

THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF COLORATURA TECHNIQUE

IN SELECTED ROSSINI ARIAS FOR MEZZO-SOPRANO

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**ABSTRACT**

**DISSERTATION:** The Development and Implementation of Coloratura Technique in Selected Rossini Arias for Mezzo-Soprano

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The mezzo-soprano arias in Rossini operas have captivated audiences for the last two centuries with their impressive and extensive vocal gymnastics, or coloratura. A strong coloratura technique is necessary for the successful performance of Rossini arias by mezzo-sopranos. This dissertation seeks to establish a systematic method of developing coloratura technique and implementing it in seven Rossini arias. An original correlation is made between coloratura development and the Accent Method. Historical and modern pedagogical resources affirm the practical importance of a systematic technique based on abdominal breath support for singing, upon which the Accent Method is based. Facets of the Accent Method as previously applied to the singing voice will be applied specifically to the development of coloratura. This method has proven effective in building vocal stamina, pitch accuracy, and speed, among other qualities necessary in coloratura development. Various means of applying this method to the melismatic choices of the mezzo-soprano are then explored, along with multiple interpretations of Rossini arias by current and past performing artists. Examples of appropriate melismas are given, along with a series of technical vocal factors for each mezzo-soprano to consider.

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# The Development and Implementation of Coloratura Technique in Selected Rossini Arias for Mezzo-Soprano

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Coloratura, the art of elaborately ornamenting vocal phrases, has been a source of musical inspiration and enjoyment to singers and audiences for centuries. Vocal feats that test the boundaries of speed, agility, and range are the musical equivalent of impressive athletic endeavors. It is no wonder, then, that the operas of Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) received such widespread popularity in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rossini introduced a style of coloratura in this era that was uniquely captivating and robust. His traditionally Italian melodic language coupled with his novel approach to orchestration and an intuitive flair for comic opera<sup>1</sup> determined his success as a composer of operas. Rossini was one of the first composers to recognize and display the vocal caliber of the coloratura mezzo-soprano voice in heroic, central roles on the operatic stage. His compositional style enables mezzo-sopranos to develop their voices to the greatest possible extent in speed and range. Such show-stopping arias as “Una voce poco fa” from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (The Barber of Seville) and “Non piu mesta” from *La Cenerentola* (Cinderella), are recognized as some of the most challenging and technically impressive works in the operatic repertoire. Coloraturic feats permeate all of Rossini’s operas and are particularly featured in his comedic output. His comic operas are characterized by a melodic and rhythmic *brio*, an incessant musical motion, of which coloratura plays a key role.

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<sup>1</sup> Also referred to as *opera buffa* or *farse* (Italian), and *opéra comique* (French). Rossini composed his last four operas in French, while his first thirty-five operas, including the seven studied in this dissertation, are composed to Italian librettos.

Coloratura technique as discussed in this dissertation is of primary interest to lyric mezzo-sopranos and their mentors, and several facets of the technique can also be applied to all voices. As a mezzo-soprano, I have studied, sung, and recorded these seven selected arias as well as other Rossini arias, songs, duets, and vocal works. My unique personal involvement with these Rossini arias has given me a practical vantage point from which to investigate this topic. The mezzo-soprano should have a knowledge of the melismas that suit her voice the best and the understanding of how to implement them. The lyric coloratura mezzo-soprano is the voice type most associated with Rossini arias composed for the mezzo-soprano, primarily due to the natural agility of the lighter lyric voices. Dramatic mezzo-sopranos can perform Rossini but must approach several of the more demanding melismas differently. A certain amount of vocal agility can be practiced by all voice types for the sake of vocal health and stamina, and to increase repertoire and marketability (Kirkpatrick, 2008, p. 359). So even though this dissertation will be of primary use to the lyric coloratura mezzo-soprano and teachers of this *fach*<sup>2</sup>, general elements of coloratura technique discussed in this dissertation apply to all voice types, including bass-baritones, tenors, mezzo-sopranos, and sopranos, and their subsets. Thus, in a broader capacity, the topic is of interest to all singers who wish to undertake coloratura singing.

This dissertation will focus on the establishment and growth of a solid coloratura technique and its implementation in seven Rossini arias for mezzo-soprano. Different varieties of coloratura will be explored, as well as specific applications of coloratura technique in seven selected Rossini arias. A performance component in the form of a CD serves as a significant portion of this dissertation project. The CD contains my performance interpretation of seven Rossini arias according to the principles of coloratura vocal technique. It is my desire that this

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<sup>2</sup> Fach: German term for “voice category”; a method of classifying singers, primarily opera singers, according to the range, weight, and color of their voices.

dissertation encourage young mezzo-sopranos and voice teachers to pursue the challenge of developing and enjoying a traditional, healthy vocal technique when singing and teaching nineteenth-century Rossini arias.

The art of coloratura, particularly of Rossinian coloratura, is worth being preserved for the enjoyment and enrichment of both singers and audiences. As Damien Colas notes in *Cambridge Companion to Rossini*, “Vocal virtuosity and the exaltation of rhythm, both dear to Rossini, are means of expression capable of inducing in the listener (and the performer) an aesthetic pleasure such as to need no justification” (Senici, 2004, p. 119). The serious study of Rossini’s beautiful arias indeed requires no justification; the sheer delight they afford the listener is sufficient defense for their study and performance. The goal of beautiful coloratura singing is attainable through the guidance of good voice teachers and the implementation of a solid technique. This dissertation seeks to ensure that this goal may be realized among singers interested in keeping this valuable and impressive art alive.

### **Coloratura: A Brief Historical Background**

The term “coloratura” was originally used to define melodic ornamentation improvised according to a set style. It is found in singing treatises as early as *Pratica Musica* (appearing as *coloraturae*) by the German theorist and composer Hermann Finck (1527-1558) (Kirby, 2001). The term stems from the sixteenth century verb *colouring*, denoting the addition of “black notes,” that is, quarters and eighths, to fill in the longer “white notes,” or whole notes, in a melody, for the purpose of interest and variety (Celletti, 1991, p. 14). The aim of sixteenth-century coloratura was elegance and lightness. This era’s coloratura consisted of a small range compared to later styles of the art. Available documents on the beginnings of operatic coloratura date as far back as the early seventeenth century with *Le Nuove Musiche* by Giulio Caccini



(1501-1618) (Carter, 2001). Caccini, considered one of the founders of opera, championed improvisatory embellishment and vocal virtuosity, paving the way for Baroque styles of coloratura. Baroque coloratura in the operas of such composers as Monteverdi, Steffani, and Scarlatti involved a more energized approach than the light elegance of sixteenth-century *colouring*. Written accounts from the era testify to the virtuosic and passionate renditions of Baroque opera by Italian singers and on the increased vocal ranges in operas that required a more robust technique. The stylistic evolution of coloratura continued into the 18<sup>th</sup> century: greater freedom of embellishments and a wider range of dynamics became the standard in operas by Porpora, Vinci, Hasse, and most prominently, Handel. Coloratura in these composers' operas focused on the performer's impressive range and skill in order to further illustrate noble sentiments and passions. This emphasis on the impressive feats of the performer was maintained into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, reaching its zenith in music composed by the impressive, influential, and ever-popular Italian composer Gioachino Rossini.

Rossini's success was born overnight in 1813 with *Di tanti palpiti* and lasted his entire musical life, allowing him to retire comfortably in 1828 at the age of thirty-six. His style was imitated by his contemporaries, including Donizetti and Bellini, and his approaches to musical dramaturgy and form were models that influenced the thinking of Italian composers for the next half century (Gossett, 2006, p. xii). Although his operas occupy a relatively short period (1810-1829), they are as popular today among opera-lovers as they were among the throngs that attended Italian and French opera houses of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Art and Aesthetic Significance of Rossinian Coloratura**

Rossinian coloratura is valuable from historical and artistic perspectives, its primary worth lying in the aesthetic delights afforded by the skill from the romantic musical era to the

present. Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) was the great master of romantic coloratura compositional style. By the 1820s, he was the most celebrated composer of his generation in Europe and Britain (Servadio, 2003, p. 117). Gaia Servadio poetically states that Rossini's "melodic verve" coupled with the "seed of harmonic genius planted by Mozart and Haydn" in his training days in Bologna may have in fact created the Italian school of the nineteenth century (Servadio, 2003, p. 22). The popularity of Rossini's works along with their consistent revivals within the musical community speak to the aesthetic power of his musical art.

Rossini was a paradoxical man, revealing to the public an affable, carefree persona while privately waxing industrious on an immense operatic output. He was able to compose twenty-six operas in the span of a decade (1813-1823), sometimes preparing an entire opera within the span of a month or less (Gossett, 2001). Despite this speed and diligence in his work, Rossini indulged in a great deal of socializing, making time for friends, admirers, and patrons of the arts as his popularity grew (Servadio, 2003). The paradoxical characteristic of Rossini's life – namely the downplay of effort in order to achieve a confident, carefree public image – is mirrored in the paradoxical elements enmeshed in the technical facets of the development of coloratura. Well-performed coloratura will seem an effortless frivolity to the listener, as though requiring little preparation and springing from sincere, immediate wells of emotion. In reality, the carefree quality of excellent coloratura requires an immense amount of commitment, practice, and preparation in order to be achieved. The operatic emotions conveyed through body language, facial expression, and vocal timbre are calculated moves, rehearsed multiple times to convey the emotions of the arias. Rossini realized, as performers do, that he could not reveal his secret to success; he was thus labeled as an indolent, gluttonous genius by those who saw only his extravagant pomp (Servadio, 2003, p. 85). Rossini understood the paradoxical elements of life

as a performer and thereby took pains to preserve his affluent public image. Similarly, the Rossinian performer is required to practice diligently behind the scenes in order to appear to perform coloratura with natural ease in public.

The primary allure of renowned Rossini arias is their showy coloratura. The impressive displays of vocal prowess enliven the personalities of operatic characters on the stage, and text-painting takes on a new dimension within the exuberance of the melismatic line. Instead of working the music around the text, which became a prevalent compositional technique in later music-dramas, Rossini chose to work the libretto around the music. This approach gives nod to the Baroque aesthetic principle that fantasy dominates everything (Celletti, 1991). In a similar vein, Rossini's ornamentation has more to do with the overarching melodic phrase than it does with individual words (Colas, 2004, p. 116). He was intentional in where he chose to place melismas, and the text played a role in serving the needs of the melodic, virtuosic line. Through these exaltations of coloratura, Rossini was able to transcend realism for what he deemed more desirable: portraying the emotion of the character and displaying the skill of the singer. It seems that his music is then able to spread its wings, unhindered by the constraints of text. This exaltation of the music was paramount to Rossini's sense of aesthetic expression, garnering him the musical accolades of opera enthusiasts throughout the last two centuries.

### **Factors Involved in the Execution of Rossinian Coloratura**

The tradition of Rossinian music has long been lost . . . That vivacious, bold, brilliant music requires great lightness of technique, flexibility, and skills in trills and runs . . . The practice of so-called dramatic shrieking and acts of violence engaged in by today's singers has made their larynxes resistant to such subtleties.  
~ Théophile Gautier, 1847 (as quoted by Parr, 2011, p. 83)

A mere twenty years after the original performances of Rossini's works, the famous poet and critic Théophile Gautier was already decrying a lack of adherence to Rossinian tradition among performers. Gautier's statement reveals the subjective and shifting nature of musical

tastes and judgments. Much of the ado made by critics such as Gautier on coloraturic style may stem from the natural phenomenon of nostalgia: lovers of vocal art will often uplift a previous era of singing, often unspecified, as being better than the current fair (Potter & Sorrell, 2012, p. 91; Rosselli, 1992, p. 91). Be this as it may, some truth is often contained within visceral responses to past and present performance tradition. We cannot simply dismiss Gautier's criticism and that of other early music scholars as a mere reflection of a longing for the "good old days." It may be true that Rossinian tradition waned in the mid-nineteenth century in certain opera houses. But what was Rossinian tradition? And if it was lost twenty years after its origin, how can we possibly regain it today? Some answers can be found within historical writings and will be explored in this dissertation.

Current research into Rossini's available writings, letters, and scores – particularly the critical editions – and analyses of recordings of mezzo-sopranos serve as our primary options for elucidation regarding early, Rossinian-approved performance practice. Closing this dissertation is a discography featuring the earliest available recordings of Rossini arias as well as more contemporary interpretations. Interestingly, modern performances based on the critical edition scores may prove more accurate to Rossini's coloratura style than early twentieth-century recordings, because late nineteenth-century coloratura practice varied slightly from Rossinian style and would have influenced early recordings (Gossett, 2009). Considering vocal tone and technique, however, the early twentieth century recordings may give us a closer picture of the sound of Rossinian singers. No recordings can bring us concrete evidence of Rossini's own taste, since they were recorded decades after his death. But they do shed light on the variety of Rossinian coloratura styles and interpretations throughout the last two centuries.

Rossini believed that all singers, whether dramatic or lyric, must be trained in agility in order to have complete control of the voice (Potter and Sorrell, 2012). Vocal pedagogues throughout the last three centuries have agreed with this concept of agility training, and most have specified its necessity for all voice types (Tosi, 1743; Tetrizzini, 1923; Manén, 1987; Bloem-Hubatka, 2012). A lack of agility training can lead to serious vocal challenges such as a wobbly vibrato and poor intonation. Alternately, if vocal agility is practiced regularly and properly, the singer will experience greater flexibility and control in slow, lyric pieces as well as melismatic compositions (Lamperti, 1957, p. 5). The requirement of proper coloratura technique and the methods for its implementation in Rossini arias will be addressed in Chapter 3.

Scholars have pondered whether Rossini was in favor of singers adding their own embellishments to his written-out melismas and cadenzas. It is now obvious based on the critical edition opera scores that Rossini molded his compositions, particularly the coloratura, to suit specific singers' voices. He was open to manipulating and changing the compositions for the purposes of variety, accessibility, and, with talented singers, displays of vocal prowess. Three different versions of "Una voce poco fa" exist in Rossini's handwriting. This is only one example of hundreds that reveal Rossini's flexibility regarding melismas (Gossett, 2009).

Rossini inherited the idea of compositional license from his musical predecessors in the eighteenth century. He expected the performer to exercise liberty in creating and performing his own embellishments (Mancini, 1774, p. 49). It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that composers required a stricter adherence to the written page. Some performers' improvisational decisions met with Rossini's approval, while others did not. Letters and musical comments reveal that Rossini gave multiple singers permission and even encouragement to add their own inspired melismatic touches to his arias (Celletti, 1991). He often did not mind if

words were changed, since the text was secondary to the music. The first performances of his operas, in which performers used their own improvisational skills, largely met with his approval (Potter and Sorrell, 2012). This was likely because Rossini himself chose many performers and trusted them with improvisational ornamentation. Later performances of his works often met with his disapproval. This may have been due to certain singers' inability to replicate Rossini's style. Rossini complained about the elite, private academies being replaced by institutional conservatories, a change which may have diminished the quality of singing necessary for performing his arias with success (Potter and Sorrell, 2012). Nevertheless, Rossini valued the musical input and improvisational decisions of several singers, paving the way for consideration of the prominence and musical legitimacy of melismas composed by the singers themselves in later Parisian performances of the mid-nineteenth century (Parr, 2011, p. 99). Substantiating the fact that improvisational skills were accepted and even required of professional singers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, renowned vocal pedagogue Manuel Garcia II stated that the florid style gives the singer the opportunity to "display the fertility of his imagination [while using the] flexibility of his voice" (Stark, 1999, p. 168). Rossini was willing, given certain parameters, to give the *diva* or *divo* a collaborative role in the interpretation of his arias.

Based on the evidence from historical sources, two determining factors for gaining Rossini's approval of melismatic improvisation were ornamental taste and accurate execution. If a performer's improvisational style matched that of Rossini's and contributed to the aria, then Rossini approved of the coloratura. And if the performer could execute the roulades effectively and musically, then both the coloratura and the performance would meet with Rossini's approval. In consideration of these factors, modern performers can successfully, and with a clear conscience, undertake Rossini arias if two criteria are met: 1) all ornaments and melismas must

be within the accepted Rossini style, as accurately as can be gathered from historical examples that met with his approval, and 2) the performer's own coloratura technique must be adequate for clean, flexible, and sustainable execution of the chosen melismas.

### **Definitions:**<sup>3</sup>

The terminology used in this dissertation includes slight variations of musical expressions about coloratura and Rossinian style. A list of definitions is included in order to clarify some of the terms used in relation to the art of coloratura and nineteenth century *da capo* aria form. Some of the terms can be used interchangeably.

**Coloratura:** Italian for 'coloring' and from Latin *colorare* (to color); florid figuration or ornamentation of all periods in vocal music; or 2) operatic roles in which such passages are frequent; or 3) singers who specialize in florid singing; synonyms include roulades, embellishments, melismas. The adjective form is most often applied to sopranos and mezzo-sopranos and has become increasingly used to refer to tenors (such as coloratura tenor Rockwell Blake) and bass-baritones (Samuel Ramey).

**Cabaletta:** the second, faster movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian double aria, most often made up of a stanza sung twice, the second time with ornamentation, and ending with a rousing coda.

**Cadenza:** a decorated cadence generally performed out of meter and noted for improvisatory purposes with a fermata; in vocal music, used to denote coloratura runs that may extend multiple bars further than the written notes, and are used only at closing sections and important cadential points. Cadenzas are generally constructed of ascending and descending

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<sup>3</sup> Definitions have been narrowed in order to apply succinctly to the context of this paper. They are not exhaustive. Definitions were primarily obtained from applicable articles in Oxford Music Online, unless otherwise noted. [oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.bsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music](http://oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.bsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music).

*passaggi*, with no change of chord within a particular ascending or descending section.

Traditional eighteenth-century operatic practice allowed three cadenzas in an aria, with the most elaborate one saved for the end. Rossini does not use cadenzas to heighten suspense in the middle of a melodic strophe as do later composers such as Bellini (Colas, 2004, p. 114).

**Cavatina:** a term used by some modern scholars to denote the first slow movement of a double aria (though historically, the accurate term would be *cantabile*), the second section being the *cabaletta*; often maintains a slow, romantic lyric quality. This term is also traditionally used to refer to a principal singer's opening aria.

**Desinence:** the "elongation of the final syllable of a verse or a drawn-out closure of a melodic phrase" used often in Italian melodies (Colas, 2004, p. 113). These are not to be confused with cadenzas, which are usually longer ornamental passages performed out of meter and indicated with a fermata.

**Diminution:** a term used during the Renaissance and Baroque periods to describe improvised embellishments, particularly a melisma that replaces a long note with shorter, faster notes; can also refer to the statement of a theme in shorter note values than originally associated with it.

**Fioratura:** Italian for 'flourish' or 'flowering;' any embellishment of a melodic line, either improvised or written out; used at times to denote smaller ornaments such as trills and mordents.

**Improvisation:** in the context of this paper, improvisation refers to any type of musical performance that strays from the notated score. It is more often called *ornamentation* (defined below) in early nineteenth-century Italian operas. Rossinian arias tend to be built on performance convention instead of a fixed musical score, because Rossini himself applauded singers who



could tastefully contribute their own coloratura within the given harmonic framework of the piece. Thus, improvisation, according to the Western art music definition, plays a significant role in performances of Rossinian works. Although singers normally learn their chosen melismas prior to a performance, seasoned performers may choose to vary melismas in the performance moment based on whim or a change in vocal capacity over the duration of a performance.

**Interpolation:** in Rossini arias, a term used for any ornamentation within the kernel of the phrase (as opposed to ornamental signals of closure such as desinences and cadenzas). Interpolation usually consists of small note values inserted within longer note values, adding interest to the internal phrase through vocal dexterity. As it requires metric flexibility, interpolation is normally found in lyric, *cantabile* sections and their reprises (Colas, 2004, p. 116).

**Melisma:** Greek for ‘song’ or ‘tune:’ a narrower specification of the word coloratura, denoting one ornamental vocal phrase or passage consisting of several notes sung to one syllable of text; often used to refer to passages in plainchant and Baroque styles, but can be used for other styles within the definition.

**Substitution:** a term used for the re-composing of an ornamental line. Interpolation adds notes, while substitution revises them. It is normally utilized in fast sections that require a complete replacement of a melisma if variety is desired. Substitution is primarily used in reprises of fast sections or oft-repeated melismatic lines.

**Ornamentation:** improvised embellishments added by singers to the score, or added by the composer to the score, usually with the purpose of showcasing vocal agility. In the *cabaletta*, there are three main locations for ornamentation: at a fermata for embellishment, at the reappearance of a basic stanza for elaboration, and in the codas. Rossini’s codas are similar in

structure and harmony to facilitate ease of ornamental improvisation. Ornamentation was at its florid height in Italy in the first half of the nineteenth-century due in no small part to Rossini, a champion of improvisational coloratura (Crutchfield, 2001). In Rossini arias, not all melodic segments are meant to be ornamented; some require ornamentation while with others it is impermissible based on their position and formal properties (Colas, 2004, p. 113).

### **Chapter Summary**

Coloratura in Rossini's mezzo-soprano arias is worth studying for its captivating brilliance as well as its historical and functional properties. The vocal technique necessary for successfully performing Rossini mezzo-soprano arias is of particular interest to lyric mezzo-sopranos but holds value for all voice types as a practice in agility. An analysis of both early and later recordings of Rossini arias reveals the variety of interpretations and improvised coloratura chosen by Rossini performers. Freedom to improvise melismas was granted by Rossini to chosen singers, and he expected performers to create embellishments to suit their unique voices. Given the wide range of possible embellishments within the parameters of Rossinian style and coupled with good technical training, singers today can confidently create melismas that suit their own voices in Rossini arias.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The art of nineteenth-century coloratura singing rests on solid historical and pedagogical foundations that attest to its thriving practice. Treatises, letters, and manuscripts detail various aspects of coloratura singing within nineteenth-century opera houses. Nevertheless, the systematic development and implementation of coloratura technique is the field of inquiry less traversed. The development of good vocal technique has been thoroughly researched, but writings that specifically address agility training are few. Published research on the application of coloratura technique to the style of coloratura found within Rossini arias is even less prevalent. The lack of research into the collaboration of these fields creates an opportunity for analyzing the development of coloratura technique within Rossini arias. This study incorporates both pedagogical and historical elements in order to arrive at technical conclusions for the development of coloratura based on pragmatic vocal traditions as well as modern pedagogical truths.

