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Problems of singers in opera plays

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ABSTRACT

Problems of singers in opera plays deals with two aspects, vocal and stage-acting in two operas W.A.Mozart “Don Giovanni” and G.Donizetti “L’elisir D’amore”. It is written in the English language by Stevica Krajinovic and it is 43 pages long. It is a master thesis from the Agder University College, the Conservatory of Music in Kristiansand Norway, the classical department.

The Thesis is divided into eight sections.

The First section is an introduction with methods and aim.

In the second section I am writing about the history and significance of opera including evolution of the opera and comments about Mozart and Donizetti through history written by Geoffrey Riggs.

In the third section I try to explore different kinds of problems which are present in different operas.

In the fourth section I start to investigate the Vocal aspect and possible solutions including some knowledge and techniques.

In the fifth section I investigate the second problem, Stage-acting aspect and possible solutions.

In the sixth section I start to explore the main problem, relations between Vocal and Stage-acting aspects in two operas “Don Giovanni” by Mozart and “L’elisire D’amore” by Donizetti.

In the Seventh section I give my conclusions.

The eight section contents a bibliography.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In the beginning of the school year, here in Kristiansand, we were ordered to write a master thesis that will show that we were able to achieve a scientific approach. I realised that this could be a remarkable occasion to devote myself to things that I am deeply interested in.

I would like to give a special gratitude to some people that helped me during my work.

Sir Jonathan Miller, the producer, inspired me to choose this topic as a master thesis. I was lucky to meet him and work with him in Kristiansand, while preparing the opera La Traviata and also Don Giovanni some time later.

Mr Per Kjetil Farstad, my **professor**, who led my ideas wisely to their final forms and whose knowledge and experience were of invaluable help to me and to my work.

Sincerely, thanks!

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INTRODUCTION

While watching and listening to the opera performance and while being involved in the same process, I have realized that performance is complex, and a serious responsibility of an artist.

At the very beginning of my educational process, I was fascinated by opera as musical and scene performance. I was wondering how singers managed to remember that quantity of text, music and elements of motion at the scene. As time went by, I saw many plays. But every time I was experienced different emotions: sometimes impressed, sometimes disappointed and sometimes only pleased by the play. Then I started wondering: What determines whether the opera will be successfully realized by the singers and the orchestra and with profound understanding transferred to the public? After watched various singers come and gone in opera-houses, I started thinking that the most significant factor for the success of an opera is the *talent* of the singers that carried the play.

Meanwhile, as I began to participate in some plays (being student of the first class of the Belgrade Musical Academy), I realized that the talent is only one important natural preposition, but not the most important factor that give success in a play. I started investigating problems and techniques which are hard and unique, and which in the end represent the life on the stage.

Variety of problems starts from the fact that there are different epochs in music each of them tending change, to improve music. Each of the epochs differs from the other each being authentic and original.

I have listened to many singers that perform their roles excellent in a certain repertoire comprised of opera plays written by for instance Giuseppe Verdi, while not doing a good job when facing classical works and Mozart. The basic two problems could be:

1. Vocal
2. Stage acting

These two parameters, I think are connected to each other and depending one of the other.

Methods and Aims

So, my intention is to do a research and to find a connection between vocal and stage acting aspects by comparing two entirely different operas (different thematically and musically and belonging to different musical epochs) such as: 1.W.A.Mozart's "DonGiovanni" and 2. Gaetano Donizetti's "L'elisir d'amore".

I am going to use the following methods in my research:

Sources of research

In this method I read different literature and listened to different CD-s. I also observed DVD-s recordings „Don Giovanni“by Mozart and „L'elisir D'amore“by Donizetti, to find and learn good tools in order to investigate problems in this master thesis.

Historical and hermeneutic;

To better know different styles and way of composing operas trough different epochs especially on classic and romantic period, I did some research on the central literature.

Observation

I observed those two operas in different opera houses, in different productions with different singers.

Artistic and interpretative

While, working with different singers, conductors, and stage directors in different opera productions I learnt a lot about singing and acting on the stage. All these experience helped me to develop my interpretative and artistic skills which I used while writing my thesis.

Comparative

To better find connections between vocal and stage-acting aspects, I compare the vocal and stage-acting in these two operas.

History and significance of Opera

What is an opera? Is it more of a musical work of art, or lyrical? Are the performer's actors or musicians?

These questions are simply growing one from another.

The significance of the opera for the society is proved by its birth and evolution through the history. The evolution of the opera shows the need of society for changes in art in general, and so in opera as well.

Therefore, from its beginning, passing through centuries to different epochs and styles, opera (of course with a help of the composers as her idea creators) has been changing and making new performing rules in every epoch of the history of art. In that way the audience expected to hear and see those innovations.

THE EVOLUTION OF OPERA

The immediate predecessors of the opera were the early semi-dramatic forms as the late sixteenth-century madrigals, madrigal cycles (madrigal comedies), the pastoral, the masque, and the *intermediate* all of which usually featured pastoral scenes and subjects. The very first opera *Dafne* (now lost, except the prologue and one aria) was written in 1597-8 by Peri and in 1600, he composed *Euridice* (some parts by Caccini). The first opera that is still performed, however, belongs to Claudio Monteverdi: *La Favola d'Orfeo*, first staged at Mantua in 1607. These early operas had only (half sung) *recitatives* and the only instrumental pieces were the *ritornellos*, which were not refrains but non-recurrent instrumental interludes. Thus, the early operas can be described as a collection of *recitatives* separated by occasional orchestral interludes and the aim was to revive the Greek drama.

The earliest move towards opera was the solo-singing style called recitative. This literary-musical texture was intermediate between spoken recitation (dialogue) and singing. Solo vocal lines of one melody at a time with instrumental accompaniment (monody), as opposed to polyphony, was thought to be the correct way to set words as it would enhance the natural speech inflections but music was subservient to the words. Jacopo Peri, Giulio Caccini and Emilio del Cavaliere in the Florentine Camerata were the pioneers of the new style of solo singing. It started heightened speech with continuo accompaniment. In 1602, Caccini

published the first collection of short vocal pieces with thorough-bass accompaniment in the monody style: *Le nuove musiche*. The dominance of recitatives (monody) in the early opera was in contrast to the prevailing vocal forms of the time (choral, contrapuntal, polyphonic), and assured comprehensibility of the words. In dramatic monody, a simple melody follows the rhythms and intonations of speech, accompanied by simple chords. Opera as we know it, however, would eventually bring together almost every art form: painting, poetry, drama, dance and music.

The Opera was grounded in Rome in the 1620s. In the music of Roman operas the separation of solo singing into two clearly defined types, recitative and aria, became more marked than ever. The recitative, dissonance and new musical effects created a more expressive, melodious vocal line often with regular phrases and triple meter (*bel canto*). Music started to become more important than the words and some melodic sections with recognizable melodic form (aria) evolved from the recitative. In the early Baroque operas, the recitative and aria were not separated to the extent common in the late Baroque (Italian) works.

