

# Communications

To the Editor:

John C. Nelson's article on Sullivan's finales in your Fall 1992 issue (vol. 13/2) fails to contribute significantly to our understanding of the composer's choice of keys. Lists of keys used within the finale structures are of little point unless a more thorough exploration is made of the relationship between juxtaposed keys, the possibility of enharmonic spellings, the significance of certain keys for the composer, and practical considerations such as transpositions for certain singers and economy in reusing existing material.

As Nelson suggests, the finales are not isolated examples of planned key structure within Sullivan's operas. I would like to widen the discussion to other parts of the *oeuvre*, to identify areas where tonal organization is clear and suggest why this should be, and to propose that the model followed most consistently is neither Rossini nor Offenbach, but Mozart.

Although at first glance Sullivan's choice of keys may appear somewhat chaotic ("Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes" in G $\flat$  major, between two movements in G major!), an analysis of the relationships between the keys of individual numbers reveals a bias towards consecutive sections being in related keys, while larger groups form sequences with some degree of coherence in their tonal organization. In this, the starting point for Sullivan must have been the classical examples of comic opera, in particular Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, which he edited for publication in 1871.

The clearest example of tonal coherence occurs in *Trial by Jury* (1875). The plot introduces one character at a time, until the arrival of the Plaintiff. Each new entry is marked by a key-shift towards the subdominant, (interrupted only by excursions to the tonic minor in

recitatives and scenas), starting in E major and ending in B $\flat$  major.<sup>1</sup> This formula follows closely the pattern chosen by Mozart in the Act II Finale of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, beginning at Figaro's entry, where each major turn in the plot is also highlighted by a shift to the subdominant—G major through E $\flat$  Major.

In the operas with spoken dialogue, Sullivan has less need to be rigorous in maintaining tonal cohesion—but fluency is often helped by the use of modulating recitatives or orchestral bridge passages. This is particularly evident in the earlier operas: *The Sorcerer*, *HMS Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance*. Felicitous sequences from the latter stages of *The Mikado* and *Iolanthe* deserve special mention.

In *The Mikado*, the decisive turning point which leads to a “satisfactory” conclusion is the pairing of Ko-Ko with Katisha. This process begins with “The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring,” leading through “There is Beauty in the Bellow of the Blast.” The unravelling of the plot is mirrored by the keys of four successive numbers each moving one step to the sharp side of the predecessor, over two breaks for dialogue: A major --> C $\sharp$ /D $\flat$  major --> A $\flat$  major --> E $\flat$  major.

In *Iolanthe*, the equivalent decisive action is Iolanthe's confirmation with the Vice Chancellor and then the Fairy Queen. The highly charged music appears to have little tonal stability, with rapid changes between major and minor, and upward shifts of a semitone, ending apparently by chance on an unexpected chord of B major. This however, turns out to be the dominant of E major, thus preparing for the Finale music which follows after the next dialogue. This whole scene incorporates reprises of musical material from the Invocation in Act I and the Trio in Act II, both stemming from reprises in the libretto. There can be no doubt that Sullivan has very close control over the tonal structure of the work as a whole.

Act I to *Iolanthe* provides further evidence of this long-term

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<sup>1</sup>The missing F major section was originally supplied by the song for the Foreman of the Jury, “Oh Do Not Blush to Shed a Tear,” which was cut before the first performance. This key is confirmed by the sketches in the Library of Congress. There is some internal evidence that this progression towards the subdominant originally continued with the Counsel's song “With a Sense of Deep Emotion” in the higher key of E $\flat$ .

planning. The final section of the Finale, “With Strephon for Your Foe No Doubt,” is a quick march in E $\flat$  major, with a trio section in A $\flat$  major. This is the identical pattern to the Entrance of the peers earlier in the act. Not only are these keys favorites of military bands, they are the ones preferred by “on-stage” bands in the nineteenth century, in such works as *Aida*, *Rigoletto* and *1812 Overture*. The first performance of *Iolanthe* did, of course, include an on-stage band for these two marches, so Sullivan may well have planned his music with the sound—and key—of the band in mind.

Occasional surprises in the key scheme may be due to cuts and additions of whole songs and to transpositions. This mainly affects individual numbers, and is too vast a subject to be treated here, but one finale mentioned by Nelson was originally longer: Act I of *The Sorcerer* had a reprise of the D major section “Eat, Drink and Be Gay,” which has been excised from the revised version we know today.

