won't leave with you," this is not her giving voluntary consent. Don Giovanni was never really seeking her consent; he intended to take what he wanted anyway.

The goal of this scene is to reaffirm Zerlina's initial "I do not want to" that should have been enough for Don Giovanni to hear, using the lens of the "Me Too" movement to represent more inclusive and agentic conceptions of consent, especially for women. Zerlina does not want Don Giovanni and is carefully choosing her words to escape. In this way, there is underlying aggression to the scene: he is always on the verge of losing control no matter what he displays on the surface. The duet is a dance between his wanting to control the situation and Zerlina matching him in that control. Each of them is crafting their own version of the dance, trying to manipulate the other. Zerlina is a double agent, trying to convince Don Giovanni she is falling for him while simultaneously devising her escape.

The setting of the scene is the bar in Gotham city where Zerlina and Masetto work. As stated above, the bar is frequented by powerful and dangerous leaders like Don Giovanni (the Joker) and his friends. It is the perfect loud setting for business meetings you don't wish others to overhear. The bar is unpretentious and not always a safe place to be, but it provides necessary income for them and is the place Masetto and Zerlina first connected. It is closing early today for

their wedding and celebrations (with them paying the bar tab for the guests, of course, Gotham City not being big on charity).

In order to get Zerlina alone, Don Giovanni has convinced the guests to go back to his home in the city, with drinks and food on him. He and Zerlina are left in the side room where small parties are sometimes held. The lighting is poor, and there is a small bar, two tables, and a bottle opener on the bar. Don Giovanni begins his statement “at last we are free,” pouring himself and Zerlina a shot, making sure he is standing between her and the entrance to the room. (There is only one). The bar is always loud, so Zerlina is unable to call for help. She has already intuited that provoking this man could be incredibly dangerous for her. She is playing this game for her life. The environment is charged with tension, and the charm Don Giovanni is displaying is calculated. The pleasant façade he is carefully constructing could break at any time. Don Giovanni guides the shot to Zerlina’s mouth, already forcing control over her. Zerlina’s response of “Sir he is my husband,” is a way for her to remind him of Masetto’s presence. It is a small hope that mentioning a significant other will be enough to make Don Giovanni back down. This initial plea fails, and he steps closer to her. It is both an attempt at seduction, and a menacing display of power. When Don Giovanni describes “this little face of gold,” he reaches out to grab Zerlina’s face. This move begins his proprietary touching of her without her consent. Zerlina immediately protests “but sir” reminding him that she has given Masetto her word. As she speaks, she starts to try to head for the door.

Don Giovanni immediately reacts to his prey backing towards the exit, because he usually does not let anyone leave without his permission. His anger is sharp, telling her those words are “worth zero.” Already he is belittling her choices, again trying to assert he knows what she wants. This is when he realizes his mistake of so quickly slipping into anger, and reels

himself back in. Returning to the careful dance of manipulation, he tells Zerlina she is not “made to be a peasant.” This is the first time he alludes to changing her circumstances. In a city like Gotham, throwing money around is no small thing. Money can mean safety, but not when it comes from a man like Don Giovanni. Here his tactic is again to call out her beauty and to attempt to come closer to her, trying to grab her “sweet fingers.” At his touch, Zerlina yanks her hands away, and he is near laughter on “I want to touch.” Now he is enjoying this game of cat and mouse. Zerlina tries to tell him what she “does not want to.” Don Giovanni flings the words back at her “What do you not want?” The mask is falling again as he can barely conceal his rage at being denied his pleasure. Zerlina must respond very carefully here, knowing the situation could spin out of control. Every reaction from Don Giovanni is over the top, just as the Joker in pop culture is prone to quick mood changes that leave those around him uneasy and walking on eggshells.

Zerlina’s new tactic is to try to convince Don Giovanni that pursuing her is not a good idea, as she would not want to be “deceived” knowing that men like him, “are rarely honest with women.” Don Giovanni does not want to hear the flaws of his character, rather he says, “they are lying.” Knowing the rumors people spread about him, many that work to his advantage, here he claims common people have spread these false claims. Finally, Don Giovanni lays out what he thinks is the ultimate way to get Zerlina to stop trying to exit the room, by saying “let us not lose any more time, I want to marry you!” Grandly getting down on one knee, he is tired of the dance and wants her to stop attempting to dissuade him. His seemingly romantic gesture can barely conceal the mocking way he throws marriage and wealth at her. This elicits a shocked exclamation from Zerlina, “you?” With that Don Giovanni wickedly smiles, thinking he has

won. By mentioning his castle where they can be alone, he is once again flaunting his wealth and power. Taking hold of Zerlina without her consent, he directs her to sit down.

With Zerlina seated, the duet begins with Don Giovanni singing above Zerlina. Inside, he is calmly thinking his charms are working and able to conceal the darker parts of his personality. His sudden changes in behavior are erratic, and Zerlina knows she cannot afford to set off his raging temper. Don Giovanni croons, telling Zerlina “you will say yes” to giving her hand to him. He is lording over her, pushing down on her shoulders when she tries to get up. Having her seated is a way for him to take advantage of her by stroking her hair and making sure she knows he will not permit her to leave. Right away he spells out what he wants from her, “let us depart from here.” His goal is to escort Zerlina away so he can take advantage of her. Don Giovanni forcefully guides Zerlina out of the chair, encouraging her to take part in this forced duet. Zerlina reluctantly says, “I do want to and do not want to.” Saying she would want is for his benefit; she is now convinced her only way out is to tell Don Giovanni exactly what he wants to hear. Don Giovanni has wrapped Zerlina in his arms, continuing to repeat his plans while not listening to anything Zerlina is expressing. When Zerlina announces she is trembling, that is for the audience to recognize her fear. Don Giovanni wants her to take his hand, so she once again mentions Masetto as a last attempt to remind him another man is waiting for her. Masetto is nothing to Don Giovanni as he claims, “I will change your fate.” Zerlina stands as she says, “I am no longer strong.” She is gathering her strength to make a new plan. As she sings of her waning strength, she starts to back around behind the bar. Don Giovanni pulls her closer on his line “come.” He intends to chase her until she submits to him. He gets close to exploding on his repetition of “let us go.” The cracks in his patience are beginning to show. Zerlina dramatically throws her hands up and backs away quickly on the word “but.” Don Giovanni is starting to get very angry, so he

