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Finale(s)

Description

Now left with no orchestra, no conductor, and no animator, the desperate host, in need of a conclusion for the film, gives a phone call to an unspecified archive that seems to have a reserve of prefabricated finales in stock.

The answer comes from a cartoon world that dialogues with the live-action one in a cross-cut short sequence. The supposed archivist is a bizarre hunchback named Franceschini.

When the call ends, Franceschini comes out of a door that seems to open on the grid over the proscenium. He mutters half-articulated words; while he goes on with his slurred speech with a stolid smile on his face, he plods over a wooden beam and then among the cordage, with a lantern in his hand. He finally reaches a pile of small theater stages, each one with their red curtains closed. With slow and heavy movements, he grabs one of the stages and rests it on the ground. Excited, he applauds and then sits down, getting ready to review the finales.

The curtain opens. A scene from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* appears: the two lovers (portrayed as slim cartoon characters) are parting, and Romeo comes down from Juliet's balcony. A loud orchestral finale, with a unison of brasses and a cymbal crash, plays in the background: Romeo jumps to the ground in one single leap and then, as the curtain closes and immediately reopens, he goes again upstairs and repeats his stunt while Juliet takes an ostentatiously graceful pose. The action gets repeated over and over, each time with the same music and the curtains closing and opening again. Romeo's leap becomes progressively more disastrous; Juliet contributes to this, first by kicking him down with an oversized shoe and then picking him up from the ground, returning to the balcony and throwing Romeo from there piece by piece.

Franceschini is not satisfied. He sticks out his tongue and then smashes the small stage out of sight. He picks another one and sits again in front of it, full of expectations.

The curtain opens. A tenor is concluding the aria *Celeste Aida*, from the first act of the famous opera by Giuseppe Verdi. While he keeps his high note, an extremely fast zoom-out makes the point of view drift away to show the city, the whole planet, and finally God on a cloud, who, disturbed by the opera singer, covers his ears.

Curtain. A bipedal mouse hunts a cat with a knife in hand. The cat closes a door behind himself and rests his back on it; however, the door is actually a giant mousetrap that snaps on his neck.

Curtain. A ballerina with giant legs is interpreting the finale of the *Dance of the Seven Veils* from Richard Strauss's opera *Salome*. She tries to pick a flower, but its stem and roots are unexpectedly long. While the flower is still stretching out, she gets swallowed by the ground. He ends up with her feet sticking out from the place where the flower was, while the latter has now its root in the previous place of the ballerina.

Curtain. An athlete, drawn in a black-and-white shaded style slightly more realistic than the other finales, is about to reach the finish line of a race. However, the string that marks the goal severs him in two.

Curtain. The camera travels through a seemingly never-ending series of opening doors. This is actually the perspective of a little man running inside a hamster wheel that has four doors on the inside. A giant cartoon hamster observes the scene with satisfaction. Meanwhile, the final measure from Beethoven's *Piano Sonata No. 8 Op. 13 (Pathétique)* plays for three times.

Curtain. Two quite realistic black-and-white caricatures of Humphrey Bogart and Audrey Hepburn exchange a passionate kiss. When they try to separate their lips, their mouths stay glued together. Their scared faces go off-screen while their mouths stretch in a ridiculously long string of flesh that ultimately breaks and falls down. They slowly return back, horrified, with all their teeth exposed.

Franceschini is again not amused. He goes for another stage; the sequence that ensues this time has no curtain cuts but presents a single chain of catastrophic events in Manuli's drawing style.

The wind blows the hat off the head of a man. He bends to pick it from the ground; however, he raises a leg that bumps into a garbage collector, who falls down with his trash bin. The bin hits a car, throwing the driver out of it; the car bounces and hits an airplane, which in turn hits a liner ship that takes fire. The ship smashes onto a dock and triggers an explosion; the flames reach some skyscrapers, driving out of the buildings a crowd of terrorized people. The fire then spreads to a missile on its launch pad. It takes off and hits a location somewhere over the horizon: the mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb rises. Other missiles respond to the attack, from all over the planet; the whole Earth gets bombed and finally blows up in pieces.

The last live-action sequence ensues, with the host and the conductor that resolve to make a new film, a sexy remake of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*; but there is also an animated denouement. It reveals that this is one of the finales reviewed by Franceschini, who seems to be enjoying it while looking at it through one of his little theaters. In a last twist, the snake from *The Firebird* appears in front of Franceschini and bites him on the nose; the hunchback runs away until a “happy end” sign crushes him.