Meanwhile, opera was spreading from Italy to other parts of Europe. By 1700, Vienna, Paris, Hamburg and London were also operatic centres.

The late Baroque opera emphasized virtuosity in vocal singing. The brief *da capo* aria soon superseded the strophic variation and was established as a vocal form. At least equally important was the bipartite aria, which consisted of only A and B or their variations. In contrast with the late Baroque opera and its rigid alternation of recitative and aria, the middle Baroque opera retained great formal flexibility. During the progress of opera from its primitive forms, the words started to lose their importance and the music was dominating over words again.

Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-1787) and his followers upgraded the instrumental preludes in the opera. The overture had been a neutral piece without any link to the following opera (except some of Rameau's overtures). It now assumed a programmatic character, anticipating the mood of the first scene or even the whole drama that was going to unfold. In the operas of the later Neapolitan School (Leo, Vinci, Jommelli), the use of virtuoso aria was so extended that the whole consisted of arias specially written to exhibit vocal virtuoso. This abuse was the main point of attack for reformists. Gluck's operatic reform by purifying it of extraneous action and musical virtuosity resulted in a simple and classical style. He created a new, more

vital, intensely expressive drama in which the music and the words were more closely allied than ever before. Gluck revived the serious approach to the arts, interest in classical - especially Greek- antiquity and a new feeling for nature and the natural. He portrays the emotions more simply, more truthfully, and in a manner more meaningful to the person of feeling and sensibility. In his first Viennese operas *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762) and *Alceste* (1767), there was already a radical break both in form and style. As Copland summarizes 'Gluck made the dramatic idea (not the singer) supreme and wrote music that served the purposes of the text (not the singer).' Gluck's operatic reforms were:

1. Use of overture to prefigure the coming action,
2. Exclusive use of recitative accompanied by the orchestra (*recitativo accompagnato* as opposed to *recitativo secco*). The continuous sequence of linked numbers always had the orchestral support avoiding the unnaturalness of the change of texture when recitative had only harpsichord accompaniment,
3. Drastic shortening of most arias,
4. Suppression of vocal ornamentation,
5. Extensive use of ensembles and choruses stressing the collective nature of human emotion,
6. Flexibility of musical forms: recitative, aria, chorus and instrumental sections can be freely intermingled whenever the dramatic situation requires. (*Orfeo* has no *da capo* arias with elaborate writing for the voice; instead there are arias of unusually varied lengths whose scale and design are dictated only by the needs of the situation.)

Gluck is the first composer where the music is fully representative of the classic style of the late eighteenth century with classic elegance and restraint (*Iphigénie en Tauride* is an example). Gluck's reforms influenced Spontini, Cherubini, and Mozart, but until Berlioz (*Les Troyens*) and Wagner, he did not have a true successor. Most people think of Mozart as the great symphonic writer, or the composer of beautiful piano concertos but he was a truly operatic composer. His 22 operas include *Idomeneo*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, *La clemenza di Tito* and *Die Zauberflöte*. He was not a reformist but a natural opera composer. His main contribution to the form was the operatic finale. In his operas, the final scene usually consists of all main characters singing altogether (not necessarily the same thing) leading to a grand climax. The grand finale replaced the old Baroque tradition of closing with a love duet. This was so effective that almost all composers used it since then; *Fidelio*, *Aida* (Act II) and *Turandot*, for example, have such finales. Mozart

was also the first to compose a comedy set in the German language. Die *Entführung aus dem Seraglio* was the beginning of a German operatic tradition.

At the turn of the century, because of the violent events of the French revolution and growing Romantic spirit, the public interest changed from the Gluckian type serious opera to rescue operas and heroic operas (Cherubini's *Medee* [1797], Mehul's *Joseph* [1807] and Spontini's *La Vestale* [1807]). The rescue opera became popular during the war and distress in Europe between the French revolution and the eventual fall of Napoleon (1789-1815). It was a subdivision of *opera-comique*.

The equivalents of *opera buffa* (or *opera comique*) were *singspiel* in Germany and ballad opera in England. The nineteenth century Romantic opera was a result of cross-influence between Italian and French styles, intermixing of serious and comic genre characteristics and the absorption of traits from contemporary symphonic music. The main sources of Romantic opera lay in the comic opera traditions. Romantic opera was based more on stereotyped musical-dramatic conventions, popular material and subjects drawn from contemporary life or recent history. Italian opera in the nineteenth century remained a 'number opera', and division of the drama into clear-cut smaller forms continued. Choral and orchestral contribution, however, gained importance. The French grand opera used plots mainly from recent European history. It was a stage spectacle, with music involving large ensemble-choral scene complexes and stunning ballets. Conventionally, it is cast in five acts. In the dramatic unit *-tableau-* of the grand opera, there is no alternation of action and repose, as in traditional *recitative-da capo* aria structure, but rather a steady intensification of the dramatic pace leading up to a climax. Perfect cadences with structural importance occur only at the end of each *tableau* not to interrupt the build-up. As a result of French operatic ballet tradition, the orchestration is more colourful than its Italian counterpart.

Richard Wagner, the last great reformist in opera history, visualized the form as a union of arts: poetry, drama, music, and staging. He renamed the opera as music drama. The uncompromising continuity brought realism in the dramatic form. He is also the creator of *leitmotif*, which brings cohesion to the opera by associating a musical motif with a character, idea or event. In Wagner's operas, the orchestra became part of the whole drama.

The composers who marked the 20th century, such as Prokofiev, Schoenberg, Berg, also had their own way in creating opera.

That is why, for instance, Schoenberg and Berg, in contrast to Wagner, who has brought to the opera “the gigantesque orchestra’s machine”, preferred a chamber ensemble in their operas.

However, opera has been, since its first performance, the most popular musical form across the globe.

Comments about W.A.MOZART and G. DONIZETTI trough history by Geoffrey Riggs

Geoffrey Riggs

“I suppose I view opera as a kind of sea with many tributaries. A challenging exercise is to pick, let's say, a dozen composers for a series that sums up the many different ways in which these different tributaries have played their part in shaping the history of opera.

Music is its chief tributary, but even music has tributaries of its own, and first and foremost among those individual tributaries is the human voice.

The most comprehensive master of music in all its many forms would be Mozart. He is remarkable in that he is generally acknowledged as having excelled in whatever genre he tackled -- a master in all the forms of music available to composers at the time. His versatility and universal facility at all levels remains unique, not just for sheer melodic invention and universal harmonic adeptness in all idioms and genres, but for infinite variety of expression as a born communicator as well. Here is one who fused unerring craftsmanship with strong instincts for character and theatre. Yet Mozart voiced the objection that the true opera genius would have to encompass proficiency in dramatic verse some day, not just music. He regretted that he had no ability to be his own librettist”.