#### **The Need for a Systematic Development of a Coloratura Technique**

“Whoever has not the Agility of Voice, in Compositions of a quick or lively Movement, becomes odiously tiresome; and at last retards the Time so much, that every thing he sings appears to be out of Tune.”  
(Pier Francesco Tosi, 1926, p. 52)

The importance of a solid coloratura technique is evident when considering vocal compositions of a “quick and lively movement,” as Pier Francesco Tosi states. Voice teachers recognize certain students’ difficulty managing fast passages. A significant component of coloratura singing lies within the realm of natural talent and voice type, since it comes easily to

some singers and not to others. This truth is sometimes taken by singers as a legitimate reason to avoid coloratura if it does not come easily in the voice. But modern pedagogues attest to the importance of all voices practicing agility for the health and vitality of the singing instrument (Kirkpatrick, 2008; Bauer, 2013, p. 134). Adam Kirkpatrick writes, “Singers who get into [young artist programs such as Santa Fe and Opera Theatre of St. Louis] are the best of the best from conservatories and universities around the country; yet, despite impressive pedigrees, many of them are not proficient in the technique of coloratura singing” (p. 359). Not only is coloratura neglected in some singer’s development based on the excuse of a lack of natural ability, but also writings addressing the technique required for coloratura singing are rare, particularly in reference to the kind of coloratura required for Rossini’s arias. Rossini’s arias may be viewed with especial apprehension due to their uniquely challenging qualities in range, style, and speed. The general lack of resources and systematic training in Rossinian coloratura technique creates a void that can be filled through combining practical, time-honored vocal techniques with modern pedagogical knowledge of vocal function.

Several studies detail the life and works of Rossini and the nuances of nineteenth-century improvisatory ornamentation within his operas. But few resources exist detailing a systematic approach to the development of a coloratura technique to facilitate the performance of his arias. Writings on performance practice of Rossini’s coloratura arias rarely include specific technical advice on the development of healthy, vibrant coloratura. Understandably, such advice is left to the vocal pedagogy sources. Respected modern vocal pedagogy books such as those by McKinney (1994), Doscher (1994), Miller (1986), and Vennard (1949) are excellent resources for general principles of vocal technique and the physiology of the vocal mechanism. However, these pedagogy sources include only small sections on agility, if any section at all, based on

anatomical truths about breathing. These pedagogy sources do not include a method for systematically developing coloratura nor a specific manner of implementing it in particular composers' works, such as Rossini's. Not only is little written on the development of Rossinian coloratura, but the term "coloratura" is never used in the early principal Italian singing treatises by Caccini (1601/2), Tosi (1723), Mancini (1774), and García (1841) (Jander & Harris, 2001). These writers address the topic of coloratura using different agility terminology and scattered hints on how to develop the skill. The lack of a systematic approach to coloratura development along with the dearth of updated vocal agility terminology in these early texts reveals a need for more scholarly writing in this area.

Works on *bel canto*<sup>4</sup> singing technique and vocal health by Toft (2013), Stark (1999), Manén (1987), Kay (1963), Brodnitz (1953), and Duey (1951) are either too outdated or too broad in nature to include sections addressing coloratura development founded on modern physiological discoveries. Vocal coach and music researcher Robert Toft published a lengthy book on the subject of *bel canto* singing in 2013, focusing on the historically accurate style and execution of what have come to be known as *bel canto* songs and arias. Strangely enough, Toft fails to include even one section on agility, even though one of the main composers of that era, as he notes, was Rossini. Musicologist James Stark's extensive work on the subject of *bel canto* singing style reveals a similar lack of attention to agility. Stark focuses his attention instead on registers, vibrato, legato singing, the *appoggio*, and other forms of vocal articulation. Stark's three-hundred twenty-five page book *Bel Canto* includes a mere three pages addressing what he terms "floridity" in the voice. In these three pages, Stark recounts the thoughts of other singers

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<sup>4</sup> Bel canto: "beautiful singing" (It.); denotes the Italian vocal style of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period at which the perfect legato tone throughout the vocal range was sought and praised; also known for ease of vocal agility, and can refer specifically to the styles of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti (Jander & Harris, 2001).

on the attractiveness or lack thereof in the skill of fioritura, and its inherent difficulty. No systematic training method is mentioned for the development of agility in the voice.

Lucie Manén (1987) claims in her *Bel Canto* treatise that the classical nineteenth-century exercise for practising coloratura consisted of a “preparation for the trill” (p. 63). Her advice concerning how to develop coloratura focuses primarily on letting the trill loose from the *imposto*, a term denoting the swift connection of the breath to the resonators in the larynx, pharynx, and the nasal passages (Shigo, 2010). She makes brief mention of *staccato*, *acciaccatura*, *appoggiatura*, and scalar exercises. Manén’s explanation of how to practice these exercises is minimal. Thus, despite her excellent discussions of breath support, Manén’s coloratura advice is limited and at times unclear. For example, she advises singers to practice the trill and scalar exercises without legato as they accelerate, but does not specify what this means. The primary means of adding separation between fast notes is either through inserting a puff of air between each note for pitch clarity or by creating *staccati*. But most vocal pedagogues caution singers from using these approaches to coloratura, as they may hinder the maintenance of a legato line (Bauer, 2013, p. 134).

The above works on *bel canto* style, as well as the vocal pedagogy sources available, are of a broad and/or comprehensive nature, focusing on many aspects of vocal production in one volume. It is not feasible for them to include a detailed method for the systematic development of a specific coloratura technique. As a result, there is a need for a stronger bond to be built in the literature between vocal pedagogy, performance practice, and the development of coloratura technique, particularly in the context of Rossini’s highly florid arias. Even though the sources on *bel canto* style do not contain a specific method for developing coloratura, they give excellent historical background and guidance for the introduction of a method.

### Foundational and Supplemental Resources to this Study

The multiple resources available on the music of Rossini provide an excellent framework for the introduction of a systematic method of developing Rossinian coloratura. Philip Gossett (1941-2017) was one of the foremost Rossini scholars of the twentieth century. He focused his attention on principles of orchestration, ornamentation, and execution of Rossini's operas from the nineteenth century to the present. Gossett wrote extensively on the style and works of the four main Italian romantic composers: Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi. He played a significant role in publishing the *Edizione critica delle opere di Gioachino Rossini*<sup>5</sup> (Critical Edition of the Operas of Gioachino Rossini, 1979), which now serve as the foremost authoritative scores for Rossini operas. Gossett has published multiple articles on Rossini operas, and his book *Divas and Scholars* combines his wealth of textual scholarship (Part I) with appraisals of performance practice (Part II). An entire chapter of *Divas and Scholars* is devoted to ornamentation, with discussion of specific Rossini arias. This chapter has been enlightening and pertinent even though Gossett does not always state explicitly when and how to ornament.

Musicologist Rodolfo Celletti (1991), one of the leading scholars of opera voices and performances, dedicated a significant section to Rossini in his book *A History of Bel Canto*. His inclusion of Rossini's views on melody, composing for the voice, voice types, and nineteenth-century opera performance practice are a result of years of research and compilation of material. Celletti's work will be cited frequently in chapters four and five of this dissertation.

Rossini scholar Richard Osborne (2007) published a substantial book on the life and works of Rossini. His primary source material included Stendhal's firsthand account of the *Vie de Rossini* (Life of Rossini) and publications of original documents connected to Rossini's life

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<sup>5</sup> A critical edition is one based wherever possible on the most accurate sources for an opera, thus requiring the study of the entire performance history of a work (Gazzola, 2012).

and music. Osborne relied heavily on the critical edition of Rossini operas by Gossett, Cagli, and Zedda. His *Rossini* contains more scholarly detail than Gaia Servadio's biography (2003), which primarily sets the stage for a historically informed view of the composer. The first half of Osborne's book incorporates musical events chronologically over the span of Rossini's life. The second section provides select compositional analyses and a detailed performance history of significant Rossini operas. This second half contains chapters discussing the more interesting and/or famous of Rossini's operas, including all six of the operas containing the arias studied for this dissertation. Important aspects of each opera are discussed in Osborne's *Rossini*, including poetry, historical context, style, harmony, and form.

One can turn to Rosselli's *Singers of Italian Opera* (1992) or Servadio's *Rossini* (2003) for a deeper understanding of the historical, political, and social climate that Rossini experienced in the early nineteenth century, all of which undoubtedly affected his compositional methods and style. Rosselli's book includes a chapter on the training of the voice in the *bel canto* era of the mid-nineteenth century, shedding light on what may have been Rossini's expectations for his performers.

The Cambridge Companion to Rossini (2004) is a collection of essays by Rossini scholars highlighting various aspects of his life and works. Rossini's use of melody and ornamentation, editions of his scores, staging, dramaturgy, and choice of libretti are discussed in detail. Of interest to this study are the sections detailing important aspects of specific operas, including *Tancredi*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and *Semiramide*. The essay on melody and ornamentation by Damien Colas in the Cambridge Companion to Rossini has been illuminating as well.



Access to the critical editions of Rossini scores and the highly researched sources listed above provides the necessary structure for an informed study of coloratura technique. The research of Osborne and Gossett has been especially valuable because their publications preserve the knowledge of the Rossini style.

In regard to performance practice, Austin Caswell (1989) discusses the accepted quality and amount of embellishments within Rossini arias. It is necessary for the performer to understand Rossini's style prior to and during the addition of improvisatory material such as melismatic runs and cadenzas. Rossini was in favor of singers making personal adjustments to his written-out melismas if they remained within his bounds of acceptable coloratura style (Caswell, 1989, p. ix). Vocalise and cadenza books such as the *Estelle Liebling book of coloratura cadenzas*, Mathilde Marchesi's *Elementary Progressive Exercises* (1881), Luigi Ricci's *Variazioni Cadenze Tradizioni*, Laure Cinti-Damoreau's *Méthode de Chant Composée pour ses Classes du Conservatoire*, and Nicola Vaccai's *Metodo pratico di canto italiano per camera in 15 lezioni e un'appendice* give tips on how to perform particular melismas within *bel canto* operas, of which Rossini operas play a large part.

In the midst of this rich trove of vocalise books for the practice of *bel canto* arias, writings on how to practice the vocalises properly are rare. The Vaccai exercises are exceptional in their attention to systematic training of the voice through vowels and interval progressions. But less than half of Vaccai's lessons include explanations on how to perform them (Potter, 2003). The explanations he does include provide helpful guidance, but are anecdotal at best. Cinti-Damoreau's book of exercises was meant as a resource for the classroom, with additional instruction on how to perform the exercises to be given by the teacher. Her publication gives little comment or instruction in regard to the vocal technique necessary for accomplishing the

exercises (Potter and Sorrell, 2012). Estelle Liebling was more helpful than most vocalise writers, dedicating an introductory page to technical advice on breathing and the production of effective coloratura. But once again, a methodical approach is lacking; the dedicated page is only a list, howbeit a very helpful one, of vocal principles. Mathilde Marchesi (*née* Graumann), a famous German mezzo-soprano known for her exceptional teaching of vocal technique, wrote little in regard to technical instruction for vocal agility in her *Theoretical and Practical Vocal Method* (Potter and Sorrell, 2012). In her preface to the vocalises, Marchesi stresses the importance of beginning with simple exercises, adding only one challenge at a time, until through progressive stages the singer becomes capable of advanced vocal feats. Her insistence on systematically training the voice through slow progressive stages is reflected in the detailed organization of slightly varied vocal exercises spanning two to three pages. Marchesi maintains the assumption that other vocalise writers of her era held: the voice student must have an excellent teacher for more detailed guidance in order to properly accomplish each step of vocal development. All of these excellent vocalise books focus on the written-out exercises and melismas themselves. They do not include detailed explanations of how to systematically develop the breathing musculature necessary for performing the elaborate ornaments they contain.

Recent doctoral dissertations have focused on specific performance practice approaches to coloratura with reference to Rossini arias (Siemon, 2007; Lee, 2007; Poppino, 1992). Studies by Brittnee Siemon and Marilyn Poppino give parameters for the mezzo-soprano voice within *bel canto* arias, but fail to provide a systematic approach to the development of coloratura. Jung Lee's work focuses on the coloratura soprano roles in works by Donizetti and Mozart, which are in a different *fach* and require a different approach than mezzo-soprano Rossini roles. These

dissertations reveal that even research by performers of Rossini's works and other coloratura arias fails to adequately detail a systematic method for developing coloratura skills.

The need for a systematic development of a coloratura technique is evidenced both by the continued popularity of Rossini operas and the gap in the literature concerning the development of the skill. Rossini operas continue to be performed by major opera houses throughout the world. Famous mezzo-sopranos such as Joyce DiDonato, Cecilia Bartoli, Elina Garanča, and others have brought Rossini mezzo-soprano arias to life in the twenty-first century. The literature addressing Rossini arias and coloratura technique also reveals the need for a method: source material focuses on other important facets of Rossini's works; method books are limited on the subject of agility; and modern pedagogy books are too broad in scope to include a detailed approach.

### **Pedagogical Foundations for a Systematic Method of Coloratura Technique**

Although a systematic method of training the voice for the development of coloratura is not readily available, pedagogy sources exist that guide vocalists in healthy directions. Modern vocal pedagogy books use specific anatomical language and the latest research to delve into the function of airflow in relation to the voice, discussing the variety of approaches for singers to harness this energy for a healthy singing technique. These sources provide a foundation for a systematic approach to the development of Rossinian coloratura.

Since this dissertation focuses on the importance of a systematic approach to the development and implementation of coloratura, the study by Ron Morris into systematic vocal training will be of particular benefit. Ron Morris provided the singing community with a groundbreaking pedagogical work in his research on accent method breathing (Morris, Harrison & Klieve, 2013). Originally used for speech therapy, the Accent Method is a verified means of

developing motor skills for singing. The systematic method of developing abdominal support advocated by Morris can serve as a solid foundation for the singing tone. With some minor adjustments and logical changes in exercises, Morris transferred an accepted method of speech training to the realm of the singing voice. In a similar manner, I would like to apply the principles of Morris' method more specifically to a subset in the singing world: the coloratura mezzo-soprano voice. His findings serve as research-based, systematic links between the basic principles of vocal/breathing physiology and the specific, methodical application of those principles to the singing voice.

Adam Kirkpatrick wrote on a similar vocal training method in 2008, though his article is short and not based on a series of survey results as Morris' was in 2013. Kirkpatrick uses the same general principles as Morris with slightly different terminology, calling his approach to coloratura technique the "bouncy breath articulation" (p. 359). He claims that even larger voices will be able to develop a solid coloratura technique using bouncy breath articulation, and will thereby be more flexible and marketable. Kirkpatrick also studied methods of training for a healthy vibrato, a necessary facet of *bel canto* singing technique for Rossini arias. A healthy, steady vibrato rate is often taken as evidence of a free and vibrant tone. Therefore, vibrato rate will also be discussed in relation to the development of a solid coloratura technique.

### **Chapter Summary**

Given the many pedagogical and historical sources available on the life, times, and operas of Gioachino Rossini, along with the detailed analyses of his musical style and ornamentation, a systematic approach to the development of Rossinian coloratura is both appropriate and necessary. The listed sources in this chapter that were written by musicologists, theorists, historians, and performers serve as the resource framework for this dissertation. The

knowledge of how to perform Rossini's arias has as much right to be preserved as the knowledge of his scores, historic traditions, and performance styles of the era. Given the ever-changing public tastes regarding the singing voice, it is understandable that the manner in which operatic arias are performed will change over time. Desirable tone qualities and melismas will vary according to the century or the decade. As conscientious musicians, it is our duty to ask whether these changes have proven beneficial or detrimental to the success, health, and beauty of the human voice, and if not, how we can return to practices that will enable these vital qualities to emerge again. A systematic method of developing the mezzo-soprano coloratura voice will establish the groundwork for future generations to explore this voice's amazing capabilities.

### Chapter 3

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLORATURA

Students who desire to cultivate the art of coloratura singing need excellent training in the development of the motor skills necessary for coloratura competency. Although the art of coloratura brings joy through its frivolity and inspires amazement through its vocally athletic prowess, its development is challenging and tedious. The coloratura voice does not sound amazing until numerous hours of focused and at times tedious practice have been accomplished. Excellent coloratura training requires both a knowledgeable instructor and a patient, diligent student. Historical performance practices for developing coloratura as well as modern pedagogical principles of the art will be explored in this chapter. These sources and methods will then be applied to the seven Rossini arias analyzed in chapters four and five. As will be demonstrated, many of the teachings on coloratura training found in early pedagogical treatises have been substantiated by modern pedagogical research. Thus, the study of these selected Rossini coloratura arias will be approached with a solid foundation of historically accepted performance practice models as well as modern pedagogical principles.

#### Historical Performance Practices for Coloratura Development

##### Historical Prerequisites to Agility Training

Excellent vocal agility requires a combination of natural skill and diligent effort to be achieved. Early vocal pedagogues<sup>6</sup> and early performers understood this truth. Pier Francesco Tosi (1653-1732) and Giambattista Mancini (1714-1800), wrote that the agile voice is a singular gift of nature, unachievable unless the natural inclination is already present (Mancini, 1912, p.

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<sup>6</sup> The phrase “early vocal pedagogues” in this dissertation refers to authors of available vocal treatises prior to the twentieth century, approximately from the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries, and pedagogues those authors quoted.

147). This is true, in that some voices are more suited to performing agility than others. The recognition of natural vocal ability is one of the main foundations for the number of vocal *fachs* acknowledged in the singing world today. The art of coloratura requires an innate flexibility of the vocal instrument that is more present in some voices than in others.

Once the natural inclination for agility is sensed in a gifted singer, she must work very diligently in order to achieve her full potential in vocal speed and precision. The hard work necessary to produce vocal agility was stressed as early as the seventeenth century. Niccola Antonio Porpora (1686-1768) was such an aficionado of agility practice that his solfeggi book directs students exclusively toward the development of vocal flexibility (Klingstedt, 1949, p. 25). In the early eighteenth century, Tosi<sup>7</sup> enumerated the “tiresome Rudiments” of singing, one of which is a competency in vocal agility (Tosi, 1926, p. 79). Less than a century later, the famous pedagogue Manuel Garcia II (1805-1906) and his English contemporary William Cazalet (1808-1875) claimed that the florid style requires laborious exercises of scales and runs (Garcia, 1975; Cazalet, 1900). These vocal performers and pedagogues of previous centuries unite in their affirmation of the importance of hard work. A naturally agile voice is not the only ingredient required for the development of excellent coloratura. Tosi, Porpora, Garcia, and Cazalet are early vocal pedagogues who attest to the importance of diligence in agility practice. The singer should be assigned systematic daily vocalises under good instruction until her coloratura is perfected.

Agility training can be commenced only as early as the voice is able to implement it with proper technique. Historical documents detail the technical prerequisites for performers of agility. Slow, *legato* exercises on middle tones will strengthen the most comfortable part of the voice first, preparing the instrument for faster movement. Stepwise intervals such as scales or a

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<sup>7</sup> From his treatise *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni*, or Opinions of Ancient and Modern Singers, also known by the title *Observations on the Florid Song*

very slow trill with evenness between the pitches will prepare the voice for pitch accuracy. Mastery of the *messa-di-voce*<sup>8</sup> is one of the final preparations for agility. Vocal regimens were prevalent even before Tosi's era, with Virgilio Mazzocchi (1597-1646) having students practice the trill<sup>9</sup> and passages of a florid nature for an hour per day (Klingstedt, 1949, p. 12-13). In early writings, a prerequisite to extending the range of the voice, for coloratura or otherwise, was a mastery of the middle tones (Klingstedt, 1949, p. 12). Scales and leaps are to reveal a unified vocal instrument, free from perceptible register shifts, before agility is seriously pursued (Mancini, 1912, p. 148). Finally, the *messa-di-voce* was to be mastered prior to coloratura training in the eighteenth century (Potter and Sorrell, 2012, p. 94). The *messa-di-voce* sung on each note of a slow scale is such a challenging feat to accomplish that, if learned prior to attempting coloratura, necessary vocal stamina will already be established. Smooth middle tones, even register shifts, and simple *messa-di-voce* mastery are the primary prerequisites to the commencement of serious agility training.

### **Implications of Early Systematic Vocal Training Methods**

Once the prerequisites are met, the voice is ready to embark upon coloratura training. The most effective approaches to coloratura training follow basic vocal principals and are implemented systematically. Early pedagogues give advice as to how coloratura should be developed, but unfortunately, this advice is not systematic in the literature. It was passed down in the form of vocal maxims, principles, and wise sayings. The lack of early writings detailing systematic approaches to vocal training does not imply their nonexistence: it rather suggests that

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<sup>8</sup> "The singing or playing of a long note so that it begins quietly, swells to full volume, and then diminishes to the original quiet tone. The *messa di voce* is one of the most important techniques of 17th- and 18th-century Italian singing style, first as an ornament and then as a pedagogic tool" (Harris, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> The "trill" mentioned in Mazzocchi's writings consisted of the repetition of the same tone with changing rhythm, as opposed to the general definition of two notes in alternation. Thus, it was more of a note-pulsing exercise than a trill (Klingstedt, 1949, p. 12).



they were passed down orally. Early systematic vocal training methods are implied in the literature.

Famous early vocal pedagogue Niccola Porpora (1686-1768) is known to have ordered students to work solely on one sheet of vocalises, in one case for six years, prior to entering a career (Klingstedt, 1949, p. 25). One sheet of vocalizes would become boring and inconsequential after a time. The only explanation for the success of this practice is that Porpora used a particular training method, consisting of a series of steps in which exercises of a progressive nature were practiced on one page of vocalises, resulting in a perfected technique (Klingstedt, 1949, p. 25). Other such implied instances of teachers using systematic training methods exist as early as the eighteenth century.