Program Notes

Under the appearance of an ultimate admission of inadequacy and incompetence, brought forward by the staging of a search for an ending that spirals out of control, the last animated sequence in *Allegro non troppo* actually provides a solid conclusion to the feature, as it ties together and confirms its storytelling and expressive premises. To achieve this, the finale(s) sequence works simultaneously at several levels: narrative, structural, stylistic, satirical, and musical.

The narrative meaning of the episode is the most straightforward one. It develops to the extreme the presentation of *Allegro non troppo* as a mindless low-budget imitation of the “serious” feature that *Fantasia* was. Not only the orchestra, the conductor, and the animator are gone; now the host, after having dropped his fake air of confidence, desperately admits that he has no clue on how to conclude his show. Instead of providing some idea of his own, he entrusts the search for a finale to someone who is possibly more incompetent than himself, a goofy, babbling hunchback with a dazed face. The rapid fire of alternate (and unlikely) ending scenes that ensues plays yet again on the supposed derivativeness of *Allegro non troppo*; the finale has to be chosen from a stock of preexisting materials, disregarding their actual pertinence to the story. The message becomes obsessively clear: *Allegro non troppo* does not aspire to reach *Fantasia*’s heights, as its very plot is a blatant rip-off, with no original ideas. After all, among Bozzetto’s early title ideas there were “Senza Fantasia” (“Without Fantasia”) and “Poca Fantasia” (“Not Much Fantasia”).

However, this is only for the sake of comedy and narrative consistency. By observing the finale(s) sequence from the structural point of view, it does not seem just some sort of self-diminishing denouement. The short animations reviewed by the hunchback Franceschini create an alternate and condensed version of the omnibus structure that defines the whole picture. They increase the established pace of the changes in narration and animation styles to an exhilarating extreme, while keeping the feeling of a variegated collection of short films; so, it is as if the film model of *Allegro non troppo* suddenly shifted gears and changed its tempo. Should the musical meaning of its title be literally taken, it might be said that in the finale(s) *Allegro non troppo*

turns into an *allegro con brio*, or even a *presto*. In fact, if the film were a musical composition, this would have made perfect sense: a faster tempo at the climactic concluding section of a piece is a well-established formula to give out a sense of closure, by means of a rhythmic intensification. Such sections are often headed *stretto* or *stretta*, which means “tight”; they are a quite common conclusive device in arias from Italian operas. A couple of renowned examples are the end of the duet with chorus *Libiamo ne’ lieti calici* from Act I of Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *La Traviata* or the ending of Adina’s aria *Prendi, per me sei libero* from Act II of Gaetano Donizetti’s *L’elisir d’amore*. There are instances of *stretta* also in instrumental compositions, as in the fourth and conclusive movement of Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*. The finale(s) sequence could thus be considered, structurally, as *Allegro non troppo’s stretta*.

The structural positioning of the finale(s) as an operatic *stretta* might be understood also in light of the similarities between this sequence and *Opera*, a 1973 short film codirected by Bozzetto and Guido Manuli, who was the main responsible for the style and gags that the conclusion of *Allegro non troppo* displays. *Opera* was Manuli’s first directorial experience and was based on a concept of his own: excerpts from operas by Puccini, Gounod, Verdi, and Rossini (plus a few fragments of compositions by Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Paganini, and Wagner) become a backdrop to absurdist visual gags happening on stage during an opera concert gala. In the first half, directed by Manuli, the gags flow one into the other with no narrative direction; each segment is introduced by the name of the featured opera (or composition), but then the original librettos gets referenced only by means of basic allusions to the clothes or actions of the characters (like William Tell trying to hit an apple on someone’s head with an arrow or Romeo singing under Juliet’s balcony). For the rest, anything can happen; the metamorphosis and the surreal twists are continuous. The music is used as a comedy tool. It is largely cut and reassembled so as to articulate and accentuate the gags. In some cases, it is quite difficult to make out the particular aria or piece that is being quoted. The audiovisual setting changes in the part directed by Bozzetto, who has anyway never liked the opera repertoire very much (Manuli, instead, enjoyed it a lot), being more interested in instrumental music.¹ As the aria *Largo al factotum* from Rossini’s *Barber of Seville* starts, the gags remain absurd but they more coherently revolve around Figaro and his crazy hair-cutting routine, which becomes an excuse to introduce and mock a few icons of the pop culture and history of the 1970s (Charlie Brown, Batman, Richard Nixon, Moshe Dayan). The aria by Figaro stays recognizable, as the cuts are far less frequent than before; it is interspersed with the beginning of *Un bel dì vedremo* from Puccini’s

¹Personal communication to the author via Skype, January 20, 2019.