VOCALISM IN EXCELSIS

“The many contrasts in vocal style throughout the 1700s parallel the contrasts in varied musical and vocal genres of that time. But such contrasts get more and more blurred by the early 1800s. These vocal styles are frequently juxtaposed within one and the same work.

By a happy accident, the culmination of this heady mixture of vocal contrasts typical of this period coincides with the culmination of one composer's most distinctive style, Donizetti's. His *Roberto Devereux* and *Poliuto*, to librettos by Salvatore Cammarano, crown his Neapolitan period (the 1830s), where, inspired by superstars like Giuseppina Ronzi-De Begnis (for whom he wrote the part of Elisabetta in *Roberto Devereux*) and Adolf Nourrit (for whom he wrote the title role in the original *Poliuto* intended for Naples), Donizetti pushes the vocal envelope as far as it can go. He expects his interpreters to combine an elegance of musical manners reminiscent of Gluck or Mozart with a newfangled vocal strength, characteristically vehement and energetic, that recalls Weber or Beethoven. With all this, the additional precision of an intricate,

florid vocal line requires the performer to combine the sheer agility of a Mozartean with a brute vocal strength.

Other composers, like Verdi or Wagner, may well trump the vehemence and energy in Donizetti; a Gounod, a Delibes or a Thomas, later in the century, may sometimes match Donizetti's vocal agility; but in the fusion of these and other conflicting demands, Donizetti remains separate and apart.

Later composers of arguably greater genius may use deliberately contrasting vocal styles in a more dazzling way (syntheses like the gallery of unforgettable character portraits in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, where each character has its distinct vocal style), but only Donizetti tests the outer limits of such contrasts within one and the same role. Cherubini, Rossini and Bellini are trailblazers in fashioning such roles, but it takes Donizetti to unleash their full potential.

We hear that most vividly in the second Act of *Roberto Devereux*, in the vocal writing for Elisabetta, and in Act II, Scene 2 of the original *Poliuto*, in the tenor writing given the title role.

There is also that most mercurial and heroic baritone role of them all: Chevreuse in Donizetti's *Maria di Rohan*. Here is one role that, requires every bit as much power, as much abundance of varied expression, as much sheer range, as does Rigoletto, as does Nabucco, as does the elder of the two Foscari, as does the Verdi Macbeth -- you name it. Nothing separates the vocal and interpretive difficulties of this towering Donizetti role from the baritone roles in Verdi (save that Chevreuse may require even more flexibility!).

Incidentally, the baritone Giorgio Ronconi, who also created the Verdi Nabucco in 1842, created this Donizetti role in 1843.

If the *Devereux* Elisabetta and the original *Poliuto* constitute landmarks for the prima donna and the primo uomo (or "divo;-), then Chevreuse is just as much at a crossroads for the baritone. The vocal envelope is tested just as severely.

Is it a coincidence that this work too is set to a libretto by Salvatore Cammarano? He and Donizetti really appear to have had a true affinity.

If I had to pick the one scene that seems to pull together the most disparate elements in Chevreuse's role, it would be his entire last scene in the third act. This closing sequence is the third pillar of a mighty threesome that also encompasses the second-act finales of *Roberto Devereux* and *Poliuto*.

It was only many years after I first responded to Donizetti's searing emotional effects, strictly through the vocal line, that I learned that Donizetti himself was a manic depressive, thus as storm-tossed psychologically as any of his most volatile characters. He does not just adopt mere formulas related to characters in *extremis*. He inhabits them, and the results are every casting director's nightmare. I don't honestly believe I will ever hear every vocal nook and cranny of a *Devereux* Elisabetta or a *Poliuto* delivered with the utmost naturalness. It may not be humanly possible. And in the sheer effort Donizetti himself pours into the vocal line (mirrored in the uniquely

staggering effort required of his performers), other elements can remain sketchy, very much unlike the craftsmanship of a Mozart or a Beethoven. Perhaps, emotional energy like Donizetti's can only be allocated to one element at a time. If so, the trade-off in Donizetti is *sui generis*, and entirely worthwhile”
(<http://www.operacast.com/snapshot.htm>).

DIFFERENT OPERAS HAVE DIFFERENT PROBLEMS

Today we have so many different styles in operas and every singer need to know how to sing each of them, and find different solutions, dependent of the style.

In the baroque opera the most valued element was a bright and easy sounding soprano, while in romantic operas things got a little more dramatic. Not that the baroque operas had no dramatic turnouts, but that period in music, especially in operas, was more turned to ancient themes, while in the romantic period, the subjects became somewhat more real.

Baroque operas are known for its coloraturas and very fluent melody lines. The Classical period and especially the Mozart operas are known for its logical forms, elegant way of singing without glissandos and big vibrato. (Don Ottavio aria from opera "Don Giovanni").

Nr. 10a. Arie

Andantino sostenuto

Don Ottavio

D.O.

Nur ih-rem Frie-den weih ich mein Le - ben, nur ih - re Freu - de...
Dal - la sua pa - ce la mia di - pen - de; quel che a lei pia - ce

Str. *p*

D.O.

kann Glück mir ge - ben, doch ih - re Lei - den bre - chen mein Herz,
vi - ta mi ren - de, quel che le in - cre - sce mor - te mi dà,

cresc. *mf* *f* *Hrn.*

D.O.

bre - - - chen, bre - chen mein Herz
mor - - - te, mor - te mi dà

p *cresc.* *p*

The Romantic period is the highlight of the opera development, with its enormous vocal request, like in the Donizetti's operas. (Duet Nemorino and Adina –opera L'elisir D'amore).

- chiesta!
CANTABILE 49 Chiedi all'au - ra lu - sin - ghie - - ra per - chè

vo - la sen - za po - - sa or sul gi - glio, or sulla ro - sa, or sul

pra - to, or sul ru - scel: ti di - rà che è in lei na - tu - - ra l'esser

mo - bi - lee in - fe - del, è na - tura, è na - tura l'es - - ser

mobile e infe - - del. 50

As mentioned the difference is also present in the themes of operas.

The Baroque opera had, mostly, ancient tragedy themes. In the classical period, especially Mozart operas as Le Nozze di Figaro, Così fan tutte, Don Giovanni ...main themes and subject is justice.

In the romantic period themes were from everyday life, such as love and other emotional conditions, like we find it in Donizetti's operas, especially in L'elisir d'Amore.

Some operas require dancing (Don Giovanni) as well as singing. That can affect the singer's manoeuvrings with the voice abilities.

In the case when the singer is well informed on period topics which would mean that the singer has a good and well based education, this will have an absolutely positive effect on the performance of the opera alone.

What is common in all these different epoch's, operas, and styles? Of course it is singing, which is a first condition to everything works. In the following I need to tell and try to explain about singing in general which I think is very important.