Vocal methods can be systematic in a variety of ways. For example, the act of beginning slowly when performing agility exercises and gradually moving faster is a simple but effective systematic approach to coloratura development. This was advocated by several early pedagogues. In the nineteenth century, Manuel Garcia composed simple exercises for agility, to be practiced slowly, with frequent breaths and attention to evenness of tone and rhythm (Bloem-Hubatka, 2012, p. 115). Both early and modern pedagogues have been systematic in the way in which they administer exercises, beginning with short or easy ones and progressing to longer, more difficult ones. These are some of the evidences of systematic training methods in the writings of early vocal pedagogues.

### Facets of Early Coloratura Training Development<sup>10</sup>

Since early principles of singing often appear as vocal maxims and are not detailed in a systematic format, an overview of some of the most prominent and interesting early teachings on the development of coloratura will be discussed. These include teachings on breath support, the *legato* line, rhythmic emphases, mouth position, voice placement, and vowel production. The principles will be discussed in their relationships to agility training.

**Supporting the agile voice.** The agile voice requires a solid training in the use of breath support. Breath support was addressed in early treatises in relation to agility, with a primary focus on exhalation, keeping an open throat and rib cage, and using lower abdominal muscle support for high tones. Interestingly, early pedagogues deemed inhalation less relevant for training purposes than exhalation, since the latter is the means of tone production. How a singer uses the available air in the lungs was of more interest to early pedagogues than *how much* air is available. Coloratura requires unusually long lines and taxing breath control, so to ignore teaching a method of inhaling properly seems counterintuitive. And yet it worked. Tenor Evan Williams wrote that singers do not need large quantities of air to sing (Cooke, 1921, p. 295). William Cazalet noted that the training of the exhalation process is more important than training the singer how to inhale (Cazalet, 1900, p. 41). The assumption was that the skill of proper inhalation is a necessary and natural result of proper tone production in sufficiently talented

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<sup>10</sup> Examples of what early vocalises may have sounded like can be accessed easily on YouTube or other websites. Especially helpful to this study are the exercises of Janet Spencer, a contralto of the early 1900s. She demonstrates the following categories with her lovely voice. Links to YouTube are listed here, with the original source of the clips being found in *Hidden In Plain Sight: The Hermann Klein Phono-Vocal Method Based Upon The Famous School Of Manuel Garcia* (2013), VoiceTalkPublications.

Agility: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JCxj5jK034>

The Pure Legato: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvJGGTJCQMU>

Arpeggios: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJPGlyr9kpc>

Trills: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dypzVieQxkM>

singers. I agree with this primary attention on the exhalation process: if the singer can control the rate at which air exits during singing, she can learn to sing long lines, regardless of how the air was inhaled. The manner of inhalation will take care of itself if the singer focuses on keeping the rib cage comfortably lifted and the throat open. Thus, it is not so much about how a singer breathes, but about what she does with the air that is inhaled.

Sustaining the vocal support requires keeping an open throat and rib cage and utilizing lower abdominal support for high tones, as taught by early pedagogues. Mancini states that agile singing should be sustained by a robust chest and open throat, “assisted by the graduation of the breath” (Mancini, 1912, p. 154). By this latter phrase, Mancini was likely referring to maintaining breath support in tandem with the necessary demands of the pitch direction. This quote implies that certain pitches require more breath support and training to achieve with strength and freedom than others. Famous early vocal pedagogue Giovanni Battista Lamperti (1839-1910) clarifies which pitches these are by writing that the higher one sings, the lower one breathes (Lamperti, 1957, p. 128). Thus, breath support is considered a necessity for the singing voice, with its strength originating low in the torso for vigorous or high passages. This corresponds with modern research on vocal support.

**Legato line in agility training.** Amid coloratura training, the vocalist is to maintain a *legato* delivery. This teaching has roots in the early seventeenth century and continued into the *bel canto* era.<sup>11</sup> A *legato* line requires the full sound of one note to pass to the full sound of the next note, to avoid a break in power and continuity. No abrupt change in the texture of the line occurs, creating a smooth transition between pitches. Such a skill is more difficult to practice in coloratura passages than in slower vocal works. One of the earliest documents to note the

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<sup>11</sup> *Bel canto* era refers to the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century time frame, when *legato* and agility training were at their peak (Jander and Harris, 2001).

importance of the *legato* line in agility singing was Giovanni Bovicelli's (1592-?) treatise on improvised Baroque ornamentation. In this work, Bovicelli affirmed that the singing of florid passages must be done with a smooth, *legato* delivery (Horsley, 2001; Klingstedt, 1949, p. 14). Thus, as early as the seventeenth century, singers were attempting a smooth delivery of vocal runs, a feat that is also prized today.

Some singers are tempted to produce agility with a slight pop of the larynx that briefly stops the flow of air between each pitch, resulting in cleaner individual pitches. If done fast enough, this abrupt stoppage can be imperceptible. However, this practice is criticized by early and modern pedagogues alike. Lamperti wrote that there should be no "shock of the *Glottis*," or what may be referred to as a glottal pop to separate or clean the pitches, as it will inhibit the *legato* line (Bloem-Hubakta, 2012, p. 121).

The *legato* line requires more work to perfect on descending scales than ascending ones due to the laryngeal position beginning slightly higher. This vocal maxim was recorded as early as the beginning of the twentieth century (Cazalet, 1900, p. 46) Once again, this statement seems counterintuitive, since going uphill requires more energy than going downhill. Nevertheless it is true, as singers will attest. Thus, descending agility is to be given more attention than ascending agility, particularly for the sake of the *legato* line.

**Rhythmic emphases in agility training.** Rhythmic accuracy in coloratura singing is vital to the success of the work. Attention to rhythmic precision in vocalises and coloratura practice will result in more clarity of tone, flexibility of tempo, and unity with the orchestral lines. Early treatises addressed rhythmic concerns in coloratura training, particularly in relation to the maintenance of the *legato* line and pitch accuracy. Varying the rhythm in practice will enhance

these aspects of a work. For example, the most obvious rhythmic choice of placing accents on the first and third beats in a series of four moving pitches should not be the sole practice strategy.

Consider this phrase:



For the purposes of maintaining a legato line, the singer should sometimes emphasize the second and fourth beats instead of the first and third, as a practice technique. This technique was taught as early as the turn of the twentieth century (Cazalet, 1900, p. 59). This exercise produces tonal accuracy and evenness, allowing the voice to flow smoothly from one system of notes into the next. Such exercises and their multiple variants are still taught to facilitate the creation of a legato line during faster singing, as in this modified phrasing of the previous musical example:



This principle of accenting off-beats becomes more complex as more rhythmic variety is introduced. In Rossini arias, the rhythmic fluidity of cadenzas and slower *cantabile* sections produces multiple possibilities for accent practicing. This will also help the singer with developing dynamic control and variety.

**Mouth position in agility training.** During agility training the mouth/jaw position should be comfortably open, with about a thumb's width of space between the upper and lower teeth. For practice purposes this position should be maintained as much as possible throughout the range of the exercise. A gradual opening of the jaw in a tucked position<sup>12</sup> will occur naturally as the pitches ascend. While this is permissible, for practice purposes this opening should be minimized, thereby encouraging a stronger reliance on abdominal support, a forward, lowered tongue position and open space in the pharynx including a raised soft palate. The jaw should slightly tuck back as the pitches ascend in order to encourage soft palate height and avoid the jaw jutting. The tongue should remain forward and relaxed in the mouth during pitch transitions, always touching the lower teeth. Pitch changes should be instigated by the abdicostal muscles instead of the movement of the tongue or jawline.

The stability of the mouth/jaw position is primarily for practice purposes. It serves as a litmus test for the proper function of the breath support, raised soft palate, and tongue position. For example, if the singer cannot produce an E<sup>5</sup> with the teeth a thumb's width apart, this may be an indication that the tongue may be sliding back into the throat, the soft palate lowering or the abdominal support lacking.

Early pedagogues held opinions on how to open the mouth for singing coloratura. In the early eighteenth century, the famous castrato and voice teacher Antonio Bernacchi (1685-1756) developed his own vocal training method that included the most difficult types of coloratura. One of his teachings was that the slightest opening of the mouth will have a distinct influence on the tone quality (Klingstedt, 1949, p. 26). The popularity of this kind of training is corroborated by male soprano Baldassarre Ferri (1610-1680), who is purported to have executed complex

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<sup>12</sup> The tucked position for the jaw involves drawing the jaw back horizontally toward the neck, focusing also on a raised sensation where the jaw meets the skull at the temple.

agility on the stage without the slightest movement of his facial muscles, or the opening of his mouth (Celletti, 1991, p. 114). Lamperti claimed that the mouth should be opened as wide as the thickness of a finger, and in his era, opening wide on the high notes was considered distasteful (Lamperti, 1957, p. 128, 135). According to several early pedagogues, the habit of singing low tones with a very compact mouth position and then opening wide on the high tones will change the character and the color of the voice, and should be avoided (Mancini, 1912, p. 161).

I attest to the importance of a compact mouth position for singing coloratura from my own experience. The compact mouth position compels the vocalist to rely on a deeper breath support and upper pharyngeal space for resonance. The tongue is required to keep still and forward via this method. Though not a negative quality on its own, opening the mouth wider for high notes may mask other undesirable qualities such as tongue tension and soft palate depression. Alternately, keeping the jaw compact requires that the tongue remain forward, because if the tongue draws back into the pharynx no space is left for resonance. The smooth transition between notes in agility also benefits from the stillness of a comfortably open, generally motionless jawline. The compact mouth position is difficult to maintain and requires the internal freedom of the vocal mechanism to be successful.

**Head voice in agility training.** Gaining access to the head voice<sup>13</sup> is a predominant resonance goal in classical singing, lending the voice acoustical power that the lower, muted tones of the middle and chest voices lack. The head voice resonates in what many singers call the “mask” or the frontal forehead area, between the eyes. The head voice produces a sound that

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<sup>13</sup> A somewhat nebulous term, the “head voice” varies in definition based on context. In this document, “head voice” refers to the natural placement of the female voice between F5-C6, just below the whistle register. This resonance placement is open, very forward in the face, and felt in the head. The head voice does not require laryngeal movement for pitch changes. The sensations of the head voice can be blended with lower pitches, creating an even tone and classic vocal production. Head voice perspective gained from *Head First* by Denes Striny (2007).

seems to come straight from the front of the face and is particularly important for clear and healthy coloratura.

Head voice resonance was discussed by early pedagogues to a significant extent. Lamperti warned that since there are only darker resonances in the chest, students should not be allowed to carry the chest tones too high (Lamperti, 1957, p. 137). In addition to maintaining the head voice resonance as far down the range as possible, the singer is to feel the tonal vibrations in a frontal position in the face and mouth. Vocal pedagogue Julia Stacey Gould states that if one is singing with the aim of good humor and joy, then the tone needs to be exceedingly forward in the mouth and even on the lips (Gould, 1943, p. 54; Lamperti, 1957, p. 137). This would be especially true, then, when singing Rossini's humorous and joyful arias. The tone should not only be forward, but also tall with a raised soft palate. When these vocal resonance positions are found, the voice becomes rich, surprisingly spacious, and direct. The sensation one gains from singing with head voice resonance has been compared to a tiny buzzing vibration between the eyes, particularly on high notes.

During the search for head voice resonance, the laryngeal position is to remain comfortably lowered, another important feature of tone placement. Early pedagogues discussed the laryngeal position, claiming that it should be comfortably low, without utilizing much vertical movement. The throat, including the larynx, should be kept as still as possible during pitch changes in a phrase, with breath energy being used to propel the changes instead of laryngeal manipulation. Lamperti stated that the breath control should descend to the pelvis as the voice ascends (Lamperti, 1957, p. 102). The higher the pitch, the lower the support, *not* the higher the larynx or the more open the mouth. The larynx should be trained to remain within the same comfortably rested tracheal position throughout the singing range.



Unfortunately, head voice resonance is an important aspect of classical singing that has become less prominent in singers of the late twentieth century, as famous mezzo-soprano Christa Ludwig noted in a 1997 New York master class (Striny, 2007, p. xvii). Musical tastes change, and the darker, richer tones of the middle and chest register have become more desirable, potentially due to the influence of jazz and popular vocal styles. Perhaps this change came about due to the length of time and laborious effort necessary to find and perfect the head voice resonance: young singers impatient to make a career do not invest the time and work necessary to find the head voice and apply it to as much of the vocal range as possible. Regardless of why the head voice resonance has diminished among singers, its exit has limited the number of singers capable of successfully performing Rossini arias.

**Vowel production in agility training.** Generally, the closed vowels such as /e/ and /i/ are favored in agility practice over the open ones such as /ε/, /a/, /o/ and /u/. The vowels on which agility exercises can be sung will vary based on the goals of the exercise. The /o/ and /u/ vowels are considered poor choices for agility, and are avoided if possible (Mancini, 1912, p. 163). The /a/ vowel (pronounced “ah”) is considered by some to be the most difficult vowel to produce with control, given its open quality (Cooke, 1921, p.17; 95). Thus, many singers are expected to master a pure /a/ vowel in vocal exercises prior to attempting coloratura, since it is sometimes the main vowel of coloratura runs. The /i/ vowel is easier to produce with agility exercises in the lower and middle range, due to the compact nature of the mouth and the forward position of the tongue. The /i/ vowel is thus a good starting place for agility vocalizes.

The tongue position plays a key role in vowel production; therefore, developing pure vowels requires limiting the amount of peripheral oral movement. The vowels /a/, /ε/, and /e/ should be produced solely with the tongue, and thus without participation of lip movement

during singing, and the jaw should remain in the same open space for all vowel changes (Garcia, 1975, p. 7). This is not a natural skill; it requires disciplined practice to acquire. Such attention to stillness in the natural jaw position will facilitate an equality of tones within the vowel spectrum during agility practice, regardless of the vowel being produced.

### **Summary of Historical Performance Practices**

Historical performance practices for the development of coloratura have been documented as early as the sixteenth century. The approach to coloratura development, though varying slightly in terminology and practice, has remained consistent in the classical singing world ever since then. Historically, the singer must meet certain requirements prior to beginning agility training. These include a natural flexibility in the voice, a willingness to practice consistently and diligently, and a mastery of basic vocal techniques such as *legato* line, even registers, and the *messa-di-voce*. Though a systematic approach to coloratura development is not apparent in the earliest vocal pedagogy resources, it is implied amid a series of vocal maxims. Early coloratura training involved the development of low breath support, a *legato* line, a compact mouth position, forward vowels, and head voice resonance. These facets of agility training were essential to the proper development of coloratura, particularly the challenging and extravagant coloratura of Rossini arias.

### **Coloratura Development Based on Modern Pedagogical Principles**

The historical perspectives on coloratura development have been explored, providing a gateway into the study of modern pedagogical principles addressing the development of coloratura. The systematic development of a reliable and balanced breathing technique is necessary in order to gain full command of Rossini arias, and the foundation for a solid coloratura technique is a reliable and balanced abdominal connection. A systematic training

method called the Accent Method has proven successful in facilitating a healthier, stronger singing technique through connecting the abdominal muscles to the voice. This systematic method trains the abdicostal breathing muscles to support the voice in the extensive manner necessary for classical singing. It can be applied directly to the development of a solid coloratura technique. Modern research evidence and vocal pedagogy sources support this training method. Before delving into the particulars of the Accent Method, some preliminary information on abdicostal breathing will be presented.

### **An Effective Energy Source for Agility Training**

The abdicostal muscles are the primary muscles used in supporting the singing voice and are the most effective source of energy for coloratura. Advocated by modern professional singers and pedagogues, abdicostal breathing is a term used in singing to describe the way in which the thoracic muscles, particularly the intercostal and abdominal muscles, work together through the natural phenomenon of muscular antagonism to sustain and support the vocal tone (Bauer, 2013; Chapman, 2012; Morris, 2012; Miller, 1986). Abdicostal breathing has also been referred to as diaphragmatic-costal, diaphragmatic-abdominal, dynamic muscle equilibrium, and the *appoggio* in the Italian school, among other terms (Christy, 1965; Miller, 1986; Vennard, 1949) Vocal training methods used for the development of abdicostal breathing are highly varied, with some working better than others. Particularly helpful are those methods grounded in physiological principles.

The following elements of abdicostal breathing are agreed upon by modern, reputable sources as necessary aspects of breathing for singers: a comfortably raised sternum should be maintained throughout the inhalation-exhalation process during singing (Miller, 1986); the intercostal muscles between the ribs should join with the diaphragm in suspending the air upon

inhalation; and the abdominals need to flexibly tuck in tangent with the diaphragm's slow upward release while air is dispelled through singing (Miller, 1986; Vennard, 1962; Bauer, 2013). A comfortably raised rib cage should be maintained as much as possible throughout the vocal lines. Also, the abdominal muscles should be trained to work effectively during the muscular antagonism<sup>14</sup> created by the act of singing. Research evidence suggests that these basic elements of abdicostal breathing are effective means of supporting the singing tone. This evidence substantiates the historical teachings on the open chest cavity and the activity of the abdominal muscles during singing.

An effective counterbalance to the abdominal contraction during singing is a feeling of expansion in the lateral and lower back area. This expansion assists in rib cage expansion and may also serve to absorb tension that could otherwise build in other parts of the body. Some vocal instructors encourage back expansion to accomplish prolonged tones or phrases, along with abdicostal support. This additional technique has been supported in research (Watson, Williams, and James, 2012). Awareness of the latissimus dorsi function during singing may give voice instructors increased freedom to speak about this back-muscle connection, along with the abdicostal technique involving the abdomen and the intercostal muscles.

### **Methods of Engaging Abdicostal Breath Support**

Abdicostal breathing technique is a motor skill requiring development and strengthening. Using abdicostal muscles effectively for coloratura development requires a regimen of proper practice, which is as important as the knowledge of which muscles are involved in the process. Each student requires diverse types and amounts of practice based on her current breath

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<sup>14</sup> In singing, muscular antagonism refers to the coordination of opposing muscle groups to sustain the singing tone, particularly that of the intercostal muscles keeping the rib cage open (thereby holding air inside) and the abdominal muscles slowly pressing inward and upward (thereby letting air out).

connection and vocal development. Voice educators should equip students with good practice strategies for developing abdicostal breathing, particularly for the purpose of agility training.

Despite the consensus on abdicostal breathing, controversy arises over its manner of implementation. Such disagreements may revolve around which aspects of abdicostal breathing to emphasize. James McKinney emphasizes the primary importance of freedom in the breath mechanism and the dangers of hyperfunctional breath support (McKinney, 1994). Other vocal scholars underscore the necessity of rigorous conscious movement of the abdominals, including contracting them while singing high notes to encourage a steady tone and avoid laryngeal strain (White, 1989, p. 29; Bunch, 1982, p. 54). Specific applications of the breath support are thus varied and are often left to the personal judgment and experience of each singing teacher.

An abdicostal-breathing-based vocal technique can be applied in numerous ways, but one method works particularly well for the development of coloratura. This method goes by a variety of names, including pulse breathing, accent breathing and flex breathing. It is based in current physiological knowledge and substantiated by the results of several studies. This method incorporates principles from both McKinney's relaxation emphasis and the abdominal rigor advocated by Bunch and White. In a pulse-based breathing technique, the breath is coupled with the vocal mechanism through a conscious, steady pulsation of the lower abdomen. Abdominal flexibility should be maintained throughout the development of this technique so that the muscles are not completely taut nor completely relaxed.

The most methodical exploration of this technique is the Accent Method, introduced to the field of singing by a vocal pedagogue at Griffith University, Dr. Ron Morris. The method is backed by positive survey results published in 2013 (Morris, 2013). In Accent Breathing, the abdominal muscles pulse in time with specific rhythmic exercises for the voice. Accent method

training involves a series of pitches sung in an accented manner, both legato and staccato, beginning slowly and gradually increasing in tempo, with various stages of development.

**The Accent Method.** The Accent Method originated with speech pathologist Svend Smith in the 1920s and '30s as a method of improving speech quality. Studies revealed successful results in speech improvement areas because of Accent Method breathing exercises, including an increased length of phonation (Thyme-Frøkjær and Frøkjær-Jensen, 2001, p. 8). Morris realized that the goals of the Accent Method correlated with those of singing methodologies. He embarked on a quest to transfer Accent Method breathing to the realm of the singing voice.

I take Morris' correlation a step further, claiming that Accent Method principles and practices are particularly valuable for the development of clean, accurate, and impressive coloratura technique. The breathing exercises of the Accent Method center around the abdicostal principles set forth earlier, or what Morris refers to as "a voluntary control of respiration and [use of] repetitive rhythmic exercises" (Morris, 2012, p. 122). The system relies on a disciplinary, step-by-step approach to the development of breath support. A main goal of the Accent Method is the development of a conscious, highly refined control of the abdominal muscles in relation to the out-going airstream. The abdominal muscles are activated to pulse the accents of each rhythmic exercise. Accents/pulses then increase in speed according to the abdominal strength and flexibility of the singer. Exercises begin with closed vowels and fricatives, and as speed increases, "consonant-vowel babble" commences for continued airflow and accuracy in speed (Morris, 2012, p. 123). As evidenced by the preference of early singers and pedagogues for a compact mouth position during singing, the use of closed vowels such as /i/ and /e/ coupled with

a “babble” of added consonants (e.g., /vidi-bidi-vi/ or /biri-biri-bi/) will make the development of singing fast passages more accessible, keeping the tongue forward and the jaw compact.

After researching the ways in which Accent Method can be transferred from speech training to vocal training, Morris conducted a study, subjecting 15 voice students to a ten-week Accent Method group class. An equal number of students under the same instructor served as a control group. Measures were taken before and after the instruction period consisting of Maximum Phonation Time (MPT), Mean Air Flow Rate (MFR), and a Phonetogram. Students who had undergone the Accent Method training revealed an increase in average dynamic and pitch ranges on the phonetogram, and a qualitative analysis of airflow tracing morphology showed a positive effect. Additionally, recordings of the control group and the Accent Method trained students were sent to an expert panel of judges, who were unaware of which students had undergone training. The judges generally favored the post-intervention recordings of Accent Method trained students (the experimental group) above those of the control group. Considering these positive results, Morris’ joining of singing development to the Accent Method was a successful correlation.