Madama Butterfly, sung by the Statue of Liberty on the backdrop of a sea that, at each return of the music, gets more polluted, to the point that the statue needs to wear a gas mask. So, under Bozzetto's direction, the second half of *Opera* gets more goal-oriented: it focuses on the director's typical discourse on the wrong use of power and the subsequent future of the world (in one scene, an overpopulated earth is consumed by people looking like a bunch of ravenous insects; its remains look like an apple core). A few ideas destined to end up in *Allegro non troppo* are already present in the second half of *Opera*—most notably, the derailment of the story of Adam and Eve (a giant apple crushes Adam; Eve is inside it) and the gloomy skyline of a polluted city taking over the whole landscape. The first half, instead, uses the proscenium-curtain visual device to stage and mutually separate the gags, as in the finale(s) of *Allegro non troppo*. In hindsight, *Opera* feels like a general rehearsal to the 1976 full-length feature that had however a too fast pace for the expressive intentions of Bozzetto, not only because of the shorter run time but also because of the presence of Manuli, the most creative gagman of the Bozzetto Film, in a directing position. So, it seems that the heritage of *Opera*, and especially of its Manuli-helmed first half, mostly found an outlet just in the finale(s). The “operatic” argument of the 1973 short goes well with the idea of making an *Opera*-like sequence into a sort of *stretta*, a typical closure for opera arias; at the same time, however, the fact that Bozzetto left Manuli in charge of the finale(s) gives to the *Opera* reference also a stylistic consistency. The drawing manner of Manuli is in fact clearly distinguishable in the slender characters with wide eyes and a kind of “rubber hose” anatomy in their limbs, always ready to morph or dismember themselves; it is the same style that can be appreciated in the first half of *Opera*, and that quite clearly differs from that of Bozzetto, which is less polished and based on stumpy and more geometric character designs (Mr. Rossi can be easily compared with Figaro from *Opera*, for example). Because of this, the finale(s) work as a marker of continuity with the most absurdist vein of the Bozzetto animated production, which had been partially tamed in the rest of *Allegro non troppo* in order to not hinder the more varied and, at time, pathetic tone Bozzetto was aiming for in this feature. It is as if, after having restrained him for the whole of the six musical shorts, Bozzetto finally “unleashed” Manuli to have his own way during the finale(s). If observed carefully, though, the style of the finale(s) is by no means a “pure Manuli” one. In a clear attempt to reinforce the sense of continuous variation in the spectator, so as to convey a hectic visual rhythm, the drawing style is not homogeneous. Sometimes it is Manuli himself who alters his own graphic approach, as in the scene with the athlete at the finish line; in another occasion, though, a different artist provides the visuals. This is the case of the kiss between Bogart and Hepburn, rendered by Mirna Masina with a grotesque caricatural approach full of realistic shadowing and details. Even the animation style changes; the essential but

fluid approach by Manuli is superseded by transitions between still images; when the two heads come together, after having had their lips ripped off, they slide on-screen like paper cut-outs. But ultimately, Bozzetto's touch also remains visible, as in the camerawork that features agile whip pans and, most of all, an extreme zoom-out (from the inside of a theater to a cloud in the heavens, where God is covering his ears) that could be compared with the camera movement that goes on through the whole 1967 short film *Man and His World*. The final image, the explosion of the world, is a staple of Bozzetto's repertoire, too; *Opera* also featured it, with the earth being eaten like an apple, in the section of the short that was in fact directed by Bozzetto. So, the finale(s) concede a lot to the wildest sides of Bozzetto and Manuli's inspiration, without losing sight of the stylistic imprint of *Allegro non troppo*.