VOCAL PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

One of the biggest problems on the stage is SINGING. If the singer is not singing beautifully enough, or out of style, or (in the worst possible case) the voice is cracking, the whole piece is at lost. In such moments it is impossible for the audience to follow the course of the opera, for the attention of the audience is on the singer, who is struggling with his (or hers) own voice. These things should not happen to professional singers, as well as they shouldn't be experienced by the audience.

The reasons of failure can be different, but I will only write about those, which are possible to come over by knowledge.

I will not write about abstract things.

Like we know, in opera we have:

-small \

-medium = Roles

-high /

I'm not trying to say that "small roles" are not difficult to sing. On the contrary, they are very significant (like Masetto in Don Giovanni or Gianetta in L'elisir D'amore) , but they do not have as high roles (like Don Giovanni or Nemorino) vocal requests in opera play.

However, they do have their own little problems, such as stage problems, acting, movements or dancing.

Every opera has its duration time, so the singer has to know how to take care of his voice in huge, massive roles in long operas (like Don Giovanni, Don Ottavio, Dona Ana, Dona Elvira, Leporello by Mozart).

One of the basics is to be well prepared for the piece, through the reading of the parts and rehearsals with the pianist and use our singing technique properly. So, I would like to look at some important vocal knowledge and vocal technique:

- **Breath** (technique)
- **Resonator** (Knowledge)
- **Marking** (Technique)
- **Styles** (Knowledge)

Breath technique

One of the most powerful tools that singers have is the breath. Everything else depends on it. The main object of singer's everyday work should be how to shape and control the air that comes out of our throat. Some singers have problem with the short breath, which often become even shorter with the anxiety and pressure on the stage. Thus, the singing is bad, the singer cannot hold on "till the end of the phrase and everything falls apart.

The most important thing in singing is breath control and I found some rules by Arnold Rose

1." The greater the tension directed to the abdominal muscles, the greater the amplitude of the vibrations and thus the greater the power of the tone, also the greater the closure of the glottis, which tends to increase the pressure".

2." The greater the tension directed to the diaphragm, the less the inward movement of the thorax, the less breath is expelled and the smaller the mass of vocal cord in vibration. Conversely the more the diaphragm is relaxed, the greater the contraction of the chest cavity, the more breath is used and the greater the mass of vocal cord in vibration" (Rose 1962: 91)

I think this is the main tools use to produce a nice and quality sound of the voice during singing but we also need to know how to use the breath during the recitative and how to mix it like in Don Giovanni opera and also in L'elisir D'amore. Many operas have recitatives especially Don Giovanni which contains a recitatives part of at least 45%.

In recitatives we don't need to breathe as in the Aria because a recitative is almost in speech modus, and we need to express the story and words more than showing up the voice.

We can use that parts in any opera to rest ours voice and breath muscles, and more represent the acting skills.

If we want to have a stabilized good voice intonation and a nice vibrato we need to have good and long breath to support all of these aspects.

How to practice and get good breath? I found an interesting statement in book by Biserka&Dusan Cvejic

“Soundless breathing exercises cannot develop optimal breathing for singing because it’s a result of the co-ordinated operations of all parts of the vocal apparatus.

Proper breathing is practiced by the singers who succeeded in creating a good ringing tone, and not by those who can take enormous quantities of air, keep them for a long time and let them out over a long period of time. All they have big and long breath, but not necessarily a proper tone emission.

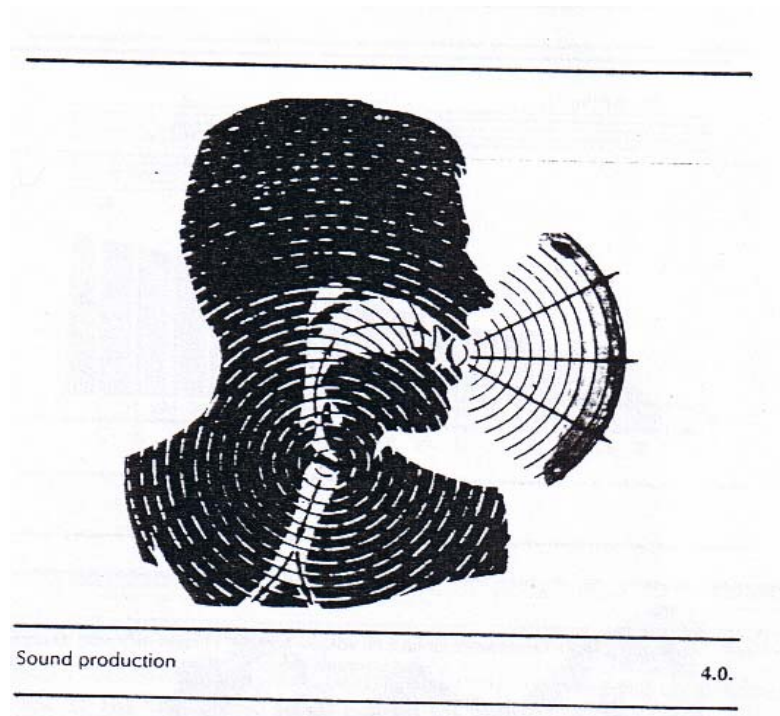
Soundless breathing exercises might be a good idea for strengthening the muscles of the respiratory tract, and for acquiring the knowledge about the muscles that should be exploited in executing the breathing. It can also be noticed in “limbering” prior to singing, but it needs to be said that the term warming up is incorrect, for it is not the voice that is warmed up, but the muscles that facilitate creation of the singing voice” (Cevijc 1994 : 87).

It is important to practice with vocal exercises to get a longer and more stabilized breath, but of course we can also have gymnastics exercises preferably before the performance to warm up our muscles for singing. Practise on our body and muscles in general will increase our breath and singing abilities.

A very important thing is that singers should be careful with cigarettes and alcohol because of the negative effect on their breath and their voice.

Resonator knowledge

All instruments have their own resonator, so also the human voice. The human body is one big resonator, especially the head and the chest. Knowledge about this is most important because if you know where you need to feel the vibrations of the voice means that you know to control your voice. The better you know how to use the resonator's areas for different tones, high or low, the better will be the sound and penetration of the voice.



“Voice teachers are extremely fond of using the term head and chest resonances. A voice is properly trained if in its entire range it has traces of both. When one sings it is possible to feel vibrations in the face (the mask) and the chest areas.