turns away briefly in frustration to gather himself. On Zerlina's repetition of "I am no longer strong," she grabs the bottle opener from the counter and hides it behind her back. The small weapon reassures her that she has a way of defending herself. When Don Giovanni turns to her with the signature Joker smile on "let us go," she repeats his words "let us go," knowing the dance must end eventually. Her abrupt change is surprising to Don Giovanni, but welcome. Zerlina now approaches Don Giovanni, taking his hand to convince him that her echoes to his pleas are sincere. At last, they are singing the same words together, as Don Giovanni believes he has won her over. Zerlina is content to let him slowly lead her to the door, knowing she has a weapon she can use to save herself. Don Giovanni seems a little suspicious as Zerlina has quickly changed her tune and tries to get closer to her. Zerlina then takes him in her arms, simultaneously reassuring him and having him face the exit while she conceals the weapon. Her touch is enough to convince Don Giovanni that everything is fine, and the victory is his. As he turns away from her to depart through the door first, the duet ends with her slowly raising the weapon to strike before he can take her to another location. Zerlina is not forced to use her weapon at this moment, as following this scene Donna Elvira comes in to save the day. Zerlina is demonstrating even if Donna Elvira had not come to her rescue, she would have used all of her strength to gain her freedom. The ending with Zerlina taking charge of the physical contact also gives her the power to control what is happening between them, without Don Giovanni using force to make her bend to his will. Zerlina was thinking on her feet during this entire encounter, cleverly orchestrating her release.

### **What We Need to do Better**

The duet is beautiful, but beautiful things on the surface do not always capture the internal conflict that an individual might be experiencing. Zerlina's act of mirroring Don

Giovanni's line may be the only escape she has. It is a tool she can use to protect herself in the current situation. We honor the character of Zerlina by interpreting her discomfort and verbal "I would not want," to be facts that Don Giovanni ignores. This is a non-consensual interaction because Zerlina has made her intentions clear. This reading of the scene respects her boundaries and does not place any blame on her. By Zerlina having a weapon behind her back, she is representing the many 'escape plans' women have to make in dangerous situations. It is akin to giving the persistent guy a fake number at the bar, clutching your car keys while walking alone, or always telling a trusted person your location when on a first date. Zerlina is the brave one in always making the choices she needs to survive.

Zerlina shows us in many ways she is not consenting to Don Giovanni's sexual advances. She tries to leave, she says "I would not want," she pushes him away, she avoids eye contact, and she is tense and uncomfortable. Don Giovanni ignores both the verbal and non-verbal cues indicating that Zerlina is not interested in any relationship with him. Don Giovanni knows he is using his power to control the situation and seeing only what he wants to see. Don Giovanni is the one who initiates the idea of handholding together, but Zerlina's hands are the ones in the scene that get the last word as she raises her weapon high. Zerlina has outmaneuvered Don Giovanni and made him the vulnerable one who believes everything is going according to his plan. This scene can always prominently convey Zerlina's hesitation as not consenting and highlight Don Giovanni's behavior as an abuser. By supporting Zerlina, we can fundamentally transform this scene from a romantic duet to one in which we protect a women's capacity to raise her voice and say "I do not want this."

## Chapter 3

**“Batti, Batti, o bel Masetto” (Beat me, beat me, oh dear Masetto)****Young Lovers or Adversaries, Zerlina and Masetto****Summary**

In this chapter, I will give a summary of the aria “Batti, batti, o bel Masetto” as it was originally written, then I will discuss how productions have often presented the scene. Lastly, I will present an interpretation of Zerlina’s role that reclaims the narrative through the lens of the “Me Too” movement. For a more streamlined reader experience, I have created English translations of the libretto to facilitate the explanation of my stagings. Original Italian texts and translations can be found in Appendix B.

The libretto indicates that Zerlina truly loves and cares about Masetto. Before her duet with Don Giovanni, she asks Masetto to trust her to help convince him to leave. This would help solidify the interpretation that Zerlina is not truly interested in Don Giovanni, but is a woman put in an unsafe situation. Otherwise, we are questioning her character and her intentions instead of being focused on Don Giovanni as a predator. The title of Zerlina’s aria is unsettling, and hard to reconcile with a woman talking to her fiancé. In Act I, Scene 16, Zerlina and Masetto are fighting over what happened with Don Giovanni. A global study in the *Lancet* medical journal found that more than one in four women experience sexual or physical violence at the hands of a male partner at least once during their lifetime.<sup>24</sup> This study makes it clear that we cannot treat the suggestion of beating a partner to earn forgiveness as a playful part of this famous aria.

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<sup>24</sup> Lynnmarie Sardinha, Mathieu Maheu-Giroux, Heidi Stöckl, Sarah Rachel Meyer, and Claudia García-Moreno, “Global, Regional, and National Prevalence Estimates of Physical or Sexual, or Both, Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in 2018,” *The Lancet* 399, no. 10327 (February 2022), [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)02664-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)02664-7/fulltext).



Zerlina's words suggest casual violence that could already be present in their relationship. The severity of the text has to be treated sensitively, as it calls into question Zerlina's entire relationship with every man in her life.

Prior to this scene, Zerlina was rescued by Donna Elvira who filled her in on all the prior treacheries committed by Don Giovanni. Zerlina has not seen Masetto since he reluctantly obeyed Don Giovanni and left him alone with Zerlina. Masetto uses very offensive language to blame Zerlina for what happened with Don Giovanni. Zerlina typically takes this verbal assault and further defers to Masetto's toxic display of masculinity by asking Masetto to beat her so he can forgive her. When Masetto yells at the opening of their argument to Zerlina "don't touch me," it is ironic to hear a man having a say over what his partner does physically to him. Masetto can demand not to be touched at the same time as he is trying to shame his partner for her supposed cheating, never asking her if the advances of Don Giovanni were something she wanted.

Masetto calls Zerlina's hands faithless when he wishes her not to touch him. He is immediately on the defensive with his partner whom he has theoretically known for much longer than the single day in which Don Giovanni has inserted himself into their lives. This lack of trust in Zerlina highlights Masetto's insecurities and the harmful ways that the men in this opera treat the women. Zerlina does not need to be treated this way. There are other choices for women when their partners are verbally abusing them. Masetto's constant insults amount to emotional abuse. That does not make him a hero compared to the other men in the opera. When Masetto takes out his anger on Zerlina he is aligning himself with the other abusers in the opera by not taking his partner at her word. Here Mozart and Da Ponte agree that Zerlina "does not deserve such treatment" from Masetto. Masetto makes it about himself and what people will think of him

as an honorable man. Zerlina is going to teach him that his actions are not honorable. Masetto could not take out his anger on Don Giovanni, so he gave in when Don Giovanni threatened violence. Now he is taking out his aggression on an easier target, Zerlina. “You don’t believe me” is a huge line for Zerlina, and one of the turning points of a potential new way of looking at *Don Giovanni* where we believe all of the women.