Accent Method breathing is already used to varying extents in voice studios, though often not as systematically as Morris would advocate. Just as athletes must be persistent in maintaining bodily strength, so singers will be aided through a disciplined implementation of a breathing method that has given successful results such as the Accent Method. The increase in dynamic and pitch ranges yielded by the Accent Method are especially valuable to coloratura development for Rossini arias, as Rossini’s melisma ranges are very wide.

Excellent breath management based on the principles of abdicostal breathing technique normally takes several years of dedicated practice to develop. Even though this may cause initial

impatience and frustration, this will be less damaging than the frustration experienced if the singer expects fast results but cannot attain them or attains them at the expense of a healthy voice. The Accent Method begins with slow pulses on the breath without engaging the voice, called panting.

**Panting.** Panting is one of the first methods of developing the breath for singing (Richard Miller, 1986). It involves silent inhalation and exhalation while maintaining an open throat and a comfortably raised rib cage. By keeping the rib cage open, the external intercostal muscles are trained to maintain contraction even while exhaling, which is a simulation of their role during singing. Upon exhalation, the thoracic region below the diaphragm will slightly tuck – that is, pull up-and-in – releasing again upon inhalation. As the muscles develop the ability to perform this task with ease over a few minutes' duration, the panting can increase in speed. As speed increases, each pant will become less pronounced and more imperceptible to the observer.

The purpose of panting is to strengthen the connection between the airflow and the musculature movement engaged during singing; thus, it should serve as a necessary preliminary step to vocalises. Maintaining the pant requires mental concentration. Just as mental practice increases the student's ability to learn music, so panting will increase the singer's physical awareness of abdicostal musculature in relation to airflow. This awareness will accelerate the process of connecting the musculature to the act of singing. Additionally, the torsal energy of panting will simulate the muscle engagement necessary for the flexibility of coloratura singing.

**Sustaining a vibrant tone.** The use of incremental pulsing exercises for the development of coloratura can be considered a highly accelerated version of what early pedagogues referred to as *messa-di-voce*, the prolonged crescendo-decrescendo. The *messa-di-voce* exercise allows voice students to explore the relationship between airflow and subglottal pressure. Given that



accent/pulsing exercises can be as fast or slow as necessary, at its slowest pace the abdominal pulse is in fact a *messa-di-voce* exercise: the crescendo encouraged by the tuck of the abdominal muscles and the decrescendo accomplished still using lower muscle contraction, but to a smaller and more refined extent. Based on the principles of vocal aerodynamics, a quick crescendo exercise will likely be helpful for those struggling with a wobbly vibrato. It will result in decreased subglottal pressure and increased airflow (Kirkpatrick, 2008). The quick crescendo exercise creates a lighter and more energized vibrancy in the tone. Using swift dynamic changes within a given phrase or in a vocalise is akin to the exercises of the Accent Method since a natural surge of air will be activated below the diaphragm by the abdominal muscles. The more swiftly it is utilized, the more it will resemble accents, or pulsing. Until a healthy dynamic equilibrium is attained, exercises such as the *messa-di-voce* and the quick crescendo can be implemented to tap into the abdominal support.

**Exaggeration: a means to an end.** Moderate exaggeration is a helpful tool in developing desired motor skills, especially in the initial stages of connecting to the breath for abdominal breathing. In order to achieve a balance, sometimes the pedagogically useful approach involves exploring the extremes, and in some cases, opposite extremes. Such exploration reflects the nature of singing itself, which is primarily an exaggeration of speech processes. Accent Method Breathing begins with slow, large movements of muscle groups moving to quicker, finer movements only after the slower ones can be controlled and manipulated at will (Thyme-Frøkjær and Frøkjær-Jensen, 2001). Exaggerating a muscular action such as tucking the abdominals while singing will serve to strengthen the connection between the breath and the abdominals, especially when this connection is initially weak. It must not be confused with the inclination to over-exert the breathing process: any exercise can be taken too far, and this could prove

ridiculous and even harmful. Care must be taken when exaggerating any exercise, never losing sight of the purpose of the overemphasis, which in this case is the development of abdominal flexibility and support.

The student who cannot feel the connection between the abdominal movement and the tone produced on the pulsing exercise can either simulate the pulse with the hands on the lower abdomen (below the umbilical region) or return to more rigorous exercises in order to conjure the connection. This exaggeration can be used incrementally on agility passages, beginning the passage slowly with a pulse on every pitch, then singing gradually faster, pulsing on every other pitch, then every four pitches, until the pulse becomes imperceptible. The tuck/release pulse will strengthen pitch accuracy, rhythmic accuracy, and vocal buoyancy in coloratura singing.

**Mindful repetition.** Repetition is an essential tool for motor skill development utilized by performers of coloratura singing. Mindful repetition in singing involves engaging the muscles of the torso in a consistent manner that connects with the airflow to produce a healthy, vibrant tone. Repetition is necessary in the formation of habits and can produce especially helpful insights. Coloratura singing does not stem from haphazard, thoughtless repetition of pulsing exercises. For vocal students who have yet to find the connection between the breathing musculature and the voice, moments of healthy bonding between the voice and the musculature should be remembered and imitated until they can be duplicated on a regular basis. This practical aspect of the development of coloratura is vital to the singer's growth.

The student of coloratura must be wary of repeating poor technique through a shallow, forced, or imbalanced connection between the voice and the torso musculature. Therefore most voice students need a knowledgeable instructor until they can implement proper practice techniques without aid. After a suitable practice approach is understood, mindful repetition is

particularly effective. The repetition of daily vocalises up and down the vocal range is used to develop the voice and the breath support. For coloratura development, repetition comes in the form of persistent training of the abdominal and intercostal muscles in relation to the breath flow. Pulsing exercises like those found in the Accent Method will encourage the formation of this connection.

**Abdicostal breathing and vibrato.** The steady vibrato rate is often taken as evidence of a vibrant tone, a quality that stems from good breath support. Vibrato serves to either encourage or hinder the development of coloratura, depending on its speed and width. Knowledge of how the airflow may positively affect the vibrato rate is useful to enhance the ease of coloratura production. Vibrato can be defined as “a regular fluctuation of pitch or intensity (or both), either more or less pronounced and more or less rapid” (Moens-Haenen, 2001). Intensity refers to volume, which is controlled by the airflow. Thus, vibrato is accepted as generating from the work of a slight, rapid variance of tone and/or airflow over the course of a vocal phrase.

The goal of the coloratura singer is a vibrato production that does not hinder agility. Conscious efforts to directly control the larynx risk constriction and a worse tone production. So direct laryngeal or tonal manipulation is not an option for producing a healthy vibrato. If the vibrato, however, is partially dependent on the airflow for clean production, it follows that a certain percentage of the vibrato rate can be controlled via the abdominal connection. The singer who lacks abdominal support will be unable to healthily control the vibrato rate. Lacking this ability is crippling to the development of coloratura, since a wobble (too slow or wide a vibrato) or tremolo (too fast or strident) will be difficult to surmount, and pitch and rhythmic accuracy is dependent on breath support. If a wobble or tremolo exists, it will hinder clean coloratura.

Respiratory control over the vibrato rate should enhance the singer's ability to perform agile passages in arias. Several modern research findings suggest that evenness and regularity in the vibrato rate can be gained by incorporating steady respiratory pulsations into the vocal regimen [Appelman & Sundberg (1979); Rothernberg, Miller & Moliter (1988); Watson, Williams & James (2012)]. The Accent Method serves as an effective means of stabilizing the vibrato through the development of steady, abdominally-supported pulsations of air. Practiced pulsations cannot become a substitute for the natural vibrato, but they may enable the free tone to emerge over time.

Based on the modern pedagogical research, if a singer is struggling to perform coloratura due to a faulty vibrato – for instance a wobble or tremolo – she can practice gaining more control over the vibrato through abdominal pulsations. The singer should remember, however, that many other factors contribute to faulty vibratos in addition to improper breath support, including tension in the neck/throat/larynx. Tension needs to be addressed along with the respiratory component. The use of a single approach such as abdominal pulsing in mending a faulty vibrato is unlikely to produce successful results unless other problematic factors are simultaneously addressed. Incremental pulsing is one method that should enhance the development of a healthy vibrato rate, which will in turn allow for healthy coloratura production.

### **A Personal Journey**

My own journey as a mezzo-soprano included vocal exercises based on Accent Method singing principles that served to enhance my coloratura technique. At age 18, I had experienced a year and a half of vocal lessons and had committed to practicing daily. I was facing some vocal issues: my tone was strident, my vibrato nonexistent, and my abdomen unable to connect to my breath flow. I understood good principles of singing, but I could not implement them in my own

body. It was not for lack of good teaching: my teacher gave me all the necessary tools, and I understood what was supposed to be happening. It simply wasn't happening for me. It was not until I began to earnestly, methodically apply practice strategies involving a flexible, pulsing, abdominal support method that I began to blossom as a singer. After two years of daily pulsing exercises and the incorporation of this technique into my practice of repertoire, I finally had a more centered tone, an even vibrato, and a flexible, dependable connection of the breath flow to the abdominal support. Having found this technique immensely beneficial to my singing ability, I now pass it on to several of my own students if I sense that they can implement it properly.

In December 2015, after having practiced Accent Method techniques for a decade, I had the privilege of meeting a world-famous coloratura singer who confirmed my training. I was competing nationally for the Rossini Award at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The famous American coloratura tenor Rockwell Blake was one of the adjudicators.<sup>15</sup> I entered the final round along with four other singers. The finalists were each allowed to ask the adjudicators one question. I directed my question to Mr. Blake, asking how he would train someone to sing coloratura who struggles with finding the abdominal connection to the breath. His answer confirmed my training and experiences, further solidifying in my mind the benefits of a systematic pulsing method. Mr. Blake has the student stand against a wall with a straight posture, nothing moving in the mouth, jaw, neck, or throat, and pulse slowly from the abdomen on one pitch. Once the pulsing is clean on one pitch, the pulsing speed can be increased, and pitches added. Mr. Blake proceeded to demonstrate this pulsing, putting his hand just below the navel and singing on one pitch while tucking and releasing the lower abdominals. His tucking motion became faster as he continued to sing on one pitch, revealing the progressive nature of

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<sup>15</sup> Written permission was granted via email by Mr. Blake to use his words in my dissertation. The email message can be found in the appendix.

the exercise. I was elated to have found a world-famous, professional coloratura singer who developed his impressive agility through a systematic, slow-to-fast pulse training.

**The process.** The Accent Method breathing connection involves a complex series of steps. It focuses on a daily variation of rhythmic exercises and accents. Though my own recommended process of developing pulse breathing is less complex, it is still effective in reaching the same goal with systematic and repeated practice. A singer can compare the Accent Method's complex system to my regimen detailed below and see what may work best for her.<sup>16</sup>

Practice sessions should begin with a rhythmically steady, voiceless panting exercise for 2-10 minutes as time allows. The serious singer should pant as much as possible throughout the day, every day, for optimal results. Panting involves a conscious effort to expand the lower abdominals (below the navel) upon inhalation, followed by tucking these same abdominals upon exhalation, then repeating. Effort must be made to maintain a comfortably open rib cage and to avoid an excessive amount of tucking in the "breadbasket" or epigastric region just below the diaphragm while panting. The latter is often the easiest way for beginners to connect but should only be tolerated temporarily until a lower connection can be explored. The reason for this is two-fold: first, the epigastric region includes the stomach, and rigorous panting in that region will prohibit singing after eating a meal, and may result in acid reflux or other unusual symptoms; second, the goal is to develop the deepest possible connection to the breath, and therefore the lower abdominals are the optimal tucking musculature.

The proper sensations for accelerating the pant can be conceived by imagining a panting dog: the rib cage remains stable while the abdominals move in and out, and the tongue is hanging

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<sup>16</sup> To this date, Dr. Morris' entire research document on the Accent Method is accessible to the public under "Thesis (Morris\_2013\_02Thesis.pdf)" at this link: <https://experts.griffith.edu.au/publication/nd2b5ac6cf004f644200ef8aa766e50ac>

forward. A natural lowering of the diaphragm extends the abdominals, initiated from a loose jaw and tongue and via inhalation through the nose and throat simultaneously, with a very frontal concentration. The fast pant is an intense exercise but must stop short of hyperventilation. The faster the pant becomes, the less air will be inhaled and exhaled at a time. The jaw, tongue, neck, and rib cage remain comfortably stable while the lower abdominals move in and out in time with the breath flow.

After panting, this abdominal connection can be incorporated into the singing of a simple vocalise; for example, a five-note staccato ascent and descent on the vowel /i/ can be practiced, making certain to begin each note with a slight puff of air as if singing /hi-hi-hi/. This puff of air will help the singer avoid glottal tension. Flex breathing, or abdominal pulses, can then be inserted into a legato five-note descending exercise on the pure Italian vowels /a-e-i-o-u/, starting with a “DeNTaL” consonant – that is, the consonants d, n, t, or l – as for example, /na-ne-ni-no-nu/ or /la-le-li-lo-lu/. Traditionally, vocalises and even songs should be sung on pure vowels during training, only moving to words when the vowels are perfected (Marchesi, 1881). Beginning each of these pure vowels with a consonant releases the tongue during the vocal onset.

This vowel exercise can be taken up or down a half-step, repeating until the entire vocal range has been explored. Keeping the throat open will let the sound connect fully and flexibly with the tucks and releases of the pulse exercise. The incorporation of pulsing into this vowel exercise will sound like quick changes in the airflow, or a vocal accent as in the Accent Method. Upon each tuck, the airflow will surge, briefly increasing the volume of the tone. Upon expansion after the tuck, the airflow will slacken, creating a smaller sound. These slight expulsions of air initiated by the low, steady tucks will train the vocal mechanism to respond to a

deep, manageable reservoir of energy, thereby simultaneously relinquishing the shallow, less manageable substitutes such as glottal pressure, rib depression, or tensions in the neck, tongue, and jaw.

Students who have trouble tucking and releasing should press their hands into the lower abdomen, below the navel, simulating the feeling of a tuck for each pulse. Pulsing can begin with one tuck/release per pitch on the descending five-note exercise, then two, with an exaggerated connection to the lower abdomen. Eventually the abdomen manages the tucking without the hand-simulation, thereby independently connecting to the pulsation of air at a slow pulse tempo.

Once a particular tempo of pulsing is mastered, more pulses per pitch can be added. For example, if the voice student normally uses two pulses per vowel in the /la-le-li-lo-lu/ exercise, she can move to three, if she is ready abdominally. The final stage of this vocal support technique involves the development of a refined pulsation of air based upon the lowest, steady, relaxed-yet-energized abdominal pulsations, as swift as a fast pant. Care must be taken to maintain a rhythmically steady pulse originating from the lower umbilical/hypogastric region of the torso (i.e., below the navel). The pulse should always commence as low as a ballerina senses the *plie*, that is, in the lowest portion of the rectus abdominis. My controlled pulsations have reached a very quick pace: as quick as the vibrato rate. For me, this is equal to about six pulses per vowel in the /na-ne-ni-no-nu/ exercise, if one vowel gets a metronome value of 55 bpm (beats per minute). This enables clean coloratura at the fastest possible rate for the singer.

The swift movement of the lower abdominals can be compared to the movement of a swinging pendulum. When the strokes are slow and broad, they are longer. As the pendulum swings faster, the distance traversed becomes smaller. Thus, with pulsing, the slower the rate, the



more distance the abs can tuck and release. As the pace quickens to four and five pulses per vowel, the abdominal movement becomes less prominent but maintains its muscular energy. The fastest pulsing pace will eventually release conscious lower abdominal control while maintaining and utilizing the muscle memory of the pulse, sometimes at an imperceptible rate and on the subconscious level. The fastest pace of the pulse gives the sensation of a flutter-breath, fast and light. If developed slowly and with proper application, this flutter-breath will create the coveted combination of healthy breath energy and relaxation in the singing voice with a vibrant tone. This is the feeling some professional singers describe as “water swirling in the abdomen” or “a hamster wheel turning in the torso.” Therefore, breath energy is sometimes referenced by voice teachers as the “buoyancy of treading water” or “balancing lightly on a trampoline” or even “feeling a cushion of air around your waist” (Doscher, 1994, p. 24). All these sensations require energized movement. Such metaphors convey an expectant sensation of physical energy, a feeling of preparedness for whatever needs to be sung, wherever it may be. It makes singing easier and yet more challenging: more work is being done by the abdomen, but the throat, larynx, neck, jaw, and tongue all experience a desirable freedom. This freedom and energy can blossom from the sensation of panting and pulsing exercises.

**Avoiding pitfalls.** The singer should keep certain principles in mind while practicing pulsing exercises. First, the expansion is as important as the tuck. Without the outward motion of the abdomen in response to the tuck, an unhealthy tension will develop. Secondly, one must work within one’s limitations. The tucks will become uneven if the singer suddenly tries to go faster with, for instance, six tucks per vowel. Maintaining a patient persistence within the process is vital to the development of a reliable flex-breath. Thirdly, other parts of the vocal mechanism must be policed constantly so that they do not hinder the flow of air. As singing

artists, we must remind ourselves constantly to relax with certain parts of the body and support with others. Some main areas of the body that often become inflexible or unmanageable include the neck, shoulders, tongue, jaw, sunken ribcage, and independent diaphragm (rigidly refusing to respond to the abdominal tucks). After 12 years of vocal training and performance, I still struggle with these forms of tension at different times in my body. Singing is a life-long process, and the professional singer is always practicing.

Amid these issues, the unifying factors are awareness of the problems, an understanding of how to alleviate them, and the patience to practice properly daily, even when progress is slow. I hope that the principles of the pulsing technique (flex breath, or Accent Method) for breath support will prove effective for the mezzo-soprano seeking to develop her coloratura.

### **Chapter Summary**

Historical performance practices for developing coloratura as well as modern pedagogical principles of the art have been explored in this chapter, laying a solid foundation for the development of the coloratura technique required for performing Rossini arias. Principles of coloratura training found in early pedagogical treatises have been substantiated by modern pedagogical research, including such principles as the lower abdominal connection to the breath flow, the systematic approach to agility, the *legato* line, smooth register shifts, and frontal resonance. These facets of singing contribute to the healthy production of coloratura.

The Rossini era's *bel canto* singing was possible due to patient, meticulous attention to the practice of technical vocal exercises. Acquiring excellent coloratura technique in the modern era requires the same kind of regimen. Survey results of the Accent Method breathing technique suggest that this kind of systematic abdicostal approach to the vocal instrument is an effective means of developing the singing voice. Rossinian coloratura is unparalleled in its demand for

vocal stamina and flexibility. If practiced using the principles of the Accent Method, Rossini arias will enhance and expand the vocal technique. In turn, a solid vocal technique will enhance the musical interpretation of these arias. The coloratura mezzo-soprano can tap into the vibrancy of the breath flow through the systematic development of abdicostal breathing. The diligent singer who intelligently applies a systematic abdicostal practice method to vocal agility exercises can rest on a reliable, balanced connection to the breath flow. This strong, flexible connection to the breath flow introduces the possibility of performing healthy, impressive, and inspiring Rossinian coloratura.

## Chapter 4

### INTERPRETATION OF SEVEN ROSSINI MEZZO-SOPRANO ARIAS

Seven Rossini arias for the mezzo-soprano voice have been analyzed, practiced, performed, and recorded over the course of this study, with a concentration on coloratura technique and implementation. These arias are taken from the context of six operas, which Rossini composed over the incredibly short period of a decade, along with several others (1813-1823). A brief synopsis of these seven Rossini mezzo-soprano arias is helpful in order to set the stage for a discussion of specific performance practice concepts and strategies within the arias. These seven arias are addressed in chronological order as follows:

Di tanti palpiti (*Tancredi*, 1813)

Cruda sorte (*L'italiana in Algeri*, 1813)

Una voce poco fa (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*, 1816)

Non piu mesta (*La Cenerentola*, 1817)

Tanti affetti (*La donna del lago*, 1819)

Ah! quel giorno ognor rammento (*Semiramide*, 1823)

Bel raggio lusinghier (*Semiramide*, 1823)

The poetic text and word-for-word translations will follow the synopses for clarity of definition and as a reference when melismas used on specific words or phrases are mentioned. A discussion of the basic style and structure of Rossini arias will follow the text translations, along with a section defining the mezzo-soprano voice and its parameters. The final portion of this chapter includes my comparison and analysis of various mezzo-soprano artists' interpretations of Rossini arias, with attention given to their technical approaches and melismatic choices.

### **Brief Synopsis and History of Seven Rossini Arias**

#### **Di tanti palpiti (*Tancredi*)**

Rossini's opera *Tancredi* (1813)<sup>17</sup> is an idyllic *opera seria* (serious opera), or *melodramma eroico* (heroic musical drama), with a libretto by Gaetano Rossi. Based on Voltaire's play *Tancredi* (1760), Rossini's *Tancredi* is the first of two operas (the other being *L'italiana*) to win international acclaim (Crutchfield, 2001). A recitative for this *cavatina* begins with "O patria" and, soon after, a slightly more melodic recitative, "Tu che accendi." Many singers begin the aria with the recitative, but the *cavatina* section contains the most memorable and famous melody. *Tancredi* was the "magic opera that took all hearts in Italy." It was Rossini's first true success at the age of 21, due in large measure to this very aria (Istel & Baker, 1923, p. 401-2). Although composed primarily for entertainment, Goethe claimed that Rossini's *Tancredi* struck a deeper note as a pastoral fable reminding audiences of beauty, order, and equilibrium in an era of war and revolution (Osborne, 2007, p. 199). After the 1830s the opera saw a decline in performances but received widespread revival with a series of successful performances in the 1970s, with the famous American mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne as the heroic Tancredi. The aria "Di tanti palpiti" is attributed to launching Rossini's rise to fame. With harmonic surprises and a winsome character derived from folk song, the aria aptly conveys Tancredi's joy at returning to his homeland and his longing to be united with his love, Amenaide.