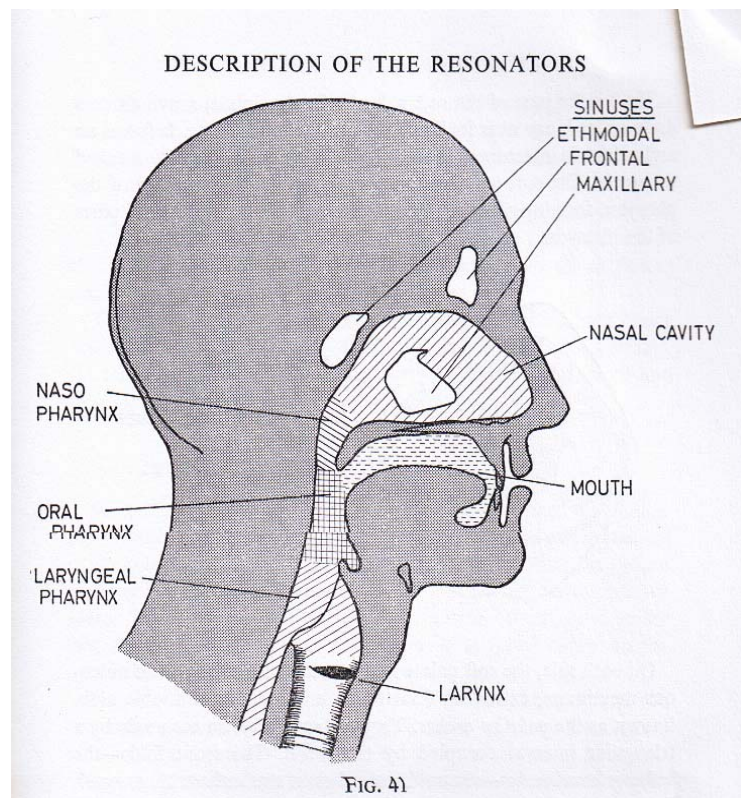
Voices that resonate in the head are shining, ringing, metallic voices, while those that resonate in chest are dark and “beefy”. The sound of a voice “in the mask” is an indication of the proper voice placement.

All resonating cavities should operate concurrently, now more vigorously, now less vigorously, depending on the pitch of emitted tone. Mixed registers, evenness of voice (an ideal of singing technique) largely depends on the “play” of resonances and on timely inclusion of proper resonances. Of course, we should not forget breathing and breath control that form an indelible part of a voice production mechanism. Co-ordinated operations of breathing support and resonances ensure a vocally and technically proper tone emission.

Resonances shape the tone, they give it beauty and colour, make it penetrating and able to ride the orchestra, depending on the way we use them” (Cvejic 1994: 143).

Head resonances

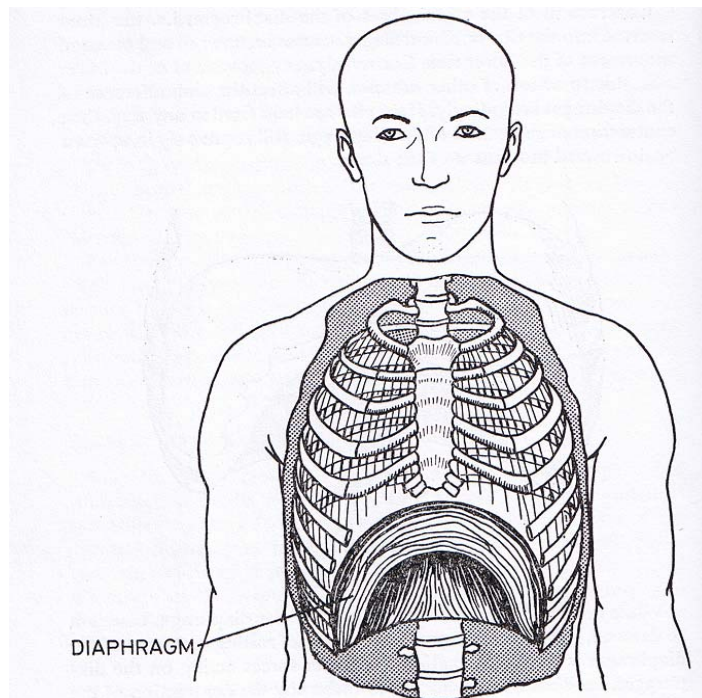
A Head resonance consists of a system of resonating cavities above the vocal cords, and is very important because if we want to have good high notes we need to have a proper use of the head resonance.



The feel of the resonances (the mask) signal to the singer whether he or she has the high singing format in the timbre. Head resonances are the most important indications of the sound of a singer's voice.

Chests resonances

“Chests resonances improve the operations of vocal cords. If one simultaneously uses head and chests resonances, vocal cords operate perfectly on the “mixed” principle, which makes it possible for the people not to hear the breaks in the voice. Evenness of voice is thus achieved. It is important to stress that abuse of the “mask” and “chest” eventually causes damage to voice” (Cvejic 1994: 148).



“Excessive use of the head resonator “mask” alone (without the chests resonator) gradually makes the voice thin, timbre less, and ugly. Abuse of the chests, a forced chests resonator, makes the voice heavier and exposes the passages that wasn’t in evidence before, and makes the top notes extremely difficult to sing” (Cvejic 1994: 149).

Proper knowledge about resonators is very important on stage in different opera roles with different tasks; when we need to sing arias or recitatives; if we have task from stage director to sing lying on bed, or to sing reversed back from audience.

Proper sound of the voice on the principles of “mixed” the chest and head resonance, makes the voice prettier, penetrating which is imported when you are on stage with orchestra.

Marking technique

What is marking technique?

This technique helps the singer to maintain a fresh voice during stage rehearsals and be ready for performance.

One of the most frequently asked questions are how do the singers overcome certain problems, like colds? My experience is that it is quite impossible to sing while having one. Before the opera is staged, the piano rehearsals are held. Next is a rehearsal with the stage director, which, most of the time starts early in the morning and last for almost the whole day. When I asked first tenor in Belgrade opera house during rehearsals for L'elisir D'amore how he could stay fresh for performance when the stage director requested to repeat the same very hard vocal plays five times, he said: "I simply "mark" in fact I mix piano singing and falsetto"¹.

Finally, the whole ensemble is moved to the stage. Those are the general rehearsals, something like a stage performance, but with no audience. That means that singers have to give in everything they have.

If the singer is not careful during rehearsals, he (or she) can experience certain problems at the show itself.

The singer has to learn how to control the voice during the rehearsals prior to the main ones, in order to keep the voice from falling apart at the opening night, or any other performing nights.

I have witnessed some operas that have lost a lot of their primal quality, just because the singers could not sustain themselves at the rehearsals. Their voices would just vanish into thin air and then start to crack; naturally, the whole show would be waste of time.

Therefore, this "marking" technique is very important, to protect the singers voice.

¹ Private interview with Radivoje Simic tenor Belgrade, Serbia & Montenegro, April 2005

Knowledge of styles

One more parameter is of importance to the singers, the singing “in the style”.

What does that mean?

“An old adage tells us prudently that “style reflects the true image of a man”. This applies to music too, for a composer surely imbued his music with his or her own musical style that, doubtless, mirrors his or her own attitude towards music, and the era in which the music was composed, and the circumstances prevalent in it.

The composer has imbued his music with his or her musical thoughts. So, the first requirement of an appropriate style is the accuracy with which one sings the notes. Next come, the composer’s instructions. No alterations should be made of the original score. One has to fulfil the composer’s wishes.