### **Analysis: Typical Interpretations of the Scene**

Often this scene is staged with Zerlina begging Masetto to beat her so that they may ultimately reach peace together. This is a problematic perspective on how their relationship works and has Masetto focusing all the blame on what he thinks occurred between Zerlina and Don Giovanni. Zerlina enters attempting to explain what has happened to her, but Masetto is not interested in listening to her. He is immediately defensive and refuses to let her speak. In one example of this dynamic, the 2019 Royal Opera House production follows the usual staging of a seductive interpretation of this scene.<sup>25</sup> When Zerlina becomes a sexual object for Masetto while singing about violence, it makes the line to “beat her” take on a submissive quality. The opera does not need to feature sexual advances from Zerlina, especially with the suggestion that physical violence is a choice Zerlina is happy to make. Zerlina becomes the one begging Masetto to forgive her, absolving Don Giovanni of his behavior towards her. The scene is then focused entirely on what she can do to win back Masetto, rather than addressing what Masetto can do to gain Zerlina’s trust. Stagings informed by the “Me Too” movement present the understanding

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<sup>25</sup> *Don Giovanni*, directed by Kasper Holten, The Royal Opera House, 2019, on Marquee tv, [https://www.marquee.tv/videos/roh-dongiovanni?gclid=Cj0KCCQiAjc2QBhDgARIsAMc3SqQdliR1V8-9gzg5P8nCX38LRC9B33fLiPa0XJLKRRXdIb4wFLAXV8aAv0oEALw\\_wcB](https://www.marquee.tv/videos/roh-dongiovanni?gclid=Cj0KCCQiAjc2QBhDgARIsAMc3SqQdliR1V8-9gzg5P8nCX38LRC9B33fLiPa0XJLKRRXdIb4wFLAXV8aAv0oEALw_wcB).

that Zerlina does not owe Masetto anything, and she certainly does not need his forgiveness for what happened with Don Giovanni.

In the 2021 production of *Don Giovanni* at the Salzburg Festival, this famous aria features Masetto picking up multiple weapons as if he is deciding which weapon to use on Zerlina.<sup>26</sup> Zerlina is helpless the entire scene, visually slumping to the ground when she delivers her final plea for peace. At the end of the aria, she applies makeup to herself to make it look like she has gotten a black eye. The jarring display of violence is effective in highlighting the intensity of the libretto, but it also takes all the power away from Zerlina. It makes her choice to try to reconcile with Masetto a tragic outcome, where it appears that all her potential partners are monsters. It also once again is asking for the woman to relive her abuse in front of the audience, instead of suggesting that Masetto should be ashamed of his behavior. While this production gets closer to making the audience face the violence of the text, it does not give Zerlina any chance to use this statement of violence as a way to address her partner's hypocrisy.

### **My Interpretation**

What happens between Masetto and Zerlina in this scene is sometimes presented as being a consensual sexual relationship. But having Zerlina ask to be beaten by her partner has the opposite effect from empowering her. The operatic canon already includes a large amount of violence against women, and even the suggestion of violence here implies that Zerlina and Masetto are not equal partners. In this interpretation, Zerlina will use pointed sarcasm to shame Masetto for his behavior, posing the lines as a question, "what are you going to do, beat me?" This aligns Masetto's behavior with that of the man he claims to despise, Don Giovanni.

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<sup>26</sup> *Don Giovanni*, directed by Romeo Castellucci, Salzburg Festival, 2021, on medici.tv, <https://edu-medici-tv.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/en/operas/mozart-don-giovanni-currentzis-salzburg/>.

The dialogue between them opens with Zerlina asking Masetto to “listen for a moment.” She is simply asking her partner to let her explain and give her the benefit of the doubt, which no one in the opera has done so far. No one is listening to Zerlina, and what she is feeling. Instead of desperately seeking his approval, Zerlina is going to make him listen, so she shoves him when he ignores her. Masetto responds with, “don’t touch me,” an interesting proclamation from her partner after Zerlina was touched by Don Giovanni without consent. When Zerlina asks him why, Masetto responds with, “Why should I bear the touch of a faithless hand.” Before Zerlina has even had a chance to spell out what happened to her, Masetto is accusing her of cheating on him. Zerlina here can barely conceal her rage, telling him to “Be silent, I don’t deserve such treatment from you.” At this moment of hurt, she turns away from him, feeling the betrayal of someone she loves not immediately being on her side. Masetto is ranting while he paces, exclaiming, “you have the effrontery to make excuses! To be alone with a man, to abandon me the day of my wedding, both your faith and my honor forgetting.” All his anger is focused on Zerlina and how her actions reflect on him. Zerlina also begins pacing and is adamant that she does not have “blame,” because she had no choice in the matter. Neither is listening to the other.

Zerlina decides this is her moment to shame Masetto for not listening to her, “calm down, he didn’t even touch the tips of my fingers.” At “You don’t believe me”, she turns to him and starts to approach him slowly with intent. Zerlina’s next lines of “get it off your chest, kill me,” shows the reality of what happens when partners are possessive. It is not a flippant suggestion to say kill me; it is a reality for many women who fear for their lives in their relationships. Masetto should be uncomfortable at the suggestion that he could be the kind of man who could kill their partner in a jealous rage. It is difficult for him to maintain close eye contact, so Zerlina grabs him to make sure he doesn’t walk about as she begins her aria. She opens with “beat, beat

oh handsome Masetto your poor Zerlina,” looking Masetto in the eye as she challenges his aggressive outburst. As she kneels at his feet sarcastically declaring she will be “a little lamb waiting for your blows.” Zerlina is questioning what type of partner he wants. Does he desire a silent lamb to push around? At the repetition of “beat, beat,” Zerlina grabs Masetto’s hand to convey he might as well go ahead and harm her. Masetto backs away to sit down, annoyed at how she is showing him that he can be just like Don Giovanni. Zerlina saunters away, taking power in the fact that she could leave this relationship if he wants to treat her this way. She demonstrates all the things she will let Masetto do, including “I will let you gouge out my eyes,” as she brings him a bottle opener to show him. This is the same weapon Zerlina planned to use on Don Giovanni if she did not get away from him. Using this weapon in this scene again aligns Masetto with Don Giovanni and points to the violence surrounding these men, violence Zerlina did not ask to be a part of. The staging is continuing to safeguard Zerlina’s refusal to Don Giovanni’s advances, and her voicing to Masetto that she will not tolerate his disbelief. As she repeats her suggestions for Masetto to beat her while she remains “a little lamb,” she is taking the narrative away from a jealous partner.