The finale(s) might be a *stretta* also in respect to the satirical content of the film. Their whole contextualization as a last resort measure by a host left without an ending reinforces the whole TV variety show metaphor that pervades the live-action parts of *Allegro non troppo* (see the Program Notes to Chapter 7), and confirms the attribution of incompetence and superficiality traits to this form of entertainment. Mass entertainment also gets targeted by presenting screen stories (or parts of them, like a finale) as interchangeable stock goods. The concept of the film genre as a disposable commodity was critically addressed before by Bozzetto: his two previous features, *West & Soda* and *Vip, My Brother Superman*, were in fact based on the ironic subversion of clichés from classic Western and superhero films. The conclusion of *Allegro non troppo* dares to go beyond that, as it subverts the classic Hollywood narrative scheme as a whole, by tampering with one of its key elements: the ending. As Bordwell described, the narrative device of the classic Hollywood film is all about chained causes and effects, and "the ending becomes the culmination of the spectator's absorption, as all the causal gaps get filled. The fundamental plenitude and linearity of Hollywood narrative culminate in metaphors of knitting, linking, and filling."² *Allegro non troppo* seems to argue about how empty this model had become in the 1970s, by (seemingly) avoiding an ending altogether, and even reinforcing this impression by slapping on-screen a forced "happy end" sign at the very last moment, and in English, too: the language of Hollywood, the place from which reportedly came the phone call that, at the beginning of *Allegro non troppo*, complained about the *Fantasia* rip-off. That Bozzetto is targeting Hollywood, and its outdated norms about films, is rendered even more evident by the gruesome derailment of Bogart and Hepburn's performance during one of the key moments in classical cinema narratives, which is

²David Bordwell, in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Productions to 1960* (London: Routledge, 2005), 18.

FIGURE 7 *Humphrey Bogart and Audrey Hepburn literally lock their lips together, during the finale(s) of *Allegro non troppo*. The art, by Mirna Masina, demonstrates the stylistic eclecticism that Bozzetto reserved to the conclusive animated episode; it also homages and satirizes the classical Hollywood film (by referencing Billy Wilder's *Sabrina*, 1954) and its outdated genres and conventions, by derailing one of the narrative and visual tropes of old romantic comedies (the kiss exchanged by the main players).*

the kiss (Figure 7). In fact, the two actors starred together in a renowned romantic film from the late classical Hollywood, by one of the directors who contributed to define such classical canon: *Sabrina* (1954), by Billy Wilder. All those elements are well in tune with the modern parody attitude of *Allegro non troppo*: works from the past get ironically referenced to show a distance from them, but also how they can get reshaped into a new expressive form. The finale(s) might even remark this by subtly joking about another film that was itself a modern parody³ of a Hollywood film genre,

³Bendazzi defined it as neither a satire nor a parody, but a paraphrase of *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931), *The Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935), and *The Son of Frankenstein* (Rowland V. Lee, 1939). Bendazzi, Mel Brooks. *L'ultima follia di Hollywood* (Milano: Il Formichiere, 1977), 124–5.

Young Frankenstein. Bozzetto seems to tip his hat at Mel Brooks's spoof of horror films through the black-and-white cinematography of the live-action interstitials, but also by making the theater archivist a possible send-up to Igor, the hunchback played by Marty Feldman. Both the characters play a similar narrative role: they are the incompetent helpers of an equally incompetent main character with an air of grandiosity, who sends them off to retrieve an object for them (a brain, in the case of Igor, and a finale in *Allegro non troppo*). The name of the cartoon hunchback, Franceschini, is a very likely pun on "Frankenstein."

The finale(s) give also some space to Bozzetto's core satirical themes, about mankind and its greedy relationship with its environment. A hint of this resides in the "finale" that shows a giant hamster taking his revenge on a man, who has to keep running in a wheel while the animal looks at him in amusement; the switching of the roles, which exposes what pets have to bear to entertain their owners, resonates with Bozzetto's advocacy of animal rights. However, the chain of events that starts with the wind blowing the hat off a man's head and ends with the destruction of the earth, is more explicit in this respect; it not only forwards a new ridiculous variation on the role of self-destruction in the history of mankind that Bozzetto has started to chronicle since his first short, *Tapum!*, but it also lets the real fears of atomic warfare as a catastrophic development of the Cold War, which were very well alive in the 1970s, crawl into *Allegro non troppo*. The idea of global destruction ensuing a series of trivial events, as well as the high-spirited music (the final bars of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*) accompanying the end of the world, seems to pay homage to how Stanley Kubrick concluded his 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*.