So that alterations should not be made in an arbitrary way by singers, conductors or stage directors, a way out would be to stick to the notes and to the composer’s instructions, for the composers were top-notch musicians who resisted the temptations of the time and survived every modern influence and remained forever young and topical, in short they were the classics” (Cvejić 1994: 245).

However, if the singer even well educated and technically superior, and no matter how great actor or dancer (he or she) might be, misses the style, the whole performance loses a great deal of its value.

Singing “in the style”, means that one cannot sing Mozart like singing Donizetti, or singing Handel like Verdi.

STAGE PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Singers don't have just vocal problems in opera plays, what already is described in the chapters before, but also stage problems.

I will try to describe some of stage problems the singer may experience on stage during the performances and rehearsals.

When you are an opera singer you have to make good overbalance vocal and stage acting at the same time. If you are a great singer with great vocal possibilities, but very poor to show the emotions and character of a role, you need to practise more and find proper ways in cooperation with the stage director.

But what are the real problems on stage and how much does vocal and stage acting parameters depend upon each other?

As I described in the vocal chapter, breath is a most important tool for singing and we need to have tranquil breath and to gain breath from the abdomen. But very often on stage when we need to dance, fight or simply take a run, our breath is accelerating and unstable. This is normal but affects on singing.

“Just to dance is hard, just to fight is hard, and just to sing is hard but when you need to sing and fight, dance in same time...! When I am in fight scene with sword ho is have weight 1kilo in first act trio (opera “Il Trovatore by Verdi”) my breath going up in chest and I all the time need to be very careful and control and mix abdomen and chests breath”².

The singer must be fitted and have a good condition for performance when he or she needs to dance or fight during the singing.

“Because of stage directors eccentricities we singers are also pressurized into adopting a modern approach to the art of acting; we are asked to sing on scaffolding, or to be clambering up and down a huge staircase while we sing, or to sing in a makeshift concentration camp or in basket of which the size was a mere 1,5 x 1,5 metres, or they hoist us to altitudes from which the young and the old alike would become dizzy in their heads, and so on and so forth”(Cvejic 1994: 245) .

² Interview with Jose Cura tenor BBC production London Royal Opera House, on DVD opera “Il Trovatore” by Giuseppe Verdi, 2003

Singers need to be ready and prepared for all tasks led by the stage director that is of course within “normal” and possible limits.

The singer needs to know how to stay in “style”, behaving on stage in different operas from different epochs. For example in Mozart operas, when you dance a *menuet* or kiss the hand of the lady in Don Giovanni, you need to do that in a proper way with style. For this you will need a choreographer to help you.

Some time the professional singers don't want to take advice from the stage director, because they think: “I have sung this role (Dona Elvira from Don Giovanni by Mozart) so many times and I know character very well and I don't need any alternative”.

I remember when the famous stage director Jonathan Miller reacted on this: “Ok very well, but can you please tell me when last time you were talking to Dona Elvira on the phone³?!” Singer's must understand that even if they sing one character for so many years, they ought to refresh and upgrade the performance together with the stage director.

In the learning process of a new role the stage director is a real big help. According to this I found very interesting explanations; that before singers start rehearsing in detail, the stage director should ask the members of the cast to recite their text in rhythm to the appropriate tune.

Stage director explains to every member of the cast what their respective parts are all about, with specific reference made to that century and style, including the historical background and costumes used, so that everybody involved should know the personality they are portraying and the relationship between the various parts of the opera.

After that, the stage rehearsals will start with the coach, with special emphasis on the music, or for example heralds, the action which accompanies it, and so on, whereupon the stage director demonstrates to members of the cast a certain view of the respective roles.

Stage movements is most important and need to be in style, no semaphoring on the stage, no exaggerated gesturing; gestures must be in tune with action, and especially with the music, because music tells it all.

³ Rehearsals with Jonathan Miller on opera “Don Giovanni” Kristiansand, Norway August 2005

Good relationships between the members of a cast on stage are another very important matter, the way they react to their partner's actions, and they shouldn't be ever too relaxed. Nor should they move across the stage with indifference. They are supposed to follow a certain action, and to listen to their partners and to react to their actions in an appropriate way. During the opera show singers should "sing out" the pauses expertly. Singing pauses are extremely important and they have to be filled with meaning. Young singers, with no experience often do not know what to do during a pause, their movements become unnatural, they clap their hands, or they forget about their partners. Music is not only sounds, but also silence or quiet moments which, dramatically, sometimes have the same significance as the speech. A pause between phrases reveals the artist's inner force. Only experienced and honest artists know how to fill out the pauses and capable of breathing life into silence.

At the end of this chapter I will conclude;

His (or her) voice and body must co-ordinate if he or she is going to be fully expressive. His imagination and understanding of the character which he is playing must be reflected in a body supple and responsive to its demands.

His (or her) voice must be flexible, capable of a great variety of pitch and colour, reacting instantly to the subtleties of the text and the emotional range of his part.

If the body is rigid the voice will reflect its rigidity.

How is relation between the vocal aspect and stage acting in opera plays “Don Giovanni” by Mozart and “L’elisir D’amore” by Donizetti?

First: we can see that those two operas are from different historical periods: “Don Giovanni” belongs to classicism and “L’Eissir d’amore” to romantism, which means they have different musical and stage styles. Second: “L’Elissir d’amore” is a comedy based on a love story that begins in a little village with common village people. “Don Giovanni” is a drama based on a popular story of the most famous lover of all time where the justice is a leading idea.

This basic and very simple description of two the operas can already give an instruction how to make a good connection between a vocal and stage acting parameter in order to help the singer, who is performing some of these roles, to present audience the characters, the story and the time of the opera in the best way to the audience.

Since I in the previous chapters have been comparing the vocal and stage acting parameter one by one, and concluded that these two are depending on each other, I would like to show by using these two examples, which are completely different, how much a singer needs to be prepared for the performance of these two operas.

The singer needs to know the basic interpretation of operas from the classicism. In this case it is “Don Giovanni”, and it is not recommended to sing with glissandos and portamentos, but with elegant use of timbre changing in voice. In “L’Elissir d’amore” glissandos and portamentos are allowed to use, but of course only where the composer wrote it.

In Mozart’s “Don Giovanni” we need elegance in acting, especially for the main role without any sudden moves or sudden moving on the stage: the singer must always keep in his mind that Don Giovanni is the greatest and the most elegant lover in the world. Leporello, Don Giovanni’s servant, is longing to become a gentleman.

In “L’Elissir d’amore” a singer has to be clumsy in his movements in order to show Nemorino’s character as a naive, pure hearted and good man, Dulcamara as a false doctor, but as a very wise and intelligent man who is ready to do anything to get some money etc.