#### **Cruda sorte (*L'italiana in Algeri*)**

*L'italiana in Algeri* (1813) is a *dramma giocoso* (humorous drama), a comedy masterpiece with a witty libretto by Angelo Anelli set to Rossini's hilarious, perfectly timed

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<sup>17</sup> All dates denote premiere performances for the operas. Rossini usually composed the operas shortly before the premiere dates, but there are occasional exceptions.

musical setting. After being shipwrecked in Algiers, the Italian leading lady, Isabella, finds herself threatened by Algerian pirates, who view her as prize booty for the harem of the Bey, Mustafa. The main portion of Isabella's aria "Cruda sorte" includes a light tapping of strings in the orchestral accompaniment, illustrating her balance of confidence and stealth as she plans to use her feminine wiles to gain freedom from the pompous Mustafa. Although this aria can be embellished as impressively as others, it can also maintain a simplicity of melismatic scope, thereby befitting the larger mezzo-soprano voice or the young mezzo-soprano just learning how to maneuver her coloratura. For this reason and for its light-hearted charm, "Cruda sorte" is often one of the first Rossini arias given to young mezzo-sopranos.

### **Una voce poco fa (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*)**

*Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816, The Barber of Seville), though not immediately well-received, proved to be one of Rossini's most popular operas (Servadio, 2003, p. 56). Composed in the *opera buffa* style to a libretto by Cesare Sterbini, the opera is based on Pierre Beaumarchais' French comedy *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775). The opera took the 24-year-old Rossini about three weeks to compose, in accordance with his typical speed and skill (Crutchfield, 2001). With a structure similar to that of "Cruda sorte," Rosina's aria "Una voce poco fa" details her capricious determination to outwit Bartolo and gain Lindoro, a male protagonist who shares the name of the one featured in *L'italiana in Algeri*. *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* contains much of what Verdi terms Rossini's "accuracy of declamation" (Osborne, 2007, 232). This is evident in Rosina's *cavatina*, with its abrupt musical flights that remain in conjunction with the natural word stress. The famous aria can be improvised with low or high-range tessitura, and has thus been successfully performed by both sopranos and mezzo-sopranos.

**Non piu mesta (*La Cenerentola*)**

Rossini's operatic rendition of *La Cenerentola* (Cinderella) in 1817 is a *dramma giocoso*, with a libretto by Jacopo Ferretti, who encouraged the production. Based on the French fairy tale *Cendrillon* by Charles Perrault, the opera is different from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in that it has an added element of *comédie larmoyant*, or sentimental comedy, to his usual comedic brilliance and wit. "Non piu mesta" is *La Cenerentola*'s final aria, which begins with the *cantabile* "Naqui all' affanno." When presented out of context of the opera, the aria is typically performed in conjunction with the *cantabile* section, though it is best known by the *cabaletta* title "Non piu mesta." It serves as both a grand and touching speech by the exhilarated and forgiving Angelina (Cinderella), who wishes grace upon her step-sisters and step-father as she prepares to begin a new life with her prince. The aria's musical ideas are clearly borrowed from the Count's aria at the end of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and are employed to greater effect. A more reserved character than Rosina, Angelina has musical lines that reflect more lyric *gravitas*, particularly in the *cantabile*. The presence of a suffering main character in Angelina sets *Cenerentola* apart from the majority of *opera buffa* (comic opera) works (Servadio, 2003, p. 66).

**Tanti affetti (*La donna del lago*)**

*La donna del lago* (1819, The lady of the lake) was the first full opera derived from one of the works of Sir Walter Scott (Osborne, 2007, p. 279). Other composers who followed Rossini's example in setting Scott's poetry to music included Donizetti, Pacini, and Berlioz (Servadio, 2003, p. 78). An *opera seria* with a libretto by Andrea Leone Tottola, the opera is based on a French translation of Scott's Romantic narrative poem *The Lady of the Lake*. Set in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Scotland, the opera follows a spunky highland lass named Elena, who is in love with

a rebel to King James named Malcom. As tensions increase, Elena seeks a pardon for Malcom, which King James willingly grants after realizing how much he cares for Elena's happiness. Elena then sings of various exalted emotions at the thought of being united with her pardoned love, Malcom, as well as her father. "Tanti affetti" is a shining conclusion to a lyrical and imaginative Rossini score. The aria maintains both a sense of blitheness and grandeur in the steady heart-beat pace of tripping sixteenth notes that accompany Elena's *cantabile*.

### **Ah! quel giorno ognor rammento (*Semiramide*)**

*Semiramide* (1823) is a *melodrama* based on the Voltaire tragedy *Semiramis*, which in turn is based on the legend of Semiramis of Assyria. *Semiramide* could be entitled *Tancredi Revisited*, with a libretto by Gaetano Rossi, another setting from Voltaire, and the lead male character played by a mezzo-soprano (Osborne, 2007, p. 302). Arsace is the commander of the Assyrian army and, unbeknownst to anyone except the gods, the son of Semiramide, who is in love with him. He sings this aria in Act I as he enters Babylonia, rejoicing to see his homeland again and meditating on his duty to his father and his love for the princess Azema. The aria libretto and accompanying music have a drive and erotic allure that are lacking in the innocence of its equivalent in *Tancredi*, "Di tanti palpiti."

### **Bel raggio lusinghier (*Semiramide*)**

Following the previous aria is "Bel raggio lusinghier," the most stunning aria in the opera. It is sung in Act I by Semiramide, the queen of Babylon, as she anticipates the return of the young warrior with whom she has fallen in love, Arsace. The role, originally composed for Isabella Colbran, is usually sung by a soprano. But many ambitious mezzo-sopranos have tackled the role of Semiramide as well, including twentieth and twenty-first century opera stars Marilyn Horne, Cecilia Bartoli, and Joyce DiDonato. These mezzo-sopranos can then alternately



play the role of Arsace, the pants-role for mezzo-soprano, if they desire. Both this aria and Semiramide's aria reflect the grand, sunny nature of the first act, while the foreboding aspects of the plot enter in the second act.

### **Libretti with English Translations and Paraphrase for Seven Rossini Arias**

#### **Text and Word-for-Word Translations<sup>18</sup>**

#### **Oh patria!... Di tanti palpiti (Oh Motherland!... For so many worries...)**

*Tancredi*

Libretto: Gaetano Rossi

Oh patria! Dolce, e ingrata patria! Alfine a te ritorno!  
 Oh homeland! Sweet and ungrateful homeland! At last to you I return!  
 (Oh Motherland! Sweet and harsh Motherland, I return to you at last!)

Io ti saluto, o cara terra degli avi miei: ti bacio.  
 I you salute, o dear land of ancestors mine; you I kiss.  
 (I'm greeting you, Oh dear land of my forefathers... I kiss (your ground)!)

E questo per me giorno sereno: comincia il cor a respirarmi in seno.  
 And this for me day serene: begins my heart to breath in my bosom.  
 (This is for me a pleasant day; my heart is starting to breathe (calmly) in my chest.)

Amenaide! O mio pensier soace, solo de' miei sospir,  
 Amenaide! O my thought sweet, only of my desire,  
 (Amenaide! My sweetest thought, my one and only desire,)

De' voti miei celeste oggetto, Io venni alfin: io voglio, sfidando il mio destin,  
 Of vows mine heavenly object, I came at last: I desire, defying my destiny,  
 (Of all my vows the heavenly object, I have come at last: I want, while challenging my destiny,)

Qualunque sia, meritarti, o perir, anima mia.  
 Whatever may come, to deserve you, or to die, soul mine.  
 (However it might be, to deserve you or else die, oh my dear soul!)

Tu che accendi questo core, tu che desti il valor mio,  
 You who kindle this heart, you who arouse valour mine,  
 (You, who set this heart alight, you, who gave me courage,)

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<sup>18</sup> Word-for-word translations for all arias except "Tanti affetti" and "Di tanti palpiti" were gained from the *Italian Belcanto Opera Libretti* by Nico Castel (2000). English paraphrases are in parentheses, and authors of these texts are acknowledged where applicable. *Used with the permission of Leyerle Publications*, [www.leyerlepublications.com](http://www.leyerlepublications.com) © Copyright 2000 Leyerle Publications, LLC.

Alma gloria, dolce amore, secondate il bel desio,  
Soul glorious, sweet love, support my beautiful desire,  
(Glorious soul, sweet love, support my beautiful aspiration;)

Cada un empio traditore, coronate la mia fà.  
Drop the wicked traitor, as crowned are my temples.  
(May the impious traitor fall as my temples are crowned.)

Di tanti palpiti, di tante pene, da te mio bene, spero mercà.  
Of many palpitations, of many sorrows, of you my good one, I hope mercy.  
(For so many worries, for so many sorrows from you, my darling, I expect grace.)

Mi rivedrai... ti rivedrà... ne' tuoi bei rai mi pascero.  
Me you will see again, you I will see, in your bright beams I will delight.  
(You shall see me again... I shall see you again... In your lovely beams of light I shall delight!)

Deliri, sospiri... accenti, contenti! Sarà felice, il cor mel dice,  
Delusions, sighs... accents, joy! She will be happy, the heart to me says,  
(Fantasies, sighs... happy voices! My heart says that, by your side,

Il mio destino vicino a te.  
My destiny near you.  
My destiny shall be joyful.)<sup>19</sup>

### **Cruda sorte! (Cruel fate!)**<sup>20</sup>

*L'italiana in Algeri (Italian Girl in Algiers)*

Libretto: Angelo Anelli

Cruda sorte! Amor tiranno! Questo é il premio di mia fé:  
Cruel fate! Love tyrannus! This is the reward for my constancy?  
(Cruel fate! Tyrannus love! Is this the reward for my constancy?)

Non v'è orror, terror, né affanno pari a quel ch'io provo in me.  
There is no horror, terror, nor anguish similar to that which I feel in me.  
(No horror, terror, anguish exists compared to my suffering.)

Per te solo, o mio Lindoro, io mi trovo in tal periglio.  
For you alone, O my Lindoro, I myself find in such peril.  
(For you alone, o my Lindoro, I find myself in peril.)

<sup>19</sup> Translation by Methodius:

<https://lyricstranslate.com/en/o-patria-di-tanti-palpiti-oh-motherland-so-many-worries.html>

<sup>20</sup> *Word-for-word translation used with the permission of Leyerle Publications,*  
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Da chi spero, oh Dio, consiglio? Chi conforta mi dara?  
 From whom can I hope, oh God, advice? Who comfort me will give?  
 (From whom, oh God, can I hope for counsel? Who will give me comfort?)

Qua ci vuol disinvoltura. Non più smanie, né paura;  
 Here we want coolheadedness. No more rages, nor fear;  
 (Keeping cool is what's wanted here, no more rages or terror:)

Di coraggio è tempo adesso, or chi sono si vedrà.  
 Of courage is time now, now who am I they will see  
 (now is the time for courage; now they'll see who I am.)

Già so per pratica qual sia l'effetto d'un sguardo languido, d'un sospiretto...  
 Already from practice I know the effect of a look languishing, a little sigh...  
 (From experience I already know the effect of a languishing look, of a slight sigh...)

So a domar gli uomini come si fa. Sien dolci o ruvidi, sien flemma o foco,  
 I know to tame men how to do. Be they sweet or rough, frozen or fire,  
 (I know what to do to tame men. Be they gentle or rough, cool or ardent)

Son tutti simili a presso a poco, tutti la chiedono,  
 They are all similar more or less, all it seek,  
 (They're all alike, more or less. They all seek,)

Tutti la bramano da vada femmina, felicità.  
 All it yearn from to gain woman, happiness.  
 (They all long for happiness from a pretty woman.)<sup>21</sup>

### **Una voce poco fa (A voice a little while ago)<sup>22</sup>**

*Il Barbiere di Siviglia (The Barber of Seville)*

Libretto: Cesare Sterbini

Una voce poco fa qui nel cor mi risuonò; il mio cor ferito è già,  
 A voice a while ago here in my heart echoed; my heart wounded is already,  
 (A voice has just echoed here into my heart; my heart is wounded,)

e Lindor fu che il piagò. Sì, Lindoro mio sarà;  
 and Lindoro was who it pierced. Yes, Lindoro mine shall be;  
 (and it was Lindoro who shot. Yes, Lindoro will be mine;)

lo giurai, la vincerò. Il tutor ricuserà, io l'ingegno aguzzerò.  
 I've sworn it, I will win. My tutor will refuse, I my wits will sharpen.  
 (I've sworn it, I'll win. The tutor will refuse, I'll sharpen my mind)

<sup>21</sup> Translation by Ates Uslu

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Alla fin s'accheterà e contenta io resterò.  
 At last he will calm down and content I will remain.  
 (Finally he'll accept, and happy I'll rest.)

Sì, Lindoro mio sarà; lo giurai, la vincerò.  
 Yes, Lindoro mine shall be; I've sworn it, I will win.  
 (Yes, Lindoro will be mine; I've sworn it, I'll win.)

Io sono docile, son rispettosa, sono obbediente, dolce, amorosa;  
 I am docile, I'm respectful, I am obedient, sweet, loving;  
 (I'm gentle, respectful, I'm obedient, sweet, loving;)

Mi lascio reggere, mi fo guidar.  
 Myself I let be ruled, myself I let be guided.  
 (I let myself be ruled, I let myself be guided.)

Ma se mi toccano dov'è il mio debole sarò una vipera  
 But if me they touch where is my weak spot, I will be a viper  
 (But if they touch where my weak spot is, I'll be a viper)

E cento trappole prima di cedere farò giocar.  
 And a hundred traps before giving in I will set off.  
 (and by a hundred traps before giving up I'll make them fall.)<sup>23</sup>

**Nacqui all'affanno... Non piu mesta (I was born to sorrow... No more sadness)<sup>24</sup>**

*La Cenerentola* (1817)

Libretto: Jacopo Ferretti

Nacqui all'affanno e al pianto, soffrì tacendo il core;  
 I was born to suffering and to tears, it suffered in silence, the heart;  
 (I was born to sorrow and to suffering, I suffered in silence in my heart;)

Ma per soave incanto dell'età mia, nel fiore, come un baleno rapido,  
 But by a gentle enchantment of my age, in the flower like a flash swift,  
 (But by gentle enchantment in the flower of my youth, in a swift flash,)

La sorte mia cangiò. No, no! Tergete il ciglio: perchè tremar?  
 My fate was changed. No, no! Dry your tears: why tremble?  
 (My fate was changed. No, dry your tears: why tremble in fear?)

<sup>23</sup> Translation by Gabriel Huaroc

<sup>24</sup> *Word-for-word translation used with the permission of Leyerle Publications,*  
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A questo sen volate, figlia, sorella, amica,  
 To this breast fly, daughter, sister, friend,  
 (Fly to my side, daughter, sister, friend --)

Tutto, tutto... trovate in me.  
 All, all... you can find in me.  
 (All of these I will be to you.)

Non più mesta accanto al fuoco starò sola a gorgheggiar,  
 No more sadly by the fire I will be alone, singing to myself,  
 (No more sadly will I sit next to the fire alone, singing to myself,)

No! Ah fu un lampo, un sogno, un gioco il mio lungo palpitar.  
 No! Ah, it was a flash, a dream, a play my long heartache.  
 (No! Ah, it was swift lightning, a passing dream, a game, my long heartache.)

### **Tanti affetti (So many feelings)**

*La donna del lago (The lady of the lake)*

Libretto: Andrea Leone Tottola

Tanti affetti in un momento mi si fanno al core intorno,  
 So many affections in a moment make my heart turn,  
 (In this moment, so many feelings, so many feelings stir in my heart,)

Che l'immenso mio contento io non posso a te spiegar.  
 That immense my contentment I cannot to you explain.  
 (That I have no words to describe the immense joy I feel.)

Deh! il silenzio sia loquace. Tutto dica un tronco accento.  
 Here! The silence is talkative. All says an utterance I cannot.  
 (Let silence speak for me... Let silence utter all that I cannot.)

Ah signor! La bella pace tu sapesti a me donar.  
 Ah Lord! The beautiful peace you knew to me gave.  
 (My sovereign! You have brought peace to me at least.)

Fra il padre e fra l'amante, oh qual beato istante!  
 Between the father and between the lover, oh what a blessed instant!  
 (My father and my beloved at my side! Oh blessed moment!)

Ah! Chi sperar potea tanta felicità!  
 Ah! Who could hope for such happiness!  
 (I dared not hope for such happiness!)

**Ah! Quel giorno ognor rammento (Ah! That memorable day)<sup>25</sup>***Semiramide*

Libretto: Gaetano Rossi

Ah! Quel giorno ognor rammento, di mia gloria, e di contento;  
 Ah! That day always I remember, of my glory, and of happiness;  
 (Ah! I shall ever remember that day of glory and happiness)

Che fra barbari potei, vita, e onore a lei serbar;  
 When among barbarians I was able, life and honor for her to preserve;  
 (When, among barbarians, I was able to preserve her life and honor)

l'involava in queste braccia, al suo vile rapitore!  
 I snatched her away in these arms from her cowardly captor!  
 (I took her away in these arms from her cowardly captor!)

Io sentia contro il mio core, il suo core palpitar!  
 I felt against my heart her heart beating!  
 (I felt her heart beating against my heart!)

Schiuse il ciglio, mi guardò, mi sorrise, e palpitò!  
 She opened her eyes, looked at me, smiled at me, and quivered!  
 (She opened her eyes and looked at me. She smiled and signed.)

Oh! Comeda quel dì, tutto, tutto per me cangiò!  
 Oh! How from that day everything for me changed!  
 (Oh! How from that day everything has changed for me!)

Quel guardomi rapì, sì, quest'anima avvampò;  
 That look enraptured me, yes this soul took fire;  
 (Her gaze cast a spell on me. My heart began to burn.)

Il cielo per me s'aprì, amore, sì, m'animò!  
 Heaven for me opened, love, yes, fired me!  
 (The heavens opened up for me; love spread through me!)

D'Anzema, di quel dì, no, scordarmi io mai saprò.  
 Azema, of that day, no, forget I never can.  
 (I shall never forget Azema and that day.)

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<sup>25</sup> *Word-for-word translation used with the permission of Leyerle Publications, www.leyerlepublications.com © Copyright 2000 Leyerle Publications, LLC.*

**Bel raggio lusinghier (Beautiful Fleeting Ray)<sup>26</sup>***Semiramide*

Libretto: Robert Glaubitz

Bel raggio lusinghier, di speme, e di piacer alfin per me brillò!  
 Lovely ray enchanting of hope and of pleasure at last for me shone!  
 (Beautiful fleeting ray of hope and pleasure, at last he has shone for me!)

Arsace ritornò, si, a me verrà.  
 Arsace has returned, yes to me he will come.  
 (Arsace returns, yes, to me he will come.)

Quest'alma che sinor gemè, tremò, languì,  
 My soul which now grieved, feared, languished,  
 (This soul that henceforth groaned, trembled, languished,)

Oh! come respirò! Ogni mio duol sparì,  
 Oh! How it can breath (again)! Every one of my cares has vanished,  
 (Oh! to breathe! All my sorrow vanished.)

Dal cor, dal mio pensier, si dilegnò il terror, si.  
 From my heart, from my thoughts has vanished the fear, yes.  
 (From my heart, my thoughts, he dispels the terror.)

Dolce pensiero, di quell'istante, a te sorride l'amante cor,  
 Sweet thoughts of that moment, at you will smile that loving heart,  
 (Sweet thought, of that moment, when his loving heart smiles upon me.)

Si, come più caro, dopo il tormento, è il bel momento di pace, e amor.  
 Yes, how much dearer after the torment, is the lovely moment of joy and love.  
 (Yes, the dearest moment, after the torment. It is the beautiful moment of peace and love.)

**Structure and Style of Rossini Arias**

Rossini's operatic compositional style borrowed from classical traditions while introducing new approaches to form, rhythm, instrumentation, embellishment notation, and genre characteristics (*opera comique* and *opera seria*, or comic and serious operas). His work served as a catalyst for future reforms in the field of Italian opera. Rossini's written-out cadenzas and fioritura changed over time, increasing in complexity and variety and culminating in the

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<sup>26</sup> *Word-for-word translation used with the permission of Leyerle Publications, www.leyerlepublications.com © Copyright 2000 Leyerle Publications, LLC.*

melismatic fervor of his most prolific decade, 1813-1823, from which the seven arias studied here arise.

### **Form**

The first section of a Rossini aria is generally recitative-like, slow, and/or in triple meter, while the second portion, the *cabaletta*, is faster, lively and in duple. Sometimes referred to as a *cavatina-cabaletta* aria, this form can also be referred to as a *cantabile-cabaletta*. The standard *cabaletta* consists of a theme, a short transition, and an embellished repetition of the theme, followed by a series of final cadences that may decrease in length after each repetition. Simple, shorter melismas and traditional harmonic progressions are used in the *cantabile* section, while flamboyant coloratura and boisterous, rhythmically propelled orchestral accompaniments define the rousing *cabaletta*.

**Harmonic structure.** Rossini highlights the melodic charm characteristic of Italian opera by minimizing the harmonic variety, keeping the harmonic structure traditional and simplistic. The arias remain within one primary key throughout the *cantabile* and *cabaletta*. Overarching chordal progressions follow a I-IV-V-I format. “Di tanti palpiti” includes a *recitative* that is often performed along with the aria, which is in the dominant key. The *coda*, or *finale*, of each aria is characterized by a rapid I-IV-V<sup>6/4</sup>-V<sup>7</sup>-I progression. This rapid succession of chords supports a repeated text through increasing speed and volume to a rousing vocal *cadenza*. The harmonic structure of Rossini’s arias supports the comical lyrics and florid melody by its unobtrusive simplicity.