There is also a musical meaning to the finale(s). The sequence, just like it concentrates many gags that Manuli did not have a chance to fit into the rest of *Allegro non troppo*, became a virtual repository for several music pieces that Bozzetto considered for the film program, but that did not make it to the final selection. Even if they are presented in tiny bits that make them barely recognizable, in a follow-up to the music strategy of *Opera*, the compositions featured in the finale(s) include the aria *Celeste Aida*, from Verdi's *Aida*; the *Dance of the Seven Veils*, from Strauss's *Salome*; the "Pathétique" and "Moonlight" piano sonatas by Beethoven; the *String Quintet in C major* D. 956, Op. posth. 163 by Schubert; the orchestral version of the *Hungarian Dance No. 5* by Brahms; the first movement of Mahler's *Symphony No. 1*, the *Toccata and Fugue in D minor* by Bach; and, as said earlier, Liszt's *Hungarian Dance No. 2*, in its orchestral variant. There is also a fragment from a piece that played earlier in the film, the *Slavonic Dance No. 7* by Dvořák. While the presence of all this works is a small payback to Bozzetto's painstaking and hidden work of musical selection during the preproduction, the use of very specific bits from each

one of those pieces—the cadences—makes for a bold musical reinstatement of the whole satire about the meaningless perpetuation of stock formulas in entertainment. From Baroque to late Romanticism, in the European musical language, the cadence is precisely a formula that brings a sense of conclusion to a phrase, a section, or even to a whole piece. The effect is not just functional but even psychological; according to Arnold Schönberg, “The meaning of the harmonic cadence is the restoration of the state of rest.”⁴ It is, thus, a cliché that signals the end of dramatic tension; in the finale(s) of *Allegro non troppo*, though, this already formulaic trope is completely emptied of meaning by the fact the cadences are no longer reliable indicators of an ending, as a new story starts again right after each one of them. Moreover, while the audiovisual strategy is mainly based on synchronies (temporal perceptual functions) between the cadences and the cartoon action, the whole concept behind the music–animation relationship in *Allegro non troppo* gets here completely disproved. The integrity of the music is no longer respected, and the compositions, reduced to their tritest formulas, are there just to support a frantic mickey-mousing with no emotional depth. The finale(s) seem tinged with audiovisual nihilism.

It might not be nihilism, though. It is true that, as recalled throughout this book, negations have often been used by Bozzetto to talk about himself and his work. He says he is not able to draw; he reacted to the prospect of making a full-length feature by warning that he was no Disney. Mr. Rossi debuted by demonstrating that he was no filmmaker; Minivip, from *Vip, My Brother Superman*, was no superhero. In respect to *Allegro non troppo*, the whole film is about it not being *Fantasia*; the music is not played by a real orchestra, the conductor is a fake one as well, and the same goes for the host. The list could go on for quite a while. If paired with the disillusionment the director nurtures about mankind, the whole situation might be commented with the tongue-in-cheek remark that ended Bozzetto’s first short film, *Tapum!*: “Mamma mia che pessimista,” “my goodness, what a pessimist!”

In truth, Bozzetto’s pessimism, while it might be based or not on a true personality trait, works as a storytelling device. It is a premise and a context; it frames an expressive space that actively challenges the negativity. The point is not to have a forced happy ending that might look as fake as the sign falling on Franceschini’s head. Instead, the characters are free to lose their battles, at the end (as often happens to Mr. Rossi, who even gets burned to ashes in *Allegro non troppo*); but they will do so after having tried their best to succeed. *Una vita in scatola*, Bozzetto’s 1967 short film, makes this concept an existential one: life is a succession of obligations and suffering,

⁴Arnold Schönberg, *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique and Art of Its Presentation*, ed. Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 249.

but on the way one can meet fleeting moments of extreme beauty and bliss that are worth the effort.

Allegro non troppo is just like one of Bozzetto's "pessimistic" characters: by claiming the absence of any artistic quality, and positioning itself as a crude imitation of an admirable predecessor (just as *Minivip* was the shameful descendant of a genetically remarkable ancestry), it actually freed itself from expectations and challenged the music-image relationship with no preconceptions. With no need for being a sequel or a remake, and with no target audience in mind, it let itself open to the sociocultural background of its makers, becoming a condensate of themes and visual solutions that drew both from the context of Italy in the 1970s and from the achievements and shortcomings of the "Carosello" age, the most productive, creative, and controversial years of Italian animation.

After all, Bozzetto found a solution to not being able to draw. He put a line around an idea; he ended up making *Allegro non troppo*, and much more. It might not have been a cure for pessimism, but it worked quite well for sure.