Moving to stand on a table in the bar, Zerlina says, “I see you haven’t the heart.” Zerlina is displaying her freedom to dance and separate herself from Masetto if she chooses. If Masetto wants to accuse her, she will continue to dance out of his life. When she sings “peace, peace my beloved,” without looking at Masetto while she continues to dance, it paints Zerlina’s idea of peace as being equal partners that trust one another. Her future could include Masetto as her true love or it could be that she is the own love of her life. “Let us spend night and day in joy and happiness,” could include Masetto if he is willing to work on establishing a truly respectful relationship. As Masetto walks toward her she does not immediately take his hands, as she is

reminding him that this relationship can work only when he values her as an equal. Zerlina is the one who decides to take his hands and initiate a kiss of forgiveness. During the aria, she has made it necessary for Masetto to seek forgiveness for his behavior, instead of apologizing just to maintain the peace. The aria then ends with Zerlina's voice being heard, and Masetto taking the necessary responsibility.

### **What We Need to do Better**

The Lancet medical journal study confirms that the threat of violence between partners is a huge issue that often remains behind closed doors. My reading of the scene questions the kind of man Masetto is, instead of us condoning Zerlina's submission to him. Women deserve healthy relationships, and we should be questioning stories that do not promote them. With the prevalence of intimate partner violence, even operas from a different period should not be continuing to promote relationships that glorify a partner harming another. When a scene like this demonstrates that this is not an appropriate relationship, opera can become part of a solution working towards the prevention of violence experienced by women. Implementing new stagings aids in the necessary and urgent need to consider how to stop the violence from happening in the first place. When *Don Giovanni* is staged every year without considering how Masetto and Zerlina's relationship should not be viewed as an ideal, we continue to silence the voices of women like Zerlina who deserve a relationship free from the fear of violence.

Zerlina's use of her hands to take control of the physical relationship in this scene is one option to represent a relationship on more equal footing. After Masetto questions her story, she is the one who gets to decide the next steps and offer her own forgiveness. By having Zerlina take his face and initiate the kiss, we are letting Zerlina consent to continue the relationship with Masetto. This reinforces the idea that women like Zerlina do not need to constantly be

submissive partners and perpetuates an imbalanced power dynamic. Zerlina has the right to express anger instead of the remorse that Masetto is hoping to see.

## Chapter 4

### **“Per queste tue manine” (For these hands)**

#### **Zerlina’s Revenge**

##### **Summary**

In this chapter, I will give a summary of the often-cut duet “Per queste tue manine” as it was originally written, then I will discuss how productions have treated the scene. Finally, I will explain the importance of including this scene in viewing the character of Zerlina through the lens of the “Me Too” movement. For a more streamlined reader experience, I have created English translations of the libretto to facilitate the explanation of my stagings. The original Italian texts and translations can be found in Appendix C.

Leporello is Don Giovanni’s sidekick who helps him commit terrible crimes, often covering for him, and never defending the many victims Don Giovanni leaves in his wake. Earlier in Act II, Don Giovanni and Leporello switch clothes so Don Giovanni can hide in plain sight in order to seduce another woman. This deception is one reason Gotham City would work so well for the setting. People in Gotham essentially wear costumes as their regular clothes every day, and it is easy to conceal oneself in this vibrant environment. When Don Giovanni is masquerading as Leporello he encounters Masetto and ends up beating him in another display of his violent tendencies. Shortly after this exchange, all the characters seeking justice find Leporello, believing him to be Don Giovanni. Leporello reveals who he is to save himself from the punishment Don Giovanni has waiting for him. He escapes the group, only to be found alone by Zerlina who wants revenge on Leporello for being Don Giovanni’s loyal accomplice.

Act II, Scene 10a was added as part of the Vienna premiere of the opera and is often cut. It is an incredible look into what Zerlina is capable of when given the chance to act beyond our



preconceived ideas of who she is. This scene offers us the symmetry of Leporello as the one begging for the freedom he denied many of the women of whom Don Giovanni took advantage. Zerlina fittingly states, “you’ll see how the dance ends.” She began the day in a dangerous dance with Don Giovanni, and now she gets to take charge of the dance with his complicit assistant. Zerlina’s hands are now the ones with the power to inflict pain. During the scene, although Zerlina manages to restrain and then threaten Leporello, she ultimately does not harm a hair on his head. Zerlina shows the restraint that Don Giovanni and Leporello often fail to and leaves at the end of the scene looking for her companions. In this way, Zerlina is welcoming her supportive community (Donna Elvira, Donna Anna, Masetto, and Don Ottavio) to enact judgment together instead of acting on her desire to harm those who have wronged her.

#### **Analysis: Typical Interpretations of the Scene**

This scene shows us a side of Zerlina that conflicts with the way she is typically portrayed in earlier scenes. Zerlina is a cheerful young woman, falling for Don Giovanni and then working to smooth things over with Masetto. A Zerlina who uses force to confront Leporello does not match the picture of the character the opera has laid out before this moment. For this reason, I would not be surprised if this were the reason that the scene is omitted in the Salzburg production. Their vision for Zerlina is as a victim of Don Giovanni, in which they feature the violence the male characters inflict on the women. A Zerlina who overpowers Leporello would not fit into the narrative of a woman who is always trying to keep the peace no matter the cost. Furthermore, in this production’s version of her second act aria, “Vedrai, carino” she takes off her clothes along with the female chorus behind her, hardly interacting with Masetto at all. This Zerlina continues to lay herself bare for everyone in the show, becoming as passive as possible to please the men around her. It becomes hard to watch this fragile portrayal

as she seems to draw into herself more and more as the opera goes on. The concept robs the audience of any of the dynamic qualities that make Zerlina unique and demeans her to a wide-eyed prop. While this duet empowers Zerlina to confront her attackers, the Salzburg production works in an opposite direction, to make sure we know the men have stripped Zerlina of all of her power. In the final scene, Masetto drags Zerlina by the arm; they are not holding hands or walking like equals. There is no happy ending for Zerlina, only the realization that the men in her life will never value her.<sup>27</sup>

The few productions that have included this scene give us a glimpse at a Zerlina that is enjoying herself immensely. Zerlina is having fun torturing Leporello and exercising her ability to take control. She can take care of Leporello without the help of any of the other characters with whom she has aligned herself, showing she is not helpless or in need of rescuing. There are moments of comedy in her exchanges with Leporello, but the scene ultimately allows Zerlina to take on the role of the aggressor. Zerlina wields all the power, but she does not use that power in the same way the men have. She is like a vigilante, taking matters into her own hands.