**Table 4.1: Basic Form and Harmonic Structure of Seven Rossini Arias<sup>27</sup>**

	<b>Recitative</b>	<b>Cantabile (triple meter)</b>	<b>Cabaletta (duple meter)</b>	<b>Coda</b>
Di tanti palpiti	C Major: 20-51	F Major: 52-65 (duple)	65-132	132-143
Cruda sorte		F Major: 1-26 (duple)	27-84	5-93
Una voce poco fa		E Major: 1-42	43-106	107-120
Non piu mesta		E Major: 10-26	27-105	105-127
Tanti affetti		E <sup>b</sup> Major: 1-29 (duple)	30-122	123-138
Ah! Quel giorno		EM/C <sup>#</sup> m: 1-42	43-116	116-129
Bel raggio		A Major: 1-43	44-93	93-109

Suspended dissonances, accents, unexpected leaps, chromatic lines, and rhythmic license in the melody are often carried by the straightforward harmonies of an ostinato-like bass line. But while the harmonic structure of his arias remains predictable, Rossini periodically introduces unexpected twists into the harmonic structure. For example, towards the end of several famous arias, Rossini turns the ever-more-frantic melody over to the orchestra, while the singer has a quasi-declamatory line on one note (Gossett, 2001, section 3). Rossini amuses his audience with the occasional harmonic deviation. For example, in the aria “Di tanti palpiti,” from *Tancredi*, instead of resting on the tonic F after the repetition of the words “ti rivedrò” in the phrase “ti rivedrò...Ne’ tuoi bei rai mi pascero” (I shall see you again...in your beams of light I shall delight), Rossini jumps to the major chord on the flattened third degree A<sup>b</sup>, coloring the phrase

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<sup>27</sup> Numbers in the table refer to measures in the scores analyzed.

with a musical ray of sunshine (see ex. 4.1). Rossini sometimes displays such harmonic surprises, and the unexpected zest contributes to the unique appeal of his arias.

Example 4.1: Illustration of Rossini's harmonic ingenuity<sup>28</sup>

[orch]

Mi ri - ve - dra - i, ti ri - ve - drò.  
[C<sup>7</sup> C<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup> C C<sup>7</sup>

ti ri - ve - drò Ne' tuoi bei ra - i  
C<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup> C Ab Db

mi pa - sce - rò.  
Eb<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup> Eb<sup>7</sup> Ab ]

### Stylistic characteristics

Stylistic characteristics of Rossini's music evident within the seven arias studied include charming, highly embellished melodies, sharp and precise rhythmic motifs, and a mounting dynamic excitement as the *cabaletta* progresses. Rossini melodies, particularly as displayed in the *cabaletta* sections, are catchy, repetitive tunes that grow more complex with each repetition. They are so enchanting and memorable that the people in cities such as Venice would sing them in the streets in the nineteenth century. "Tanti affetti" was a purported favorite (Grout & Williams, 2003, p. 387). Melodic embellishment may seem excessive when found in Rossini's

<sup>28</sup> Rossini, Gioachino Antonio 3. From 'Tancredi' to 'La gazza ladra': Ex.3. *Oxford Music Online*. Ed. Retrieved 5 Oct. 2018, from <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.bsu.edu/view/10.1093/omo/9781561592630.001.001/omo-9781561592630-e-8000005838>.

operatic scores, but one must consider Rossini's tendency to write out embellishments that other composers left to the charge of the singer. His embellishments, though numerous and flamboyant, were not considered excessive in that era (Grout & Williams, 2003, p. 387). Ornaments and coloratura passages were meant to be altered to suit the voice of the singer. Rossini did not mean to have his repeated phrases sung in the same way each time, as is evidenced by the myriad of writings from the period and notes on his scores for the singers. Orchestral lines created the rhythmic and harmonic foundation upon which the melody was built, with repeating rhythmic motifs propelling the aria forward. The Rossinian orchestra, though raucous in ensemble and finale numbers, remains subordinate to the solo voice in the arias, a testimony to Rossini's elevation of the singer. The mounting excitement characteristic of Rossini arias is often built on the famous Rossinian crescendo, a simple but effective device that uses repetitions of the same short passage, each higher, louder, and with fuller orchestration than the last, until the final cadence is reached. All these stylistic characteristics work together to create the Rossinian flavor that so enticed and entertained the European world in the first half of the nineteenth century.

### ***Libretto***

Rossini was constantly on the lookout for librettos that suited his musical style. Since many of the vocal numbers in Rossini operas require repetition, elegant word phrasing was not as important as singularly colorful words and phrases from which melismas could be gained. For example, in the *Cenerentola* aria "Non piu mesta," words such as "tears," "heart," and "enchantment" gain small melismas within initial musical phrases, while later words such as "flash," "fly," and "lightning" create the perfect tone for a burst of wide, showy runs in the

*cabaletta*. The same is true of the words and phrases in “Tanti affetti” and “Bel raggio lusinghier.”

Simple, unassuming librettos in Rossini’s comic operas possess a casual affect, rendering them more compelling from a humorous perspective. Some scholars have reacted negatively to certain librettos of Rossini operas and used the occasional poor libretto to discount Rossini’s ability to properly judge and choose dramatic texts for musical setting (Osborne, 2007, p. 171). However, proper poetic style was not Rossini’s goal in choosing which texts to set. He was looking for a good plot and vivid words. When faulty librettos were all that Rossini had at his disposal, he used his comic style to cover any lyric deficiencies. The fact that Rossini could take a weak libretto and transform it via his music into a delightful operatic whole is evidence of his musical ingenuity.

### **Unity of style**

Rossini’s comic and serious operas maintain a unity of style, with less obvious distinctions in comparison to the later Romantic operas. This unity of style is sometimes mistaken for an indiscriminate style. But Rossini’s poignant setting of the “Willow Song” from *Otello* reveals his capability of composing an *opera seria* in a manner distinct from *opera comique* while maintaining his trademark “Rossinian” melismatic treatment and harmonic progressions. As to the similarity between the two genres, Rossini was merely following in the footsteps of Baroque and early Classical composers, who sometimes set sorrowful arias in major keys or at fast tempos, the idea being that emotional context was not to override the general uniformity of style. For example, Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* includes the famous mourning aria “Che farò senza Euridice” in a major key, and with an upbeat tempo. Scholars have debated and criticized Gluck’s setting the aria in this manner, but none have denied its effectively haunting

beauty. Similarly, despite the criticism and confusion over the uniform approach in Rossini arias, the settings are effective in their aim: to enthrall audiences with melismatic prowess and communicate effectively on a word-by-word basis.

### **The Mezzo-Soprano Coloratura Voice: Definition and Parameters**

Categorizing the mezzo-soprano voice can be a challenge, and is primarily dependent upon vocal range or *tessitura*,<sup>29</sup> vocal timbre,<sup>30</sup> and registral shifting points.<sup>31</sup> The mezzo-soprano voice (Italian for “medium soprano”) is categorized as being lower than the soprano voice in range, but not quite as low as the contralto voice. It is advantageous for the vocal range of the Rossinian mezzo-soprano to be from G<sup>3</sup>-B<sup>6</sup>, with register shifts around the areas of B<sup>4</sup>-C<sup>4</sup> (chest to middle) and F<sup>5</sup>-F<sup>#5</sup> (middle to head).<sup>32</sup> Vocal timbre is not as easy to pinpoint. The mezzo-soprano timbre will be slightly darker than that of the soprano, with a rich quality of registral blending in the lower chest tones. The difficulty with timbre lies in the fact that singers can develop a darker sound artificially by placing the voice in the back of the throat. Due to this phenomenon, it is possible for a soprano voice to mimic the darker timbre of a mezzo-soprano. The true mezzo-soprano voice will have that darker, richer quality naturally, while striving to place the sound – but not the throat – high and forward during singing. Since the timbre and

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<sup>29</sup> Vocal range in singing refers to the range of pitches that a singer can produce with good technique and in a relatively comfortable manner. *Tessitura* refers to the primary area of pitches within a singer’s vocal range that is the most comfortable.

<sup>30</sup> Vocal timbre refers to the tonal quality of a voice. It is a synthesis of several factors that include breath flow, resonance space and quality of onset, and is, in a sense, unique to each individual (Campbell, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> Points at which the voice tends to “crack,” sending the message that adjustments must be made in the vocal mechanism to smoothly accomplish moving through the transition. Also known as the *passaggio*. The term “register” has been decried as inaccurately used in this context, instead referring to the three sections of the voice labelled glottal fry, general phonation, and whistle tone. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will continue using the term “register” at times, to avoid the confusion of calling the three sections of the voice “voices,” as they are not distinct voices, but parts/sections/registers within one voice. Contextual problems arise with either term.

<sup>32</sup> Range numbering is based on the lowest A of the piano being A<sup>1</sup>, leading up to a middle C being C<sup>4</sup>. For example, the lowest required note in the range for the mezzo-soprano in Rossini arias is G<sup>3</sup>, the G below middle C.

weight of a voice can be manipulated, the mezzo-soprano's sustainable *tessitura* location is a more relevant factor in accurately determining the voice *fach*.

Once the mezzo-soprano voice has been categorized as such, further categorization is possible, such as determining whether the voice is dramatic, lyric, or coloratura. Dramatic voices are large and filling; lyric voices are small and concentrated; coloratura voices are flexible and fast. Rossini arias written for the lower female range can be sung by all these lower voice types, the prerequisite being the ability to perform coloratura. Today, many of the Rossini performers are lyric coloratura mezzo-sopranos, including myself. The coloratura mezzo-soprano may be the rarest of all, since mezzo-soprano vocal folds are apt to be thick and long, making swift and precise agility difficult to accomplish (Rushmore, 1971, p. 50). Marilyn Horne and Teresa Berganza can be categorized as coloratura mezzo-sopranos of this caliber, with their exceptionally successful careers that included much coloratura repertoire. This voice type is light enough to reach the high notes, flexible enough to move through the advanced coloratura, and rich enough to pass as a lower female voice type.

The required flexibility of range and speed in coloratura repertoire can give the coloratura mezzo-soprano such confidence with the head voice register that the possibility of entering soprano repertoire exists. Lyric coloratura mezzo-sopranos are often very similar to lyric sopranos in terms of the "power range," revealing a potential reason for the several successful transitions from mezzo-soprano to soprano (Siemon, 2007, p. 15). Several women who began as mezzo-sopranos turned to soprano repertoire with success, including Edyth Walker, Gertrude Kappel, Marta Fuchs, Gwyneth Jones, and others (Rushmore, 1971, p. 56). This may be in part due to the pedagogical truth that a solid, healthy approach to training a female voice that is not obviously a soubrette soprano begins with training the middle voice, and then the chest and head

(Doscher, 1994, p. 194; Lehmann, Aldrich & Willenbücher, 1993, p. 89) A focus on strengthening the middle voice first would naturally create young mezzo-sopranos who may later produce a healthy, strong head voice capable of successfully championing soprano repertoire.

No single voice sub-category within the lower female vocal range can perfectly execute every Rossini aria written for the lower female voice. This is because Rossini tailored each role for different voices, each possessing a unique timbre and range, and because there was a distinction made between contraltos and mezzo-sopranos. Thus, the roles of Isabella (“Cruda sorte” from *L’italiana in Algeri*) and Arsace (“Ah! Quel giorno” from *Semiramide*), which were composed for the contralto voice, maintain lower tessituras and are best sung by more dramatic mezzo-sopranos, whereas Rosina (“Una voce poco fa” from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) and Elena (“Tanti affetti” from *La donna del lago*) maintain such tessitura heights that even sopranos have sung the roles with great success. True contraltos are rare, so mezzo-sopranos are the primary voice type cast for the roles Rossini specified for the contralto voice. Even Rossini’s “contraltos” (Isabella Colbran, Giuditta Pasta, and Maria Malibran, among others) were in fact high mezzo-sopranos, as they sang much higher repertoire later on in their careers (Celletti, 1991, p. 158). It is thus up to the singer and her coach/teacher to choose roles and accompanying melismas that accentuate the best aspects of her unique instrument, whether her comfortable tessitura be low or high, and her desired pace fast or slow. In order to sing Rossini arias, the mezzo-soprano should generally be able to sing a pitch range from G<sup>3</sup>-B<sup>6</sup>. But, as a testament to the flexibility of Rossini’s music and the singer’s savvy choice of melisma tessituras, many singers without the strength of this broad range have still managed to sing Rossini arias with adequate success.

The business of voice categorization, particularly for the mezzo-soprano, should be entered carefully, because differing professional opinions exist on what constitutes “dark” and

“bright” timbres, and voices change over time. I have had the privilege of singing in two master classes held at the IU Jacobs School of Music by a famous *spinto* soprano,<sup>33</sup> Virginia Zeani. My first three years of voice lessons were taken with Melinda Johnson-Barnes, who studied with Zeani for several years. Zeani’s vocal training lineage can be traced back to Pauline (Garcia) Viardot, a leading nineteenth century mezzo-soprano whose sister, Maria Malibran, was a favorite of Rossini’s for leading mezzo-soprano roles, and whose brother was the famous vocal pedagogue Manuel Garcia. Knowing Virginia Zeani’s rich vocal heritage gave me reason to desire her opinion concerning my own voice. Due to mixed opinions in the field concerning my voice categorization, I asked Ms. Zeani whether she thought I was truly a mezzo-soprano or whether I should consider turning to soprano repertoire due to my higher range possibilities. Her answer startled me: she stated that if one possesses a wide enough range and a flexible voice, one can choose which voice *fach* one wants to develop, and do so. For my lyric coloratura mezzo-soprano voice, she stated that I can likely channel my vocal timbre towards a darker, richer quality if desired, or towards a brighter, lighter coloratura soprano quality. The decision, she said, was up to me and what made me feel the most comfortable. This advice from a famous opera singer seasoned in her field and with an intimate knowledge of multiple professional operatic voices convinced me that it is possible to channel certain flexible voices into a desired *fach* through sufficiently developing the desired timbre and range. Of course, this is not possible for all voices, and some voices fit very neatly into an exact category. Hence, professional and educated opinions concerning each unique voice are a necessity in the field. Several adjudicators at national competitions including the New York Lyric Opera competition have mentioned that

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<sup>33</sup> *Spinto* soprano: a voice with the easy high notes of a lyric soprano and the dynamic potential of the dramatic soprano. Many *spinto* sopranos also have the darker, richer timbre of a mezzo-soprano, but in a higher tessitura.



my voice has a lyric soprano timbre. Those who know my voice the best, however, including all of my coaches and professors, believe me to be a lyric coloratura mezzo-soprano. To this date, I have chosen to embrace the lyric coloratura mezzo-soprano qualities of my voice and develop them as best I can.

### **Comparison and Analysis of Performing Artists' Interpretations**

In accordance with the truth that each voice is unique and requires individual coloratura choices, a comparison and analysis of various mezzo-soprano artists' interpretations of Rossini arias is useful. Artists' coloratura choices and style will be studied from the vantage of natural vocal timbre and technical development. Since singers are listed chronologically for each piece, the change in vocal style over the course of the decades is discernable and will be mentioned when applicable.

A discography is included at the close of the dissertation, with details on the origin of the artist recordings analyzed in this section and organized by aria title. Most of the recordings are from compact discs and are published for student access on the Naxos Music Library webpage. I have added weblinks to YouTube in the discography for easy public access. The year of each recording is listed after the name of the artist, followed by the source of the recording and the date of distribution. Due to the wide range of mezzo-sopranos studied, no career or biographical information will be provided.

#### **Di tanti palpiti (*Tancredi*)**

**Marilyn Horne, 1986:** (Vaimusic, 2007). Legendary mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne is considered one of the greatest interpreters of Rossini arias. Her technique is solid, her rhythms and tempi organic, her tone even throughout her range, and her melismas uniquely creative while adhering to Rossini style. These characteristics are evident in this 1986 live performance from

the Lugano Festival in Switzerland. In the first half of the *recitative*, Horne has already established several varying approaches to coloratura improvisation: turns, portamenti, elongation, *diminuendo*, *messa-di-voce*, octave displacement, and phrase rearrangement. She manipulates her timbre to fit the mood of each phrase, becoming militaristic for rhythmic sections and more lyric for slow sections. Her chest cavity is ever open, her throat relaxed, and her jawline stable on runs. When the playful main theme enters on the title words, she uses a declamatory approach, and when it repeats, a much softer dynamic level, with tasteful and unique melismatic additions for contrast. Her pronunciation is clear and her vowels pure except when they necessarily modify on high pitches. Horne also gains admiration for her artistic and appropriate leadership on the stage. She knows what tempo to use, and the orchestra follows her lead. This is the sign of a confident and knowledgeable singer. She holds back the tempo without hesitancy for dramatic effect on certain words, and then propels the tempo forward on the words “mi rivedrai, ti rivedrò” as the final section commences, ending with a rousing high A that spirals into a sustained low F.

**Stephanie Blythe, 2006:** (Rodiazsa, 2010). Stephanie Blythe is a famous American mezzo-soprano of dramatic capabilities. Her ventures into singing coloratura roles have garnered some criticism due to her limited agility and range. Nevertheless, her approach to Rossini arias is completely appropriate, as adding extensive melismatic capers is not a prerequisite to a successful Rossini performance. Furthermore, her limited stamina in the upper range gives her freedom to explore lower melismatic possibilities. She knows her limits, never adding more coloratura than she is able to accomplish with relative ease. The calm entrance of the “Oh patria!” *recitative* section is beautifully set up by the orchestra with slow, lyric lines that Blythe follows with a soft, elegant *messa-di-voce*, setting the stage for her winsome appeal to the

listener using frequent dynamic contrasts and lyric phrasing. Blythe's tendency to add lower notes to phrases where most singers add high notes is refreshing. As in the case of Marilyn Horne, and perhaps to a greater extent, this low-range approach to coloratura works for Blythe due to her rich, beautiful blend of chest voice and forward resonance on the low tones, which she melds effortlessly and evenly into the middle voice. As a result of her deep timbre and use of lower-range coloratura throughout the aria, Blythe's sustained ending F<sup>5</sup> sounds higher than it is, giving the audience dramatic satisfaction.

**Elina Garanča 2009:** (Garanča et al., 2009). Lyric coloratura mezzo-soprano Elina Garanča gained fame for her unique blend of richness and flexibility, making her a good fit for Rossini roles. The advent of microphones and studio recordings has changed the way opera singers approach their craft, and this can be heard in Garanča's interpretation of "Di tanti palpiti" in this 2009 studio recording. Her vocal production on the stage has more presence than this particular recording, in which she uses a back-of-the-throat, almost whispery tone quality at the beginnings of soft phrases. She maintains a dynamic level so low on some runs as to be inaudible if performed thus in a hall. The aria text does not require such sensitivity. Rossini's music is meant to be performed in a large space and executed with vocal strength; it does not seem as effective otherwise. Garanča's natural timbre is not as present – that is, forward and ringing – as that of Blythe and Horne, suggesting that her training has emphasized the tallness of upper pharyngeal space at the expense of mask resonance and forward tone placement. As a result, her performance is not as compelling as those of the former two. Garanča's additional melismas are beautiful, but few and predictable. She is not this careful in her other Rossini performances, suggesting that a "purity" of interpretation was required by someone involved in the recording

process. Garanča's coloratura is clean and even, displaying her natural ability despite the peculiar and less-than-desirable aspects of this recording.

### **Cruda sorte (*L'italiana in Algeri*)**

Rossini composed "Cruda sorte" for the contralto voice. The aria contains less coloratura than many of his other arias, and remains within a lower tessitura. As a result, women with larger, dramatic lower voices have successfully sung the aria, including Fedora Barbieri, Ewa Podles, and Stephanie Blythe.

**Fedora Barbieri, 1946:** (Barbieri et al., 1990). Fedora Barbieri's rich, dark tone lends a seriousness to "Cruda sorte," Isabella's *cavatina*, thereby satirizing what would be the opening number of a serious opera, but is instead a comic opera. The mock solemnity is also enhanced by the slow tempo Barbieri chooses to extend for the entire *cantabile* section, and the scarcity of melismatic additions. Shorter lines and staccati add the expected playfulness in the second half of the aria, as the orchestration begins the rhythmic pulse of Isabella's renewed confidence in her feminine wiles ("Già so per pratica..."). Barbieri was not known for her coloratura, as she possessed a more dramatic mezzo-soprano instrument, gaining a solid reputation as an interpreter of Verdi roles. She chooses to sing Rossini's skeleton melismas in "Cruda sorte," avoiding high coloratura until the addition of a mid-high run at the very end. Her interpretation, though not spectacular, is successful primarily due to her uniquely rich tone.

**Lucia Valentini-Terrani, 1972:** (Baritenore00, 2018). This 1972 live performance enables us to view Valentini-Terrani's technique and thus is of value to this analysis. Terrani's voice has the deep timbre of a dramatic instrument and owns the agility necessary to perform Rossini arias. Her approach to coloratura execution is similar to that of Jennifer Laramore and Cecilia Bartoli – slight aspirates between each pitch enable her to move from one pitch to

another with exceptional speed. Unfortunately, this approach, if audible, creates a non-*legato* vocal line on some of the coloratura runs. Bartoli, Laramore, and Terrani all open their mouths very wide during singing. While the jaw is not unhinged and the tone is still secure, this wide mouth was not taught in the nineteenth century and is therefore not in keeping with Rossini performance practice. One wonders how these fabulous Rossini performers would sound if they adhered in practice to the older technical tradition of the compact mouth. Nevertheless, all three maintain impressive breath control, as demonstrated by their physical posture onstage (consistently open rib cage, low breaths, and freedom from tension in the neck and shoulders). Terrani adds a fair amount of her own unique *fioriture*, enhancing the aria and showing off her splendid pitch accuracy amidst swift turns and scales.

**Agnes Baltsa, 1989:** (Rossini et al., 1989 [28:40-32:25] and Baltsa, 1999). Two recordings are given for Agnes Baltsa, the first featuring a 1989 performance and the second a 1999 live audio-visual performance, to reveal aspects of her vocal technique. Baltsa produces her coloratura similarly to Bartoli, Laramore, and Terrani, with a wide mouth position and the use of slight aspirates from the throat between each pitch for increased coloratura speed. However, she lacks the evenness of tone and low breath support of these three artists, as evidenced by her obvious register shifts, tense shoulders, and chest depression at phrase endings. Baltsa seems to have a high registral shift between the chest and middle voice, and she does not strive to hide the obvious switch between the two. She will often take the full chest voice higher than C<sup>4</sup>, as one would when singing musical theater works. Her unusual approach causes some scholars to claim that Baltsa “sometimes sacrificed beauty of tone to dramatic effect,” a practice more acceptable in the field of musical theater than opera (Forbes, 2009). Since operatic arias were not composed to display the register shifts, Baltsa’s habit of constantly changing from chest to head voice and

vice versa lends an agitated air to “Cruda sorte” as well as the illusion that there are two voices performing: one tall and rich and the other brash, low, and forward. Despite these vocal setbacks, her pronunciation is clear, her rhythmic accuracy precise, her acting compelling, and her tone confident, giving her a special place in the hearts of audience members worldwide.