Within the finales to the operas, where there are no breaks for dialogue, every effort is made to smooth the flow between musical sections, with unprepared juxtaposition of distant keys being almost entirely ironed out by the use of recitative or instrumental bridges. The only exception I can find in the finales of all thirteen extant Gilbert and Sullivan operas is the abrupt full chord of C major of Bunthorne’s “Come Walk Up” after the E $\flat$  major cadence of the previous section. In using such link passages between sections, Sullivan is more fluent than either Mozart or Rossini of the Italian operas: there are two tonal jolts between full chords in unrelated keys in the *Figaro* finales alone, and three in *Semiramide*. Rossini’s French operas perhaps provide the model here, in particular *Guillaume Tell*, which Sullivan had edited in 1871.

I would like to finish by presenting an alternative analysis of the Act I Finale of *Ruddigore* to that provided by Nelson. The opening chorus saluting the bride and groom is in C major, the key of the equivalent wedding chorus in *Figaro* Act III. The pastoral quartet “When the Buds” is in G major, which of course happens to be the key preferred by Mozart for introducing peasants and servants (in *Figaro*, the very first scene with Figaro and Susanna, Figaro’s entry in

the Finale of Act II, and both entries of peasant choruses). Robin sings “As Pure and Blameless Peasant” in this same key of G major, but for his future plans “When I’m a Bad Bart,” he changes to E $\flat$  major, a key more closely linked in Mozartean models with aristocracy and with intrigue. Juxtaposition of sections in G major and E $\flat$  major occur twice in the finales of *Figaro*.

The brief recitative “Who is the Wretch ... Withhold Your Wrath” serves to link this E $\flat$  major section with the following solo in the apparently remote key of B major, though to the ear it is no further than the distance between G major and E $\flat$  major. The dramatic context demands a surprise denouement, which is ideally supplied in the music by the unprepared resolution of a dominant seventh chord as a German augmented sixth. This chord sequence was never used by Mozart, and rarely employed by other of Sullivan’s predecessors—the most famous example introduced the love theme in Tchaikovsky’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

With its outward parts moving further and further apart by a half step, an augmented sixth chord can be heard as a progression equally towards sharp keys and flat keys. In this case Sullivan prefers to write the resolution as an F $\sharp$  major chord, but the enharmonic G $\flat$  would provide a clearer view of the structure. For after Robin’s solo in B (= C $\flat$ ) major, Rose sings in the subdominant E (= F $\flat$ ) major. This is followed by a scene in which the tonality is twice hitched up by a major second, through the keys of F $\sharp$  (= G $\flat$ ) major and A $\flat$  (= G $\sharp$ ) major. Each time the bridesmaids add their refrain “Hail the Bridegroom, Hail the Bride” at the higher pitch (not as the same pitch, as Nelson would have us believe!). From A $\flat$  major, it is a short distance to E $\flat$  major, the key of the closing section. E $\flat$ , either major or minor, is, of course, the key which begins and ends both acts of *Ruddigore*, as well as its original overture.

So in this finale, Sullivan has followed certain Mozartean precedents in the choice of keys, while the progression of keys includes much that can also be found in Mozart’s finales (movements to the subdominant, dominant, and flattened submediant). The two elements which are far from Mozartean are the augmented sixth chord resolution, and the sequential rises by a tone; both these latter elements have their parallels in the music of Sullivan’s contemporary,

Tchaikovsky, but must surely be rare in the music of Rossini and Offenbach, composers which Nelson somewhat gratuitously mentions without offering a single model which Sullivan may have followed.

Yours sincerely,

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Response to Tom McCanna:

I greatly appreciate Professor McCanna's additions to my article. There is much in them to repay further investigation on my part. As for derivation, no one who studies the history of comic opera can deny the influence of Mozart; however, I am not yet ready to give up on Rossini as the chief influence on the design of the finales in particular.

Sincerely,

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To the Editor:

As the editor of the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*, I was pleased to note that Volume 14/2 (Fall 1993) of the *Indiana Theory Review* was devoted to issues of music theory pedagogy. However, I would like to make small corrections to the article by David Butler and Mark Lochstampfer ("Bridges Unbuilt: Comparing the Literature of Music Cognition and Aural Training") and to draw the attention of your readers to several articles in Volume 7 (1993) of JMTP, which came out about the same time as your Volume 14/2.