### **My Interpretation**

The scene opens with Zerlina drawing a knife from her garter, demanding Leporello “stay here.” After her encounter with Don Giovanni, Zerlina has learned the value of having a hidden knife. In this confrontation with Leporello, she comes prepared with multiple tools to help ensure her safety, a necessary part of life in this setting of Gotham City. Based on her experiences in the previous scenes, Zerlina has learned that she no longer has the luxury of waiting for justice. So she has decided to create that justice for herself. Leporello is surprised but quickly realizes that

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<sup>27</sup> *Don Giovanni, medici.tv*, directed by Romeo Castellucci, Salzburg Festival, 2021, <https://edu-medici-tv.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/en/operas/mozart-don-giovanni-currentzis-salzburg/>.

the knife is not just for show. He gets to his knees to beg her to have pity on him. Zerlina quickly responds with “there’s no pity for the likes of you.” Zerlina will not let Leporello sway her, and she has zero sympathy for this man that has masqueraded around Gotham without consequences up until now. Zerlina stands behind Leporello, tugging at “your hair, your head, your heart, and your eyes” that she wants him to envision her tearing out. Leporello still believes he can use his charm to get out of this situation, so he grabs her dress trying to convince her to “Listen, my dear one.” Zerlina is tired of being touched without consent and kicks him over on “Watch out if you touch me!” This inclusion of not wanting to be touched is very significant, a moment for Zerlina to raise her voice and demand that her body be respected.

Zerlina moves to stand over Leporello, raising her boot knowing she could kick him while he is down as she mentions “You’ll see, you scum of rascals, what reward you get for the girls you wrong.” Zerlina is not just standing up for herself, but for all the women Don Giovanni has harmed. Leporello is viewed as an innocent sidekick, forced to do Don Giovanni’s bidding. Here, Zerlina is acknowledging that his actions enabled the abuse, and he should also be held accountable. She does not kick Leporello as he begs, “free me oh gods from this fury.” Instead, she walks away, calling for Masetto and other witnesses. She knows the significance of having support when confronting someone dangerous. Leporello uses this momentary distraction to attempt to crawl away from his captor, but Zerlina turns to him quickly stating “you’ll see how the dance ends.” The knife is an important extension of every gesture, so Leporello is aware the threat remains and Zerlina is completely in control of their dance.

Zerlina asks Leporello to bring her a chair and then to sit down. Leporello aims for humor, responding “I’m not tired.” The comic moment passes quickly as Zerlina points the knife at him menacingly stating, “Sit, or with these hands, I’ll tear out your heart and then I’ll throw it

to the dogs.” Leporello obeys, but tries to gain the upper hand one more time, “I’ll sit down, but please put down that razor. Maybe you want to shave me?” By asking about a shave, Leporello is continuing to try to use comedy to change the mood and soften Zerlina. After all, his cleverness and use of humor have enabled him to survive so long working for Don Giovanni. Zerlina stands over him quickly dismissing his joke again, “I wish to shave you, but without soap.” By forcing Leporello into a chair and standing above him, she is mirroring what Don Giovanni did to her in “Là ci darem la mano.” Zerlina is making sure Leporello knows what it is like to be held hostage by someone, without the freedom to walk away. Zerlina asks for his hands and Leporello cries, “But what do you want to do to me?” Smiling wickedly, she answers, “I want to do whatever I feel like!” Zerlina has continuously had to work hard to stay one step ahead of the men working to control her; here she is finally able to fully be herself without deception involved.

Zerlina whips off her scarf to begin binding Leporello’s hands as the duet begins. Leporello comments, “By these, little hands of yours, so white and tender, by this cool skin, have mercy on me!” Leporello uses descriptions of soft female features, still believing these hands too tender to cause him harm. Zerlina makes sure the knife is clearly visible as she states, “there is no mercy for you scoundrel.” Now we get to witness a Zerlina who is unquestionably having fun. In previous scenes Zerlina is constantly trying to navigate the emotions of those around her, while this scene is one where she can keep the upper hand and we can all revel in her joy. We are part of her triumph as she dances away saying, “I am an irate tigress, an asp, a lion, there will be no mercy for you.” This line is a notable insight at how Zerlina is feeling in this moment where she is getting to turn the tables on a man who helped enable her abuser.

As Leporello attempts to flee, Zerlina puts her boot on the chair telling him, “You’re dead if you move.” Having another hidden scarf to use to bind him shows us a Zerlina that was

preparing for a confrontation. In the bar with Don Giovanni, she was cunning in carefully considering what she could use in her surroundings, and now she has armed herself to avoid the uncertainty. It is a tool she is using as a survivor to feel more secure. The threat of death is repeated as Zerlina binds one of his legs to the chair. Leporello cries, “cruel unjust gods,” and Zerlina mimics him saying, “cruel man, traitor! If only I had your leader’s heart here with you.” She wants Leporello to believe she is capable of harming him, so just for a moment he can feel what the many women he did nothing to help felt. Mentioning Don Giovanni is Zerlina’s way to make Leporello stand in for the predator as he attempted to earlier. Zerlina is intending for Don Giovanni to eventually be met with the same justice.

Leporello continues to try to reason with Zerlina, “please don’t bind me so much, my soul is leaving me.” In a call to all the women who were not heard by Don Giovanni, she towers behind him as she replies, “Let it go or stay, meanwhile you won’t leave from here.” This delivery also parallels the moment in which Don Giovanni attempted to restrain Zerlina, without giving her any options. Both men’s actions were soulless, and she wants Leporello to understand the pain of having one’s choices taken away. After this binding, Zerlina pulls Leporello’s beanie down over his eyes confusing him, “is it daylight or night?” She then dances away remarking, “out of joy and out of delight I feel shining in my breast. With men, this is how it’s done.” With this statement she is regaining her power, but also being a force for power to be given to all survivors. She is confronting the cruelty of men such as Don Giovanni and Leporello and embracing the healing act in which abusers are held accountable for their actions.