### **Una voce poco fa (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*)**

Due to the higher tessitura of “Una voce poco fa,” several famous sopranos such as Amelita Galli-Curci, Louisa Tetrazzini, Maria Callas, Joan Sutherland, Edita Gruberova have sung the aria with great success. Soprano renditions include the highest improvisational melismas, showing off more *staccati* and runs that venture into the whistle register than the mezzo-soprano voice would be comfortable performing. The mezzo-soprano interpretations, though less extravagant, are equally enjoyable and explore the lower-range melisma possibilities to a greater extent.

**Eugenia Mantelli, ca. 1903:** (Mantelli et al., 2007). Eugenia Mantelli’s vocal tone is forward and clear. In accordance with the stylistic taste of the early nineteenth century, her vibrato rate is fast and even throughout the range. Her choice of tempo fluctuations are unusual and erratic, particularly near her melismatic additions. But her melismas are unique, numerous, and cleanly executed, in keeping with the Rossinian style. Her coloratura is so fast that it seems to run ahead of the phrase at certain points, suggesting a lack of complete control. A slower tempo overall may have enabled her to accomplish the floridity without affecting the pace. Her low notes dip into an obvious chest register, which is especially evident on descending leaps such as that found on the first statement of the words “e Lindoro.” The register switch is so pronounced as to sound similar to a yodel. The obvious break between registers is rarely this pronounced in other singers’ recordings from her era, though usage of the full chest tone on low

notes was common. Obvious register breaks would not have been considered seemly in Rossini's day half a century earlier, as the *legato* line and register blending were of utmost value. To Mantelli's credit, her tone remains even and *legato* on descending scales that enter the chest register; only the leaps sound disjointed. Mantelli barely touches the high B at the end of the piece, choosing to exhibit her vocal flexibility with a spiraling descent instead of sustaining what may have been a strained pitch. For whatever reason, in this recording Mantelli bypasses approximately twenty-seven measures of the rousing finale. This may have been due to a stylistic preference against multiple repetitions of the same phrase, a lack of vocal stamina that day, or merely the constraints of the available gramophone.

**Giulietta Simionato, 1949:** (Simionato et al., 2003). The deep, velvety tones of Giulietta Simionato's low mezzo-soprano voice lend a sensuality to "Una voce poco fa" not often displayed in other renditions. Her interpretation of the *cavatina* includes a wide dynamic range; descending *fioriture* passages begin with a strong tone and sink with the pitch until it fades away. These charming phrases blend into Rossini's melismatic flow, providing an organic, playful quality to the beginning of the aria and revealing Rosina's vivacious, clever nature. As a darker vocal timbre is often associated with weight in the tone, Simionato's ability to blend richness with dexterity and accurate, forward pronunciation is impressive. She easily adds a *staccato* high B at one of the pivotal repeating points, and ends the final phrase with a sustained high B. These excursions into the high head voice register reveal Simionato's ability to combine rich tonal quality with a broad vocal range. Hers is a most enjoyable performance.

**Teresa Berganza, 1959:** (Berganza et al., 2001). The evolution of the slower vibrato rate is readily discernable when comparing Mantelli's 1903 recording to Simionato's in 1949 and then both of these to Berganza's rendition in 1959. Teresa Berganza begins most of the *cantabile*

phrases with barely any vibrato, morphing into an even, relaxed vibrato rate as the phrases progress. This is a stylistic choice more than a natural phenomenon, as Berganza reveals the ability to add vibrato anywhere and at any time in later phrases and other recordings. Her slow transition into vibrato mirrors Rossini's gradual transition into coloratura as the aria progresses. She also utilizes a straighter tone on certain chromatic phrases, thereby emphasizing the purity of each pitch. Berganza can manipulate her vocal timbre, as evidenced in her use of a lighter timbre on the words "Io sono docile" (I am sweet/gentle) to reflect the lyrics, and her gradual return to vocal boldness as the finale progresses. Berganza remains within the confines of Rossini's written melismas, a striking contrast to the multitude of florid additions made by Mantelli in the 1903 recording.

**Isabel Leonard 2014:** (Rossini et al., 2014). Isabel Leonard displays a rich vocal timbre and a flexible voice in this 2014 recording from the Metropolitan Opera. Her voice has a more theatrical air than previous decades' recordings, vocally reflecting the recent decades' demand for greater acting ability and drama in opera. Though rich, her tone is not as forward in the mask as Mantelli's or Simionato's, lending a somewhat dampened quality to her low range and an unconcentrated direction to her high notes. In contrast to Berganza's deliberate choice to use a mixture of straight tone and vibrato, Leonard's vibrato vacillates according to pitch location, maintaining evenness in the low and middle range, but becoming wider and slower on the higher pitches. A slight aspiration between notes in many of her runs is evident, especially the descending ones. This is also more common in modern coloratura practice, but would have been considered an inappropriate lack of *legato* in earlier eras. Since this is a video recording, we can observe that her jaw widens a great deal on the high pitches, a practice that would have been



considered inappropriate in the nineteenth century according to writings on vocal technique training.

**Nacqui all' affanno... Non piu mesta from *La Cenerentola***

**Conchita Supervia, 1927:** (Bellini et al., 2012). The most immediate observations gleaned from this Supervia recording are her forward tone quality and very fast vibrato rate. To the modern ear, her vibrato rate may detract from the lyric phrasing and suggest an air of tension in the slower sections. Though fast, the vibrato is not wide and remains within the confines of acceptable pitch fluctuation. As the coloratura begins, the vibrato in no way detracts from Supervia's superior technical ability in performing runs. Perhaps the speed of her vibrato lends an urgency to her runs that propels them forward. In fact, her vibrato rate coincides with the speed of her runs, suggesting a correlation. Both up and down the scales as well as within weaving lines, her coloratura is very fast, clean and rhythmically accurate. Her melismas are not extravagant, primarily remaining within the bounds of Rossini's suggestions. The high notes she chose are those written in the score, and are pristinely placed. No tension is apparent in the sound, only strong breath support and pitch control. The low tones are settled beautifully, attesting to the fact that her larynx is relaxed in a comfortably low position and not forced upward for the high tones. The tone is forward in the mouth and very bright, almost of a soprano quality. Supervia likely sang with a more compact mouth position to create this kind of timbre and lots of lower breath support for such pure high tones. Supervia's ability to darken her tone into a richer mezzo-soprano sound is evident when one listens to her interpretation of Bizet's "Habanera." She purposefully chose a brighter tone quality for Rossini's "Non piu mesta" to reflect the sentiments and higher range of the aria.

**Teresa Berganza, 1960:** (Rossini et al., 1960). In distinct contrast to Supervia, Berganza utilizes straight tone on several of the longer notes of the aria, a practice that would become increasingly popular over the coming decades. This is coupled with more rhythmic freedom and a greater range of dynamics – that is, more musical playfulness and less direct presentation than previous decades’ performances. Berganza’s melisma notes meld smoothly together while her pitch accuracy remains excellent and her runs clean. The tone quality is darker than Supervia’s but does not become heavy. Berganza chose to use Rossini’s written-out runs as Supervia did, and her high B at the end is just as stunning.

**Cecilia Bartoli, 1989:** (Bartoli et al., 1989). Cecilia Bartoli was informed by Rossini scholar and editor Phillip Gossett concerning her coloratura in her later recordings. She knows the critical editions well, and is able to implement coloratura in an informed manner (Gossett, 2009). Though her coloratura choices would likely have been Rossini-condoned, her technical approach to producing them may have met with some disapproval in the nineteenth century, as will be discussed shortly. Bartoli’s unique presentation of this famous *Cenerentola* aria begins with an exaggeratedly drawn-out phrase “Nacqui all’affanno e al pianto” (I was born to suffering and tears), depicting the sorrows of Angelina (Cinderella) with her voice. Bartoli utilizes straight tone at the beginning of phrases and on slow chromatic sections as Berganza did. As the coloratura diva, Bartoli begins adding her own melismas from the beginning, with two gentle trills on the phrase “Soffrì tacendo il core” (It suffered in silence, the heart), portraying the trembling sorrow of the heart. As the coloratura begins to increase, Bartoli’s unique approach becomes apparent. Her speed and accuracy are exceptional. However, a slight exhalation exists between the pitches that suggests a technical approach very different from what produced the *legato* line valued in previous decades. Her throat seems to play a significant role in producing

the runs instead of pure breath flow reliance. Also, there is a dispersed quality to Bartoli's highest tones due to her habit of opening the mouth very wide to obtain them. They are not produced with as much security and strength as high tones from earlier singers; they change in tone color from her middle range and cause her diction to become muddy. These concerns do not diminish the main draws of Bartoli's voice, however, which include her incredible coloratura speed, pitch accuracy, and musical finesse.

### **Tanti affetti (*La donna del lago*)**

As Rossini progressed with his operas in the 1810s, he began to include more melismatic possibilities in the score for singers, often out of mere suggestion, but sometimes to keep certain singers from adding stylistically inappropriate coloratura. "Tanti affetti" is an excellent example of such composing. Rossini adds many ornate, specific and frequent melismas. Even performers who remain true to the score will be vocally challenged, sounding to the average listener as if they have improvised. There were very few productions of *La donna del lago* prior to the Rossini revival of the 1970s. Thus, the recordings analyzed stem from the last forty years or less.

**Frederica von Stade, 1982:** (Von Stade et al., 2016). As is typical of lyric coloratura mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade, she sings the first lines of the aria using her operatic slur, a method of singing into the pitch with a straight tone and a small mouth position, then widening the mouth, tone, and vibrato as the pitch or phrase continues. She sometimes creates a *messa-di-voce* on each pitch for dramatic effect, instead of one on each phrase as would be customary. This practice of using operatic slurs produces in von Stade's voice a slight distortion of individual vowel sounds and an overemphasis on particular pitches, causing less *legato* than nineteenth-century composers would have preferred. Opera singers normally want to remain "on top of" each pitch, but von Stade's unique and modern stylistic approach leads to a very different

tone quality that is often just below each pitch, and scoops into phrases. These operatic oddities are particularly evident in the beginning of this recording of “Tanti affetti,” perhaps indicating that this aria was performed near the end of a recital when her voice was already fatigued and she could not maintain the stamina to remain “on top of” pitches much longer. On the positive side, von Stade’s blend of the middle, chest and head registers is very even, with a uniform vocal tone throughout. This is especially transparent in the chromatic ascent/descent from B<sup>b4</sup>-B<sup>b6</sup> and back again, which is truly stunning. Near the end in measure 108 on one of the last “Fra il padre” phrases, von Stade adds an unexpected and unique melisma, beginning at the lowest portion of the range and driving the phrase upward instead of varying Rossini’s written-out scampering descent. She resolves this melisma very fluidly in m. 112 within the Rossinian character. One wonders if the famed pianist who collaborated with her in this recording, Martin Katz (who adds very amusing and clever piano runs not composed by Rossini) had anything to do with this particularly stylish melisma choice.

**Joyce DiDonato, 2009:** (Rossini et al., 2009). Along with Marilyn Horne and Cecilia Bartoli, Joyce DiDonato has the most striking, unique, and Rossinian melismas of all the artists I have analyzed. With a blend of strong high notes and adequate depth in the lower voice, DiDonato incorporates the best melismas of both soprano and mezzo-soprano singers of the past, adding to them her own mix of improvisational techniques. This creativity and skill is evident even in Rossini’s “Tanti affetti,” which is already highly ornamented. Her high melismas are light enough to be accomplished very fast, and yet they also maintain the brightness necessary for carrying in a hall without a microphone. Her low tones, though not rich, are accurate and well-settled in her voice, exhibiting a healthy, relaxed larynx.

**Julia Lezhneva, 2012:** (Crescendo, 2013). Of all the singers listed and analyzed, I have chosen to include only one soprano: amazing youthful talent exudes from Julia Lezhneva, a Russian coloratura soprano who specializes in coloratura soprano and mezzo-soprano repertoire from the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries. Her young voice rings clear and focused on all pitches, only lacking in the depth and vibrancy that comes with age. Her tone seems a bit careful on the high notes, once again probably an issue of her youth rather than any technical deficiency. One can already distinguish the richness of which she is capable in her blossoming upper-middle register pitches. Perhaps due to her young, clear tone, Lezhneva is capable of immensely fast and clean coloratura. Her melisma choices sit more or less within the soprano range and are stylistically appropriate.

**Ah! quel giorno oignor rammento (*Semiramide*)**

As a pants role, “Ah! Quel giorno” is one of Rossini’s lower-tessitura arias written for a true contralto or at least a mezzo-soprano with a very rich lower register. Consequently, all three of the singers analyzed below are known for their accomplishment in performing mezzo-soprano operatic roles of dramatic and authoritative proportions.

**Eleonora de Cisneros, 1913:** (Rossini et al., 1990). With a rich, deep voice of a very wide range, Eleonora de Cisneros successfully sang both soprano and mezzo-soprano repertoire throughout her career. She had an incredible amount of flexibility for the size of her instrument, and her interpretation of “Ah! Quel giorno” is melismatically secure. She adds a fair amount of her own coloratura, some of which sounds as though it would have been popular in the early twentieth century but seems slightly uncharacteristic of Rossini’s choices. As with many singers of the early century, Cisneros maintains such an evenness of tone quality that her dynamic range is narrow. Her rhythmic pulse is strong except for one of the runs near the end where she skips a

beat, causing the orchestra to scurry to keep up. Her high ending pitch rings strong with frontal resonance, perhaps a bit strident, but well sustained.

**Ebe Stignani (ca. 1941):** (Bellini et al., 1990). Ebe Stignani has a rich, forward and interesting vocal timbre which she displays superbly in “Ah! Quel giorno.” She takes breaths more frequently than most performers of this aria but uses her air for solid coloratura execution and to maintain an even, rich tone. In two places, she uses lower melismas where most performers would choose to go up. Her higher range is very secure and beautiful, so the reason for her choice may have been individual musical taste. As in the case of some melismas in Cisneros’s performance, Stignani’s final melisma for the ending cadence seems uncharacteristic of Rossini’s writing; it is rhythmically and melodically anti-climactic to the grand melismas sung earlier. Her voice exudes with confidence and is a very strong fit for this particular aria.

**Ewa Podles 1995:** (Rossini et al., 2000). Contralto Ewa Podles has the lowest, deepest voice of all the singers analyzed in this dissertation. Her lowest tone in this recording, which is landed very well, is the low  $F^3$  just before the entrance of the first “Sciuse il ciglio.” Due perhaps to her very dark timbre that requires incredibly open pharyngeal space and resonance, some of Podles’ coloratura is subject to the audible aspiration between pitches that is apparent in many modern interpretations of Rossini arias. Her unique choice to hold out a high G and cap it with a following high B before the second statement of the theme is surprising and impressive; contraltos often choose not to sustain high pitches, yet her high pitches are secure and free.

### **Bel raggio lusinghier (*Semiramide*)**

As the title role of *Semiramide* is often sung by a soprano, there are fewer mezzo-soprano recordings of this aria. Of those available, I have chosen three of my favorites: Horne, Berganza,

and DiDonato have already been analyzed for their performances of other Rossini arias, but I will contrast their different approaches here as well.

**Teresa Berganza, 1960:** (Rossini et al., 1960). Berganza compels the listener into her character's emotional realm from the very first phrase in "Bel raggio lusinghier" by implementing organic articulation and phrasing methods. For the initial vocal leaps, her voice bounces on the lower note, causing it to sound almost like a staccato, and lands on the higher note firmly in *tenuto* fashion. The following melisma goes up three notes and down, then turns near the end. If this were a roller-coaster, it would pause momentarily on the highest note, then spiral downward fast and slowly taper near the final twist before landing. Berganza does this motion through her dynamics and pacing, slowing into the high note then coming down the musical cascade swiftly and finally lightening the voice and slowing down at the final turn. Such musical sophistication causes Berganza to have a very high reputation among peers and opera lovers. As is Berganza's custom, she adds very few melismas that are not already included by Rossini. Her coloratura is evenly paced throughout this recording, never going too slow, but never going very fast either, thereby creating pristine pitch accuracy on the runs. Her high A<sup>6</sup> at the end is held longer than expected and maintains strength and freedom combined. Overall, this is a most enjoyable performance of Semiramide's famous aria.

**Marilyn Horne, 1966:** (Rossini et al., 1966). The incredible Marilyn Horne becomes very creative in "Bel raggio lusinghier" with her melisma choices, especially after the repeat of the phrase "Dolce pensiero di quell'istante," or m. 77. Even in the short span of mm. 77-81, Horne explores high and low limits of dynamics, range, and tempo. Her lowest note in this segment is a D<sup>#3</sup>, a note even contraltos rarely try to sing. She then enters a very slow pace, the orchestra lightly plodding behind, while she explores the rich lower limits of her voice before

leaping unexpectedly up to an A<sup>6</sup> on the word “sorrìde” (smile). Due to the higher range of the final repetitions of the phrase “è il bel momento” (it is the wonderful moment), Horne modifies the prolonged vowel in “momento” so that it sounds more like “momahnto.” This enables her to keep the open pharyngeal space necessary for accomplishing the runs to her satisfaction. Just before the rhythmic section commences in the orchestra in m. 94, Horne takes extra time to breathe, knowing that the rest of the piece is a non-stop ride until the final cadence. She once again explores the low as well as the high range of her voice, ending on the high A<sup>6</sup>.

**Joyce DiDonato, 2009:** (Rossini et al., 2009). Joyce DiDonato’s choice of coloratura in this aria is in-between that of Horne’s (exploring the range of pitches and tempi) and Berganza’s (maintaining the written-out melismas and tempo markings). In keeping with the fact that the role of Semiramide is often sung by a soprano and has a higher tessitura, DiDonato explores primarily the upper range possibilities in this aria. She takes a tempo much faster than Horne or Berganza in the coloratura sections, showing off her incredible speed. This speed is gained at the expense of a larger, stronger tone quality, as the tone must be significantly lightened to accomplish such speed. For a recording, this approach works very well. DiDonato ends the aria by moving up in a scalar motion to the high B<sup>6</sup> before landing on the A<sup>6</sup>, ending with a *bravura* to match her spectacular coloratura skills.



**Table 4.2: Performing Artists and their Vocal Techniques**

	<i>Legato/ Line</i>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Resonance and Tone</b>	<b>Melismas/ Speed</b>	<b>Registers</b>	<b>Vibrato/ Speed</b>
Eugeia Mantelli (1903)	smooth	low	frontal/ dark	added/ fast	disjunct	constant/ fast
Eleonora de Cisneros (1913)	smooth	broad (low-high)	frontal/ dark	added	even	constant/ medium
Conchita Supervia (1927)	smooth	broad	frontal/ dark+brgt	added/ fast	even	constant/ fast
Ebe Stignani (1941)	smooth	low	frontal/ dark	added/ fast	even	constant/ fast
Fedora Barbieri (1946)	smooth	low	frontal/ dark	added/ slow	even	constant/ fast
Giulietta Simionato (1949)	smooth	broad	frontal/ dark	added/ fast	even	constant/ medium
Teresa Berganza (1960)	smooth	low	frontal/ dark	as written/ medium	even	sometimes straight
Marilyn Horne (1960s-80s)	smooth	broad	frontal/ dark+brgt	added/ fast	even	constant/ medium
Lucia Valentini-Terrani (1972)	smooth	broad	back/ dark	added/ fast	even	constant/ medium
Frederica von Stade (1982)	smooth	high	frontal/ bright	added/ fast	even	sometimes straight
Cecilia Bartoli (1989)	aspirated	broad	frontal/ bright	added/ fast	even	sometimes straight
Agnes Baltsa (1989)	aspirated	broad	back/ dark	added/ fast	disjunct	often straight
Ewa Podles (1995)	aspirated	broad	back/ dark	added/ fast	even	constant/ medium
Stephanie Blythe (2006)	smooth	low	frontal/ dark	added/ slow	even	constant/ slow
Elina Garanca (2009)	smooth	broad	back/ dark	added/ fast	even	constant/ medium
Joyce DiDonato (2009)	smooth	high	frontal/ bright	added/ fast	even	constant/ fast
Julia Lezhneva (2012)	smooth	high	frontal/ bright	added/ fast	even	sometimes straight
Isabel Leonard (2014)	aspirated	broad	back/ dark	added/ fast	disjunct	constant/ vascillates

The eighteen performing artists in the table above were analyzed for their Rossini interpretations. They represent over a century of coloratura singing, from 1903-2014. The results of this overview reveal some general trends in stylistic preferences and training in the opera world from the early twentieth century into the early twenty-first century. With some exceptions, the *legato* line within Rossini melismas has been maintained by coloratura mezzo-sopranos across the century. In accordance with Rossini's directives, melismas have been highly ornamented by most mezzo-sopranos and have been performed with speed. The register shifts, or *passaggi*, of most mezzo-sopranos have been handled smoothly, with evenness between the chest, middle, and head registers, or voices.

Some changes can be noted across the twentieth century in the resonance placement and the approach to vibrato. Mezzo-sopranos of the early twentieth century generally maintained a frontal resonance, even when their timbre was darker and the preferred range lower. On the other hand, singers of the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century practice placing the tone in a more open pharyngeal space, centering the sound in the back of the throat instead of the front of the face. This modern trend digresses from traditional pedagogy, which emphasizes frontal resonance. The vibrato rate was generally a consistent pace in the early twentieth-century voices, carrying through each pitch. But in the mid-to-late half of the century, prolonged pitches and slow passages would sometimes begin with straight tone. This trend, which continues today, may be due to the advent of musical theater or a renewed interest in early music (Renaissance and Baroque singing styles included straight tone). At any rate, the stylistic choice of implementing the occasional straight tone does not hinder these mezzo-sopranos' ability to perform exceptional coloratura.

