Recognition in Mozart's Operas

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Jessica Waldoff

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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著者:Waldoff, Jessica

出版者:Oxford Univ Pr

出版时间:2006-4

装帧:HRD

isbn:9780195151978

The plots and themes of Mozart's operas are as rich and complex as those in Shakespearean plays. Many of the operas -- including Don Giovanni and Cosi fan Tutte -- have baffled scholars and critics because they do not fit neatly into the genres of "comedy" or "tragedy." In Recognition in Mozart's Operas, Jessica Waldoff approaches

these works as a literary critic would, attempting to illuminate the trickier operas through a close reading of key scenes. Waldoff argues that rather than offering the simple happy endings or tragic climaxes of "easier" operas, many of Mozart's works feature scenes of recognition--moments in which a protagonist has an important revelation that changes the course of the drama. Drawing on Aristotle's Poetics, the works of contemporary critics such as Terence Cave, and her own reflections on the operas, Waldoff provides a critical account of Mozart's recognition scenes. In doing so, she finds unexplored themes of knowledge and discovery that figure prominently in many of the operas. The discussion of these themes also allows Waldoff to contextualize the operas within a culture that was obsessed with the idea of discovery or "Enlightenment." Recognition in Mozart's Operas is a thoughtful and insightful treatise that uses both literary and musicological methods to illuminate some of Mozart's best-loved operas.

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