Leporello continues to attempt to flee, and we see that Zerlina has another scarf in her other boot to bind him further. She is taking action so he can no longer scurry away from his responsibility. Zerlina repeats her lines of joy and the promise that Leporello will not leave from

there. The focus remains on Zerlina speaking up and disrupting the patterns of rape culture that have continued to shield Leporello and Don Giovanni. Taking Leporello's tie from him, she binds him one more time and pulls his beanie from his eyes. Zerlina wants to make sure he can see her as she takes the knife and points it at his throat smiling. Zerlina could choose a violent end for Leporello, but the opera goes on to reaffirm the power of seeking community in healing and taking action. Zerlina does not kill Leporello, but instead she seeks out her friends and partner to work together for justice. The inclusion of this scene gives Zerlina a chance to emphasize that Leporello is a person who also should be held accountable, and that Zerlina is a survivor using her voice on her journey to recover.

### **What We Need to do Better**

Leporello often gets to be the comic relief of the opera, mistreated by his boss Don Giovanni. Until Zerlina confronts him, he is sought after only when the victims believe him to be Don Giovanni. There are no other scenes where Leporello's punishment for his part in the abuse is considered. We know Don Giovanni's fate at the end of the opera, but Leporello escapes retribution as the focus remains on Don Giovanni's actions. Including this scene not only empowers Zerlina to reclaim the narrative, but it also rightly indicts Leporello for assisting Don Giovanni and covering up sexual assaults. Leporello could have turned on Don Giovanni, but he ultimately sticks around for the money he offers. This is a crucial duet that can address the partners that help protect abusers and promote rape culture.

Seeing Zerlina dance with a knife is something new that might seem shocking for audiences that have not witnessed her in control. This scene already offers a powerful alternative to the sweet narrative that Zerlina desires only to please the men around her. Zerlina's hands prominently holding a knife and binding Leporello without actually harming him shows both

power and restraint. She is not a vigilante who will murder Leporello; she seeks her community to help address his behavior. By including this scene, we reaffirm the strong belief that Leporello is culpable in the abuse and part of the toxic culture that is embedded in this story. We are also showcasing a moment in which Zerlina uses her voice and is not actively being pursued or consoling a male character. Finally, we get a glimpse of her character not as a lover, but as a person who feels society is not protecting her freedom. Zerlina is working through her response to her trauma using her hands to boldly seek a better future.

### **Takeaways and Future Directions**

It is time opera takes a stand to address the many harmful ways women are portrayed and be a leading voice in changing this abusive narrative. There can certainly be versions of this opera where Zerlina is interested in Don Giovanni, but in order for that to be a viable choice we must always be considering consent and the environment in which we are staging these operas. The “Me Too” movement helped to propel us into a time where remaining silent in the face of abuse is akin to protecting the abusers and continuing the environment where victims are shamed. It shone a spotlight on this public health crisis and reminds us that survivors of sexual assault are our colleagues, friends, and family members. These are not events that happen to other people; the assaults are happening all around us in our communities. Sexual violence is personal, and something we must all address for it to have a lasting change. This change must include our productions, and how we can frame the narratives that have been told for hundreds of years. The opera world has the opportunity to update these stories and transform the narrative that women are helpless to the whims of men.

When productions begin to offer characters like Zerlina more choices, we can make way for more stories where women are in equal partnerships. In the world of this opera and how we

imagine the characters beyond this day, it should be possible for Zerlina to be able to leave her marriage/relationships safely and peacefully if she chooses. Zerlina has fewer means to leave controlling and abusive relationships than someone with more wealth and influence. Giving Zerlina a voice gives a voice to the most vulnerable women who lack the resources and encourages the growth of community action against sexual violence. Anyone can be abused no matter their background. When we stand for Zerlina, we stand for all women in the opera who confront their abusers. Beyond the operatic stage, we encourage critics to discuss the women in *Don Giovanni* more positively and reframe how we have considered all the characters in the opera.

The classical music community needs to pay attention to staging and what it does in this context beyond just providing a content warning. Trigger warnings are important, but they are often a surface level solution and can exclude audience members that have experienced sexual violence. By adding a trigger warning we give agency to the audience by allowing them to choose whether or not they can witness certain stagings. Being open about what the audience will witness is a necessary step forward to presenting modern productions. However, without also updating our stagings, we alienate survivors and a community that is looking for a better response to sexual and gender-based violence. To include survivors in our audiences, we can present productions that do not only present some of the violence they experienced, but that also seek to provide healing in the narrative. In producing difficult stagings this way, we do not exclude the victims of the abuse we are hoping to support.

Art reflects and reinforces changes, challenges, and critiques of our modern society. Opera should not be a passive thing we enjoy, rather it needs to engage and adjust to what we now know about the impacts sexual violence has on our audience and the greater society.



Audiences that are not invested in the cultural significance of the work and how it can be addressed are not part of a creative community but are passive viewers. It is not just a diversion, but a part of the society we live in. *Don Giovanni* should be staged to consider the urgent crisis of sexual violence, and how we can invest in survivors to create a better community for everyone.

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## Appendix A

*Libretto to Act I, Scene 9: “Alfin siam liberate” and “Là ci darem la mano”*

Most of the translations are taken from Nico Castel’s book *The Libretti of Mozart’s Completed Operas: In Two Volumes*<sup>28</sup>. Those in Helvetica with an asterisk are taken from IPA Source.<sup>29</sup>