After we finish studying the roles and their characters with the director and in the musical sense with the conductor as well, we are facing the problem how to find a good balance between the vocal and stage acting aspect so that none of them would have a negative influence on each other.

Comparing these two operas, “Don Giovanni” and “L’Elisir d’amore”, I would like to show the typical “traps” for the singers. The question is where they are able to avoid it and find a good balance between a vocal and stage acting aspect.

In these first examples, I would like to present the vocal difficulties and the differences in vocal performance, which can be expected in some of the roles of these two operas.

Observing the arias of the main characters, Nemorino’s (“L’Elisir d’amore”) and Don Giovanni’s (“Don Giovanni”), we can see that they are different; the aria of Nemorino and the whole part is so demanding and high that the tenor, during the play in ensembles and even in aria “Una furtiva lagrima”, is singing in high register:

68 Un so-lo i-stan - te i pal - pi - ti

del suo bel cor sen - tir!... i miei so - spir con -

- fon - de - re per po - co a' suoi so - spir!... i

pal - pi - ti, i pal - pi - ti sen - tir!... con - fon - dere i miei co'suoi so -

- spir!

MACGIORE

69 Cie - lo, si può mo - rir; di più non

MACGIORE

chiedo, non chie - do, ah! cie - lo, si può, si può mo -

- rir; di più non chiedo, non chie -

- do.

In addition, he express deep emotions with different dynamic timbres. The typical Donizetti's virtuous cadenza emerges at the end is quite difficult to sing after the whole aria... On the other hand, the role of Don Giovanni is generally not that difficult in vocal sense, and the whole part is written in optimum register, but it requires a very elegant singing, where the accent is more on acting.

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UBAETI KAO KINER ZLEAFUCIJI

Nr.16. Kanzonette

Allegretto

D. Giov.

Mandoline

Str.pizz.

Horch

Deh

D.G.

auf den Klang der Zi - ther, mach auf das Git - ter, o
 vic - ni al - la fi - ne - stra, o mio te - so - ro, deh

D.G.

lin - dre mei - ne Pein und laß mich glück - lich sein!
 vie - ni a con - so - lar il pian - to mi - o!

D.G.

Läßt du mich trost - los flehn, so
 Se ne - ghi a me - di dar qual -

D.G.

macht ein ra - scher Tod, du Fal - sche, sollst es sehn, ein
 che ri - sto - ro, da - van - ti a - ghi oc - chi tuoi mo

Therefore, in Don Giovanni's Kanzonette the singer has to show the beauty of the voice and sing for the purpose of courting, accompanied just by the mandolin and a very quiet accorded accompaniment by orchestra. However the other characters in this Mozart's opera,

such as Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, Don Ottavio, requires a very demanding vocal interpretation.

Because of the specific libretto and the play itself, very often the directors tell the singers to change their voice, producing the unarticulated sounds to show the different conditions such as illness, crying etc. In the aria of Dulcamara by Donizetti for example, where he is enumerating the medicaments for paralyzed, asthmatic, and people with gastritis, he is trying to imitate all these illnesses:

The image displays a musical score for the aria 'Dulcamara' by Donizetti. It consists of three systems of music, each with a vocal line (bass clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The first system includes the lyrics: 'dò. Ei move i pa - ra - li - ti - ei, spe - disce gli apo - ple - ti - ci, gli asma - ti - ci, gli a -'. The second system includes: '- sfi - ti - ci, gl'isterici, i dia - betici; gua - ri - sce timpa - ni - ti - di, e scrofole e ra -'. The third system includes: '- chi - ti - di, e fino il mal di fe - gato che in moda di - ven - to. Mi - ra - bi - le pe''. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and chords, with dynamic markings such as *p* and *f*. A measure number '69' is visible in a box above the piano part in the third system.

With performances like these, there is a strong possibility of voice tiredness and even the voice breaking.

In the recitative of Nemorino, when he finally gets his Love potion (which is just an ordinary wine bought from Dulcamara), the singer needs to pretend that he is drunk which is symbolised by hiccups, belch and other unarticulated sounds:

95

RECITATIVO

SCENA VII.

NEMORINO

Ca-ro Eli - sir! sei mio! sì, tut-to mio... Com'esser dee pos-

RECIT.^{vo}

p

N

-sente la tua vir-tù, se, non bevuto an-cora, di tanta gioja già mi colmi il

N

96 pet - - - to! Ma perchè mai l'ef-fetto non ne poss'io ve-

ALL.^o f *RECIT.^{vo}*

N

(beve)

-dere prima che un giorno inter non sia trascorso? Be - vasi.

f *f* *f* *ALL.^{to}*

N

(beve ancora)

Oh! buono! Oh! caro! un altro sorso. Oh! qual di vena in

f *f* *tremolo*

In "Don Giovanni" there is another stage-acting trap, (who is even more extreme and could in fact destroy the singer's vocal aspect, but also, if the singer is very well prepared for the role, it could give a strong impact to the audience) at the end of second act where Don Giovanni expects Komturo to join him for dinner... Very often the director asks the singer to really eat during the singing:

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Donna Elvira

Don Giovanni ha, Schänd-licher, ha, Schänd-licher!
cor per - fi-do, cor per - fi-do!

Bra-vo!
Bra-va!

Leporello
 Ha, Schänd-licher!
Cor per - fi-do!

Don Giovanni
 Jetzt laß mich es-sen, jetzt laß mich es-sen;
La - scia ch'io mangi, la - scia ch'io mangi; (Setzt

sich wieder zum Essen)

wenns dir be - lie - bet, spei-se mit mir.
e se ti pia - ce, man-gia con me.

Donna Elvira
 Nun, so ver - sin - ke denn im Pfluhl der Höl - le, als ew' - ge
Re - sta - ti, bar - ba - ro, nel lex - so im - mon - do, e - sem - pioor -

Leporello
 Wenn ih - re Kla - gen ihn nicht mehr rüh - ren, dann ist sein
Se - non si - nuo - ve nel suo do - lo - re, di sas-so hai

In both operas, I have found the similar imitation examples of unarticulated sounds and a show up of different conditions where the vocal and stage-acting parameters are wreathing and influencing each other. That means, if we exaggerate any of them, it would make a negative influence on each other.

The next “traps” for the singers would be the moving and dancing on the stage during singing.

I have found two examples: the first one in “L’elissir d’amore” in duet of Nemorino and Belcore, where Nemorino decides to join the Belcore’s army so he could earn money to buy some more of Love potion... In that part, the directors make a scene of an army polygon and ask the tenor, who is singing a very difficult and long duet, to pass the different obstacles on the polygon, to jump, to crawl etc...

NEM. LARGHETTO

21 LARGHETTO (Ai pe-ri - gli del-la guer - ra io so ben che e-spo-sto

167

BEL. NEM.

so - no. Venti scudi. Che do - ma - ni la patria ter - ra, zio, con-

BEL. NEM.