<i>Recitativo</i> DON GIOVANNI Alfin siam liberati, Zerlinetta gentil, da quel sciocone. Che ne dite, mio ben, so far pulito?	<i>Recitative</i> DON GIOVANNI A last we are free, Little Zerlina, of that dimwit*. What do you say, my dear, do I know how to handle things?
ZERLINA Signore, è mio marito...	ZERLINA Sir, he is my husband.
DON GIOVANNI Chi? Colui? Vi par che un onest'uomo, un nobil cavalier, com'io mi vanto, possa soffrir che quel visetto d'oro, quel viso inzuccherato da un bifolcaccio vil sia strapazzato?	DON GIOVANNI Who? Him? You think that an honest man, a noble cavalier as I pride myself to be, could suffer that your little face of gold, that face deliciously sweet should be ill- treated by a boor*?
ZERLINA Ma, signore, io gli diedi parola di sposarlo.	ZERLINA But, sir, I gave him my word to marry him.
DON GIOVANNI Tal parola non vale un zero. Voi non siete fatta per essere paesana; un'altra sorte vi procuran quegli occhi bricconcelli, quei labretti sì belli, quelle ditucce candide e odorose, parmi toccar giuncata e fiutar rose.	DON GIOVANNI Such a promise is worth nothing. You are not made to be a peasant. Those roughish eyes decree a different fate for you, those little lips so lovely, those fingers <b>so sweet and scented*</b> , it feels as if I am touching cream and smelling roses.
ZERLINA Ah!... Non vorrei...	ZERLINA Ah! I would not want..
DON GIOVANNI	DON GIOVANNI

<sup>28</sup> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Nico Castel, Julius Rudel, and Eugene Green, *The Libretti of Mozart's Completed Operas: In Two Volumes* (Geneseo, NY: Leyerle, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> Bard Suverkrop, “Là ci darem la mano,” IPA Source, LLC, <https://www-ipasource-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/product/la-ci-darem-la-mano/>.

<p>Che non vorreste?</p> <p>ZERLINA Alfine ingannata restar. Io so che raro colle donne voi altri cavalieri siete onesti e sinceri.</p> <p>DON GIOVANNI È un imposture della gente plebea! La nobilità ha dipinta negli occhi l'onestà. Orsù, non perdiam tempo; in questo istante io ti voglio sposar.</p> <p>ZERLINA Voi!</p> <p>DON GIOVANNI Certo, io. Quel casinetto è mio: soli saremo e là, gioiello mio, ci sposeremo.</p> <p><i>Duettino</i> DON GIOVANNI Là ci darem la mano, Là mi dirai di sì. Vedi, non è lontano; Partiam, ben mio, da qui.</p> <p>ZERLINA (Vorrei e non vorrei, Mi trema un poco il cor. Felice, è ver, sarei, Ma può burlarmi ancor.)</p> <p>DON GIOVANNI Vieni, mio bel diletto!</p> <p>ZERLINA (Mi fa pietà Masetto.)</p> <p>DON GIOVANNI Io cangierò tua sorte.</p> <p>ZERLINA Presto... non son più forte.</p> <p>DON GIOVANNI</p>	<p>What wouldn't you want?</p> <p>ZERLINA To be left betrayed in the end. I know that rarely with women you cavaliers are honest and sincere.</p> <p>DON GIOVANNI This is a misconception of the common people! You can tell a noble person's honesty by his eyes. Come, let us not lose time; I want to marry you at once*.</p> <p>ZERLINA You!</p> <p>DON GIOVANNI Certainly, I. That little house is mine: <b>there we shall be alone, and there, my little jewel, we shall marry*</b>.</p> <p><i>Duet</i> DON GIOVANNI There we will hold hands, There you will say* "yes." Look it isn't far; let us leave, my beloved, from here.</p> <p>ZERLINA (I would want to and yet I would not want to, my heart trembles a bit in me*. Happy, it's true, I'd be: but he could just be tricking me.</p> <p>DON GIOVANNI Come, my lovely delight!</p> <p>ZERLINA (I feel sorry for Masetto.)</p> <p>DON GIOVANNI I will change your fate.</p> <p>ZERLINA Soon I am no longer strong*.</p>
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Andiam!	DON GIOVANNI Let us go!
ZERLINA Andiam!	ZERLINA Let us go!
A DUE Andiam, andiam, mio bene. a ristorar le pene D'un innocente amor.	TOGETHER Let us go, let us go, my beloved. To soothe the pangs of an innocent love.

## Appendix B

*Libretto to Act I, Scene 16: “Masetto senti un po” and “Batti, Batti, o bel Masetto”*

Most of the translations are taken from Nico Castel’s book *The Libretti of Mozart's Completed Operas: In Two Volumes*<sup>30</sup>. The ones in Calibri with an asterisk are taken from opera-arias.com.<sup>31</sup>

<i>Recitativo</i> ZERLINA Masetto... senti un po'... Masetto, dico.	<i>Recitative</i> ZERLINA Masetto, listen for a moment! Masetto, I say!
MASETTO Non mi toccar.	MASETTO Don't touch me!
ZERLINA Perchè?	ZERLINA Why?
MASETTO Perchè mi chiedi? Perfida! Il tocco sopportar dovrei d'una mano infedele?	MASETTO Why you ask me? Wicked girl! Must I bear your faithless hand to touch me?
ZERLINA Ah no! taci, crudele, Io non merto da te tal trattamento.	ZERLINA Ah no! Be silent, cruel man! I don't deserve such treatment from you.
MASETTO Come! Ed hai l'ardimento di scusarti? Star solo con un uom! abbandonarmi	MASETTO

<sup>30</sup> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Nico Castel, Julius Rudel, and Eugene Green, *The Libretti of Mozart's Completed Operas: In Two Volumes* (Geneseo, NY: Leyerle, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, “Masetto Senti Un Po’: *Don Giovanni*,” Opera-Arias.com, <https://www.opera-arias.com/mozart/don-giovanni/masetto-senti-un-po/>.

<p>il di delle mie nozze! Porre in fronte a un villano d'onore questa marca d'infamia! Ah, se non fosse, se non fosse lo scandalo, vorrei...</p> <p>ZERLINA Ma se colpa io non ho, ma se da lui ingannata rimasi; e poi, che temi? Tranquillati, mia vita; non mi toccò la punta della dita. Non me lo credi? Ingrato! Vien qui, sfogati, ammazzami, fa tutto di me quel che ti piace, ma poi, Masetto mio, ma poi fa pace.</p> <p><i>Aria</i> ZERLINA Batti, batti, o bel Masetto, La tua povera Zerlina; Starò qui come agnellina Le tue botte ad aspettar.</p> <p>Lascerò straziarmi il crine, Lascerò cavarmi gli occhi, E le care tue manine Lieta poi saprò baciar.</p> <p>Ah, lo vedo, non hai core! Pace, pace, o vita mia, In contento ed allegria Notte e di vogliam passar.</p>	<p>What! And you have the effrontery to make excuses! To be alone with a man! To abandon me the day of my wedding! Both your faith and my honor forgetting*! Ah, if it weren't, if it weren't for the scandal, I'd like to...</p> <p>ZERLINA But I am not to blame! But I was tricked by him! And then, what are you afraid of? Calm down, my beloved, he didn't even touch the tips of my fingers. You don't believe me? Thankless one! Come here, get it off your chest, kill me, do whatever you want with me, but then my Masetto, but then make peace (with me).</p> <p><i>Aria</i> ZERLINA Beat, Beat, oh handsome Masetto, your poor Zerlina, I'll be here like a little lamb waiting for your blows.</p> <p>I will let you tear out my hair, I will let you gouge out my eyes, And your dear little hands happily then I will kiss.</p> <p>Ah, I see it, you haven't the heart! Let's make peace, my beloved, Let us spend night and day in joy and happiness.</p>
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## Appendix C

*Libretto to Act II, Scene 10a: "Restati qua" and "Per queste tue manine"*<sup>32</sup>

<p><i>Recitativo</i> ZERLINA Restati qua.</p>	<p><i>Recitative</i> ZERLINA Stay here.</p>
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<sup>32</sup> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Nico Castel, Julius Rudel, and Eugene Green, *The Libretti of Mozart's Completed Operas: In Two Volumes* (Geneseo, NY: Leyerle, 1997).



LEPORELLO Per carità, Zerlina!	LEPORELLO For pity's sake, Zerlina!
ZERLINA Eh! non c'è carità pei pari tuoi.	ZERLINA Hey! There is no pity for the likes of you.
LEPORELLO Dunque cavar mi vuoi...	LEPORELLO What do you want to tear from me?
ZERLINA I capelli, la testa, il cor e gli occhi!	ZERLINA Your hair, your head, your heart and your eyes!
LEPORELLO Senti, carina mia...	LEPORELLO Listen, my dear one!
ZERLINA Guai se mi tocchi! Vedrai, schiuma de' birbi, qual premio n'ha chi le ragazze ingiuria.	ZERLINA Woe if you touch me! You'll see, scum of rascals, what reward you get for the girls you wrong.
LEPORELLO (Liberatemi, o Dei, da questa furia!)	LEPORELLO (Free me. Oh gods, from this Fury!)
ZERLINA Masetto, olà, Masetto! Dove diavolo è ito... servi, gente! Nessun vien... nessun sente.	ZERLINA Masetto, hey, Masetto! Where the devil has he gone? Servants, People! No one comes.. no one hears.
LEPORELLO Fa' piano, per pietà, non trascinar mi a coda di cavallo.	LEPORELLO Take it easy, for pity's sake. Don't drag me behind you like a pony tail.
ZERLINA Vedrai, vedrai come finisce il ballo! Presto qua quella sedia.	ZERLINA You'll see how ends the dance! Quickly bring that chair.
LEPORELLO Eccola!	LEPORELLO Here it is!
ZERLINA Siedi!	ZERLINA Sit!
LEPORELLO Stanco non son.	LEPORELLO I'm not tired.

<p>ZERLINA Siedi, o con queste mani ti strappo il cor e poi lo getto ai cani.</p> <p>LEPORELLO Siedo, ma tu, di grazia, metti giù quel rasoio mi vuoi forse sbarbar?</p> <p>ZERLINA Sì, mascalzone! Io sbarbare ti vo' senza sapone.</p> <p>LEPORELLO Eterni Dèi!</p> <p>ZERLINA Dammi la man!</p> <p>LEPORELLO La mano?</p> <p>ZERLINA L'altra.</p> <p>LEPORELLO Ma che vuoi farmi?</p> <p>ZERLINA Voglio far...voglio far quello che parmi!</p> <p><i>Duettino</i></p> <p>LEPORELLO Per queste tue manine candide e tenerelle, per questa fresca pelle, abbi pietà di me!</p> <p>ZERLINA Non v'è pietà, briccone; son una tigre irata, un aspide, un leone no, no, non v'è pietà.</p> <p>LEPORELLO Ah! Di fuggir si provi...</p>	<p>ZERLINA Sit, or with these hands, I'll tear out your heart and then I'll throw it to the dogs.</p> <p>LEPORELLO I'll sit down, but please put down that razor. Maybe you want to shave me?</p> <p>ZERLINA Yes, scoundrel! I wish to shave you, but without soap.</p> <p>LEPORELLO Eternal gods!</p> <p>ZERLINA Give me your hand.</p> <p>LEPORELLO My hand?</p> <p>ZERLINA The other one.</p> <p>LEPORELLO But what do you want to do to me?</p> <p>ZERLINA I want to do.. I want to do whatever I feel like!</p> <p><i>Duet</i></p> <p>LEPORELLO By these, your little hands white and very tender, by this cool skin, have mercy on me!</p> <p>ZERLINA There's no mercy, scoundrel. I'm a tigress irate, an asp, a lion, No, no, mercy there isn't.</p> <p>LEPORELLO Ah! Let me try to flee.</p>
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<p>ZERLINA Sei morto se ti movi.</p> <p>LEPORELLO Barbari, ingiusti Dei! In mano di costei chi capitar mi fe'?</p> <p>ZERLINA Barbaro traditore! 1 Del tuo padrone il core avessi qui con te.</p> <p>LEPORELLO Deh! Non mi stringer tanto, l'anima mia sen va.</p> <p>ZERLINA Sen vada o resti, intanto non partirai di qua!</p> <p>LEPORELLO Che strette, o Dei, che botte! E giorno, ovver è notte? Che scosse di tremuoto! Che buia oscurità!</p> <p>ZERLINA Di gioia e di diletto sento brillarmi il petto. Così, così, cogli uomini, così, così si fa.</p>	<p>ZERLINA You're dead if you move.</p> <p>LEPORELLO Cruel, unjust gods! Who made me fall into the hands of this woman?</p> <p>ZERLINA Cruel man, traitor! If only I had your boss's heart here with you.</p> <p>LEPORELLO Please! Don't bind me so much, my soul is leaving me.</p> <p>ZERLINA Let it go or stay, meanwhile you won't leave from here.</p> <p>LEPORELLO What straits, oh gods, what blows! Is it daylight or night? What shaking of an earthquake! What murkey darkness!</p> <p>ZERLINA Out of joy and out of delight I feel shining in my breast. Like this with men, like this is how it's done.</p>
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