- giunti, ahimè, abban - do - no. E ben sonanti. Ma so pur che fuor di

que - - sta, al-tra stra - - da a me non re - - - sta per po -

rinf.

Oppure

- di - na so - lo un gior - no so - lo un giorno tri - on -

fp

- ter del cor d'A - dina so - - lo un giorno tri - - - on -

The second example is in Don Giovanni: the scene of marriage between Masetto and Zerlina where the two of them have to dance while singing:

Zerlina
 Komm, o kom-me, Ge-lieb-ter, zum Fe-ste, laßt uns tan-zen und sin-gen, ihr
Vie-ni, vie-ni, ca-ri-noe go-dia-mo, e can-tia-mo, e bal-lia-mo, e sal-

Masetto
 Komm, o kom-me, Ge-lieb-te, zum Fe-ste, laßt uns tan-zen und sin-gen, ihr
Vie-ni, vie-ni, ca-ri-nae go-dia-mo, e can-tia-mo, e bal-lia-mo, e sal-

la!
 la!

Gä-ste, laßt uns tan-zen und sin-gen, ihr Gä-ste; o die Freu-de, die Freu-de ist
tia-mo, vie-ni, vie-ni, ca-ri-noe go-dia-mo; che pia-cer, che pia-cer che sa-

Gä-ste, laßt uns tan-zen und sin-gen, ihr Gä-ste; o die Freu-de, die Freu-de ist
tia-mo, vie-ni, vie-ni, ca-ri-nae go-dia-mo; che pia-cer, che pia-cer che sa-

Fl. Fig. VI.

55

Z.
 da! Ah, o die Freu-de, die Freu-de ist da!
 rä! A che pia-cer, che pia-cer che sa-rä!

M.
 da! Ah, o die Freu-de, die Freu-de ist da!
 rä! A che pia-cer, che pia-cer che sa-rä! Chor der

Sopr.
 Ah, A

Alt
 Ah, A

Ten.
 A

Baß
 A

f G. Orch.

During the dancing and jumping on the scene, it is normal that the heart beating and breath accelerates, and we need more oxygen. Often we start taking air more from our lung then

from abdomen, but for singing however, we need a calm breath taken from abdomen. The singer must be in a good physical condition for these kinds of requests which are, more or less, present in every opera.

As I already said in the chapter “stage problems and possible solutions”, the singer needs to “sing” the pauses in order to emphasize the importance of moments in a play.

I have found some examples in “Don Giovanni’s” recitatives which are only accompanied by harpsichord without an orchestra, which is different from “L’elissir d’amore” where Donizetti, as a typical romantic composer, wrote few recitatives and accompanied them by the orchestra. Since “Don Giovanni” consists of 45% recitatives without orchestra, only accompanied with harpsichord, the singer has a great liberty of interpretation, which means that if he does not play with pauses, prolongations and abridgments, he will be dull and unvaried.

Neunte Szene
Don Giovanni. Zerlina.

63

Rezitativ

Don Giovanni

D.G. *Be-freit sind wir nun endlich, du mein rei - zen-des Kind, von die - sem Töl-pel. Nun, was sagst du da -*
Al - fin siam li - be - ra - ti, Zer - li - net - ta gen - til, da quel scioo-co - ne. Che ne di - te, mio

Cont.
Cemb.

Zerlina *ah on ce bit mais moi* Don Giovanni

D.G. *zu, ging's nicht vortrefflich? Gnäd'ger Herr, er ist mein Bräutigam. Wie, der da? Glaubst du, ein Mann von*
ben, so far pu - li - to? Si - gnore, emio ma - ri - to. Chi, co-lui? Vi par che un o - nest'

D.G. *Eh - re, ein Ka - va - lier wie ich, der könn't es dul - den, daß die - ses lie - be, gol - di - ge Ge - sicht - chen, die*
uo - mo, un no - bil Ca - va - lier, co - me io mi van - to, pos - sa sof - frir, che quel vi - set - to d'o - ro, quel

Zerlina *al ves -*

D.G. *zu - cker - sü - Ben Lip - pen die Beu - te ei - nes Bau - ern - töl - pels wer - den? Gnäd'ger*
vi - so in - zuc - che - ra - to, da un bi - fol - cac - cio vil sia stra - paz - za - to? Ma Si -

Zerlina *sposare ja obo - cal ho mur'a de sa wimen* Don Giovanni

D.G. *Herr, ich versprach, ihmals Frau an - zu - ge - hö - ren. Die - ses Wort, es ist null und nicht - tig; du bist*
gnor, io gli die - di pa - ro - la di sposar - lo. Tal pa - ro - la non va - le un ze - ro; voi non

However, relationships between vocal and stage-acting aspect in these two operas is very connected and they are depending on each other even if this two operas belong to different times and styles. Singers have serious tasks in these two operas and they need to be prepared well through the cooperation with a pianist, conductor, stage director, and collages to find a proper way of interpreting their own roles.

It is recommended that singers should do every detail in the libretto, stage movements, vocal tasks approach with the full attention, and observe each aspect separately in the beginning of the learning process, and finally make the vocal and stage-acting aspect unique.

Than we will experience a performance, which turns out to be a pleasure for everybody, including singers, audience, orchestra and all people included in the opera production.

Conclusion

By studying opera as a vocal-musical-scene work of art, but also as a human need for artists to express their own feelings and emotions through opera and pass it on to the audience, I have realized that singers have a problem to unite or combine their vocal technique and stage-acting movement, so they could share the writer's and composer's thoughts and ideas to the audience.

I wanted to do a research and to see how much these two aspects have been connected and depending on each other by comparing two operas: "Don Giovanni" by W.A.Mozart and "L'elissir d'amore" by Gaetano Donizzeti. I hope that I have managed to give the answer to the question: How much have these two parameters been connected and how much have they been depending on each other?

The singers have a very difficult assignment; they have to use complicated actions and moves, even beyond the limits of the possible, such as singing, dancing and fighting at the same time, so that the scene or action looks more natural.

They have to use their skills and to find a solution for all problems they might have on the stage in order to not harm their own voice and make it tired or useless. If that happens, the whole event and play will be lost, and ruined as castle of cards...

That process of preparation is very difficult and long, but knowing that we will get the applause from the audience, which is an approval and gratitude for the work we have done, all difficulties during the preparation will be forgotten.

Regarding the relation between the vocal and stage-acting aspect in the operas "Don Giovanni" and "L'elissir d'amore", they are equally treated and equally demanding, as I have already shown through the examples, no matter these two operas are different by its time and content.

Without a constant training of our voice and body and a constant desire for learning something new, we cannot be adequately prepared for different assignments that are expected from us. Especially if we know that Opera as a work of art has been constantly changing together with the human need through the time (as I wrote in the chapter "Evolution of opera") and will always move the singers beyond the limits of what is possible.

For the singers, as well as for other artists, there is nothing else left but merging knowledge and talent for the future.

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