### Chapter Summary

The seven Rossini arias studied and performed for this dissertation project have been discussed in relation to their performance histories, plotlines, forms, harmonic structures, libretti, and styles. Rossini utilized the multi-movement form for his arias, creating a flexible framework for inserting coloratura. The two main sections of his arias are the lyric *cantabile* followed by the fast, rhythmic *cabaletta*. His harmonic structures remain simple so that the melismas might shine. Rossini deliberately chose to incorporate libretti based on their colorful plotlines and vivid texts instead of their poetic elegance. Rossini's style involves a high degree of embellishments, rhythmic motifs, repetition, and dynamic acceleration. His stylistic approach remains consistent throughout his operas, whether they be *opera seria* or *opera buffa*.

Various performing artists' interpretations of these Rossini arias have been analyzed, with attention given to how each artist approaches melismas, phrasing, tone placement, register shifts, and vibrato rate. The analysis revealed a general adherence to *legato* line, even registers, and swift execution of melismas. Toward the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, performing artists' interpretations of Rossini arias began to shift toward a darker, pharyngeal resonance and the inclusion of some straight tone. Nevertheless, the coloratura execution of more recent mezzo-sopranos is not hindered by these trends but remains strong, flexible, and impressive.

## Chapter 5

### PERFORMANCE GUIDANCE FOR SEVEN ROSSINI ARIAS

An analysis of specific Rossini coloratura as studied in the seven Rossini arias of this dissertation will now be presented, with the primary attention dedicated to the varieties of interpretation through melismas. While each aria presents unique challenges, all of them share Rossini's style, and an overlap of coloratura concepts will occur within the different arias. As the systematic method for coloratura technique is practiced, the mezzo-soprano will experience a slow, steady progression toward more advanced coloratura abilities. Guidelines and musical examples will be given to direct the mezzo-soprano in choosing appropriate melismas based on her current level of agility development and voice type.

Important elements of Rossinian style are discussed prior to the introduction of musical examples of melismas in this chapter. Rossini enjoyed having his arias performed within his own compositional style, including those that require the use of improvisational skills from the singer. Upon hearing an unusually florid rendition of "Una voce poco fa," Rossini is reputed to have said, "Very nice, my dear, and who wrote the piece you have just performed?" (Osborne, 2002). Although the ambitious soprano who sang for Rossini (Adelina Patti) may have merely amused the composer, this quote suggests that Rossini valued his own unique style of melismatic composition and hoped that in the midst of improvisation an attentive vocalist would be able to distinguish between random floridity and stylistically appropriate coloratura. Due to the importance of this facet of Rossini arias, this chapter seeks to serve as historically and musically-informed guidance to coloratura choices in the seven selected Rossini arias.

Melismas will be approached with the following facets taken into consideration: appropriate range, length, speed and clarity, rhythm and rubato, trills, and *messa-di-voce*. In

accordance with Rossini's desire that singers adjust his melismas in stylistically appropriate ways to showcase their unique skills, this performance guidance chapter will feature two to four acceptable melisma choices for specific sections in each of the seven arias studied.

Differentiation will be made between appropriate melismas for larger, more dramatic voices as opposed to smaller, lyric voices, and between the mezzo-soprano voice leaning towards the lower range as opposed to the mezzo-soprano voice with a comfortable high *tessitura*. Unique melismas gained from particular mezzo-sopranos in performance (Marilyn Horne, Teresa Berganza, Cecilia Bartoli, etc.) will be sourced accordingly when accessed.<sup>34</sup> This chapter is not meant to be exhaustive: sources for Rossini embellishments such as Ricci's *Variazioni Cadenze Tradizioni* (1903), the *Estelle Liebling book of coloratura cadenzas* (1943), and the Cagli/Gossett/Zedda critical edition scores (1979) give thorough listings from which to choose melismas for Rossini arias. Additionally, recordings of Rossini singing artists from the early nineteenth century into the present are widely available. This chapter includes guiding principles for exploring one's own embellishments in the Rossinian style, along with a series of selected examples of potential melismatic choices in the seven Rossini arias studied based on the principles of appropriate range, length, speed and clarity, rhythm and rubato, trills, and *messa-di-voce*.

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<sup>34</sup> N.b.: Similar coloratura choices are used in various sections of the arias, and overlap occurs in multiple recordings. For this reason, it is impossible to source every embellishment back to its origin. But sources will be revealed for improvisatory melismas gained from particular performances.

### **Performing and Interpreting Rossini Arias**

“After all the study and research you can do, ornamentation becomes a question of taste. Instinct must take over.” ~ Richard Bonygne (Redick, 1971, p. 44)

#### **Common Elements**

Amidst the variety of Rossini aria interpretations, professional performers of coloratura possess certain unifying qualities that include an attractive tone, a high level of technical proficiency, and an artistic musical intelligence. The first quality requires a natural possession: a purely attractive instrument. This cannot be taught, but only utilized and developed once found. The second quality – a high level of technical proficiency – can be taught and practiced, the development of which was discussed in Chapter 3. The third quality, the artistic musical intelligence, enables the singer to convey the emotions of the operatic character through the music. Every performance requires a peculiar and personal degree of emotional communication through song. Once these qualities have been utilized and developed by the coloratura mezzo-soprano, she is then able to interpret the Rossini arias in a unique, personal, and compelling fashion.

#### **Avoiding Imitation**

Rossini’s arias maintain such uniformity in style that rote imitation can become the primary effect of the performance upon the audience. Efforts should be taken to keep mere imitation from being the main impression. Upon hearing the accusation that Italian musical art is imitative, Rossini responded that “Italian musical art (especially the vocal aspect) is ‘ideal and expressive’ and never ‘imitative’... the feelings of the heart are expressed and not imitated” (Celletti, 1991, p. 136). In stating this conviction, Rossini was not denying the fact that he borrowed excerpts of music from his previous operas for new ones, or that he used similar

musical material multiple times with slight variations. Instead, he was making a statement about the nature of the music itself; that is, each aria stands alone as a work of art, ideal and expressive in its own right. In order for performances of Rossini arias to be successful, novel expressiveness should be channeled into the singer's interpretation of the piece, thereby stimulating a renewed sense of purpose and vibrancy each time an aria is performed. Without an acknowledgment and subsequent musical implementation of the unique passion and soul of an aria, the work *does* become imitative, a mere copy of a previous model. The Rossini performer should be aware of this pitfall and make constant efforts to keep the arias fresh.

### **The Unique Performance**

Some of the ways in which the Rossini arias can be kept distinctly expressive instead of imitative include the employment of unique melismas instead of generic or expected ones, the incorporation of elegant and meaningful phrasing, and the use of varying approaches to dynamics. Fresh, unique melismas require a broad knowledge of the possible melisma choices for various phrases in a Rossini aria. The mezzo-soprano should make herself aware of the plethora of choices available to her from books detailing Rossini melismas as well as recordings of the arias. A unique and technically appropriate variety of melismas from these sources should then be implemented. If the mezzo-soprano is experienced enough to create her own melismas, she should be certain that her creation falls in line with the general melisma guidelines that all Rossini arias follow (these guidelines are explored in the following section).

The second method of creating expressive melismas involves phrasing. Elegant, meaningful phrasing includes the dynamic arch of the line as well as the manner and location of breaths. The development of good breath control will enable the mezzo-soprano to insert long phrases where Rossini wrote long melismas without rests and to shorten certain phrases for the

sake of variety and lyric expression. Rossini's ornamentation has more to do with the overarching melodic phrase than it does with individual words. So, choosing words on which to place melismas becomes a matter of the appropriateness of the setting within the phrase coupled with the vowel sound and does not rely heavily on the meaning of the word.

The third tactic for producing a unique aria rendition involves changing the use of one's dynamics in accordance with various melismatic directions. The Rossini mezzo-soprano can utilize a myriad of dynamic directions within the usual rise and fall of a phrase. Recordings are a good source of ideas on the variety of phrasal dynamics at the singer's disposal.

### **Guidelines for Choosing Rossini Melismas**

Some basic elements must be considered when choosing melismas for Rossini arias. The chosen embellishments should be uniquely suited to the mezzo-soprano's specific voice *fach*, *tessitura*<sup>35</sup>, and coloratura skill. The chosen embellishments should reflect an accurate stylistic approach to the aria, meaning that Rossini would have recognized and approved the melisma choice (Gossett, 2009). Finally, the embellishments should stem from an understanding of the meaning conveyed by Rossini's musical symbols. These elements are discussed individually in this section.

Improvisatory embellishments are to be inserted in appropriate sections of the aria. Sections in the arias where Rossini composed various renditions of his own phrases and coached singers to realize their own coloratura are suitable options for improvisation. Generally, in the *cantabile* and *cabaletta* sections of the *da capo* aria form, improvisatory embellishments are

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<sup>35</sup> The *tessitura* denotes the part of the vocal range in a vocal piece that is most frequently used. Thus, *tessitura* is the musical equivalent to the statistical mode in mathematics. In the context of this section, I use the term *tessitura* to refer to the part of a vocalist's range that should be utilized the most for the creation of improvisatory embellishments, based on the mezzo-soprano's voice *fach* and comfort. Thus, the discussion centers around how the mezzo-soprano creates the aria's *tessitura* based on her melismatic choices.



unadvisable during the first statement of a melody but are encouraged wherever a melody is repeated (Gossett, 2006). The embellishment of repeated melodic material within the *cabaletta* is especially important as the material repeats multiple times before the final cadential point. Refraining from improvisation at repeated sections of Rossini's musical material is stylistically inappropriate as well as musically tedious. The mezzo-soprano can take Rossini's repetition of material as authorization for improvisatory license within the parameters of Rossini's style and the capacities of her unique instrument.

### **Voice *Fach***

The categorization of "mezzo-soprano" is only the beginning of melisma determinations for the person performing Rossini's mezzo-soprano arias. As discussed in Chapter 4, the varieties and parameters within this broad categorization are the primary means whereby individual Rossini performers will choose melismas. These include more specific voice *fach* elements such as whether the mezzo-soprano voice is lyric or dramatic, high or low, heavy or light. Of course, the mezzo-soprano should be adept at singing coloratura. But this does not mean that she must be categorized as a "coloratura mezzo-soprano" in order to perform Rossini arias and roles successfully. Instead, her unique instrument will determine which melismas she will choose.

A dramatic, darker, lower voice, such as that of Ewa Podles or Stephanie Blythe, requires that improvisatory embellishments be primarily within the lower register and at a slower pace. Dramatic voices require melisma improvisation that focuses on the creation of unique intervals and melodic direction instead of speed, thereby displaying the strongest facets of the instrument: breadth, low richness, and legato tone.

A lyric, light, and higher mezzo-soprano voice with easy coloratura will be best displayed via embellishments in the middle and head registers of the voice. This kind of voice is often capable of performing the fastest coloratura improvisations, including swift scales, vocal leaps, staccati, and arpeggios.

The most impressive professional operatic mezzo-sopranos own a little bit of each of these broad categories. These voices are capable of using both the low and high register while maintaining an even, rich tone. They can display a dark breadth in the low register while also revealing a vocal brilliance in the high coloratura. Their voices are agile and rich simultaneously. Such voices could possibly be considered the mezzo-soprano coloratura equivalents to the *spinto* sopranos, lyric sopranos known for their ability to wax rich and dramatic when the music demands it.

### ***Tessitura***

Creating one's own vocal *tessitura* in a Rossini aria via the direction and setting of each improvised melismatic phrase can be a daunting task, particularly for the young mezzo-soprano. As the breath support for the voice becomes stronger, the upper range will expand, allowing for a higher melismatic *tessitura* than was previously possible (Rosselli, 1992, p. 106). Mezzo-sopranos should consider where their voice currently resides on the vocal spectrum when choosing which melismas to use in Rossini arias. If a range of notes for a melisma exceeds the current capabilities of the singer, the voice will strain every time the melisma is sung, which may lead to vocal deterioration. But if a range is chosen that is within the current limits of the mezzo-soprano's unique voice, good technique can be established within the aria, building the voice instead of breaking it down. A common misconception among young singers is that if one can reach a note by whatever means, that note is within one's range and can be regularly added to the

general tessitura of a Rossini aria. This is simply not true; almost any untrained woman can produce a high C that is aesthetically unpleasant. The difference between the untrained voice and the trained one is proper technique and tone quality. A note that is rarely attainable using proper technique and tone quality in the practice room should not be considered part of a singer's range until it becomes attainable under these conditions and should not be used in the improvisatory tessitura of Rossini arias.

As the goal of embellishing melismas includes the creation of more impressive coloratura, the range of notes within improvisatory embellishments often exceeds that of the original melodic phrase, with an emphasis on the upper or lower register as determined by the mezzo-soprano's *fach*. Thus, a phrase with an initial range from E<sup>4</sup>-D<sup>5</sup> may become a range of B<sup>4</sup>-G<sup>5</sup> at the repeat, in the voice of a seasoned coloratura mezzo-soprano. For a darker, lower mezzo-soprano, the range may become simply B<sup>4</sup>-D<sup>5</sup>, without an upward extension. Alternately, for the high, lyric mezzo-soprano, the extension may need to simply run the higher gamut from E<sup>4</sup>-G<sup>5</sup>.

Despite the temptation to display the full range of the voice in Rossini arias, mezzo-sopranos, particularly younger ones, should feel comfortable maintaining a lower tessitura throughout their melismatic additions to Rossini arias. This advice is well-founded; Pauline Viardot claimed to have "spoilt" her voice by trying to sing soprano roles, and other mezzo-sopranos have had equal difficulty reaching into the higher tessitura (Rushmore, 1971, p. 56). Estelle Liebling cautions singers to know their own limitations, consult with vocal teachers, and not attempt coloratura feats outside of their unique and current abilities (Liebling 1943, 3). Coupling this advice with the knowledge that some mezzo-sopranos successfully transition into soprano repertoire later in life, the young mezzo-soprano is well-advised to remain within the

bounds of healthy vocal production, never straining the voice but only singing high notes if they are healthily accessible. Time and ability will reveal whether or not higher notes and melismas are apropos.

### **Coloratura Skill**

The ease and speed with which a mezzo-soprano can move through the *passaggi* with an even tone, performing vocal leaps and runs, will determine in large part what kind of melismas she should embrace. The main point of Rossini's repetitions of melodic material, especially within the *cabaletta* sections, is to display the coloratura skills of the singer to a more impressive extent. But sheer virtuosity will not bring the acclaim Rossini sought for his singers. Rather, the beauty and diversity of the detail within the variety of choices claims the applause more than the random addition of rapid scales or arpeggios. Diversifying the approach to each melisma in a tasteful and technically proficient manner is the primary means whereby Rossini singers gain applause. For example, one may use 32<sup>nd</sup> triplet arpeggios to broaden a mere triplet arpeggio in one phrase, while in the next add 32<sup>nd</sup> chromatic half steps leading to each note of the triplet. Cadential points at the end of larger sections welcome more length and variety than usual and can include a combination of various articulations, scales, leaps, and dynamics before the final resolution. Skill in these kinds of decisions grows as the mezzo-soprano learns from the score and good recordings, tailoring her own melismas to display the best of her vocal abilities.

### **Facets of Rossinian Style**

One of the most important factors in determining which melismas to use in Rossini arias is stylistic appropriateness. Thanks to the success of modern musicological research, performers of Rossini arias have access to a more specific knowledge of which melismas are the most stylistically appropriate to implement in Rossini arias. This is possible primarily due to the

markings found in scores belonging to famous singers of Rossini's time – singers who either worked with Rossini directly in the creation of melismas or were coached by someone who had (Gosset 2009, p. 117). This knowledge, Gosset claims, reflects how singers ought to approach the performance practice of Rossini's arias. He stresses the importance of not confusing Estelle Liebling's turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century publication of coloratura cadenzas with those that the Rossinian performers of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century would have used (Gosset 2009, p. 117). This does not mean Liebling's cadenzas are inappropriate to use but rather that they add what in her day would have been modern stylistic elements. Music is interpreted differently in every era. Though this phenomenon is natural, it should be acknowledged as different and should not be confused with an adherence to original practice. Mezzo-sopranos have the freedom to use late-nineteenth century or later-influenced melismas in their interpretation of Rossini arias. Nevertheless, they should be aware that they are implementing melismas unlikely to have been used by Rossini's singers.

Rossinian style remains consistent with a set of basic guidelines that can be followed by those adventurous mezzo-sopranos desirous of creating their own melismas. Facets to consider include the position of the desired melisma in the aria, the surrounding harmonies, the rhythm, and the phrase shape. The position of the melisma in relation to the aria's structure, tempo, and harmonic framework determines the kind of melisma permitted. Rossini preferred his singers to perform the first appearance of main melismas as written, with consecutive appearances of that melisma embellished as desired. A melisma within the *cantabile* section can have more interpolation (internal, free runs within the phrase, emphasizing particular notes), while melismas in the *cabaletta* should maintain rhythmic integrity, without *rubato*. More freedom can be taken at the end of the phrase, or the desinence. Melismas appearing earlier in the phrase should

maintain an acknowledgment of the basic meter, but the desinence can be freer, like a mini-cadenza. Harmonic coherence should be maintained throughout all melismas. Every primary beat should be met with a note that coincides with the harmony in the orchestra at that juncture. Phrase shape and direction can be manipulated and imitated, conveying a fresh perspective on the melisma. Rossini will often use slight variations on a particular melisma, such as changing an ascending turn or scale into a descending one, beginning the phrase on a note an octave higher, or spelling an arpeggio backwards. A particularly effective repeated melisma is one that imitates itself in phrase shape but on different pitches. Approaching the melisma from the opposite angle is also an acceptable form of imitation. In the *finale*, liberty can be taken with the vocal entrance and how long the phrase is maintained. With the exception of occasional awkward leaps and accents used for comic effect at specific junctures, Rossinian melismas have an elegant shape. The fluidity of the added scales, turns, and arpeggios attest to Rossini's sense of beauty and order. The basic line of the melody is maintained. A melody that displays disjunct leaps or rhythmic directions that distract from the overarching phrase shape should be avoided.

Following the principles of Rossinian style will not suddenly cause the mezzo-soprano to know which precise coloratura choices would coincide with Rossini's preferences. Rossini's reaction to a greater variety of approaches to coloratura style, had he heard them, is also unknown. As complete a familiarity with Rossini's own melismas as possible will be the best guidance. Per Gossett's example in the previous paragraph, Estelle Liebling was aware of the unorthodox quality of her published cadenzas, asserting in the introduction to her book the inclusion of modern and popular cadenzas used by performers of the day and stating rather controversially, howbeit pragmatically, that "singers with great voices are a law unto themselves" (Liebling 1943, p. 3). Would Rossini agree with this? Would he, who appealed to

the masses with his quickly churned-out popular operas and early retirement, accept and perhaps even applaud this nod to musical fashions of the day above traditionalism or adherence to the score? Perhaps, or perhaps not, given his personal taste. Liebling obviously believed that he would, a boldness decried by critical edition scholar Phillip Gossett in particular. Liebling's free, late-nineteenth century approach to improvisation is nevertheless understandable; after all, Romantic coloratura repertoire is at its core an outlet for ostentatious improvisation. And though some may accuse Liebling of too extravagant a license in improvisation, she herself warned against over-embellishment, stating that the intention of the composer should be respected, and all embellishments should be within the confines of his particular style (Liebling 1943, p. 3). Many of Liebling's coloratura suggestions are beautiful, and a multitude of sopranos and mezzo-sopranos have used them (Gossett, 2009). They can be included within Rossini arias and gain much applause by opera-goers despite the controversy over correct style. Gossett himself acknowledges the disparity between early nineteenth-century practice and modern opera-goers' expectations (Gossett, 2006, p. 305). Modern singers would do well, all the same, to consult Gossett's critical editions and other Rossinian-grounded melisma varieties before settling on coloratura choices outside the realm of historically proven Rossini-endorsed possibilities.

While some mezzo-sopranos err on the side of too many embellishments or too florid coloratura, others enter the opposite extreme through improvising simpler fioriture than Rossini composed. Phillip Gossett calls the practice of augmentation<sup>36</sup> an undesirable habit in Rossini arias used by singers with poor coloratura skills to bolster their performances and veil a weaker coloratura technique (Gossett, 2006, p. 313). This tactic is not stylistically appropriate, as Rossini almost always composed diminutions<sup>37</sup> when suggesting coloratura choices for repeated sections

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<sup>36</sup> The act of replacing notes of shorter values with longer notes.

<sup>37</sup> Replacing notes of longer values with shorter notes.

in his music (Gossett, 2006, 313). *Puntature*<sup>38</sup>, alternately, are acceptable improvisational choices because the general contour of the melisma remains as Rossini composed it.

### Musical Symbols

Along with balancing the amount of floridity in her improvisatory embellishments, the mezzo-soprano should understand the meaning of musical symbols within Rossini arias before deciding which embellishments to use. She should perform the aria with Rossini's definition of musical symbols as a guide. Musicologists know, for example, that Rossini's fermatas do not always denote the prolongation of a note's rhythmic value as they do in later composers' scores. They instead give the singer license to insert her own coloraturic invention to embellish the cadence, based on the style of the aria as a whole (Celletti, 1991, p. 143). Consider this fermata in "Una voce poco fa":

Example 5.1: Rossini, "Una voce poco fa" from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, mm. 89-90<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *Puntature*: vocalists' simplified adjustments to melodic lines to make them easier to sing. These often appear as extra breaths where the composer wrote an extended line, or a modification of range where the composer stretched the line further than a singer can healthily reach. The use of *puntature* differs from augmentation in that the general structure of the melisma remains as the composer intended.

<sup>39</sup> "Una voce poco fa" (from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Cesare Sterbini. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured*. Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy



Some editions of this phrase place the fermata between the whole note G and its half-note tie. Regardless of where the fermata is placed, its presence here suggests that the singer embellish, based on our knowledge of Rossini's directives to singers and his markings in singers' scores. When singers do not embellish at such fermatas, the aria remains "authentic" to the score, but is robbed of Rossini's intentions for the fermata and is consequently not quite as attentive to Rossinian style.

### **Discussion and Examples of Specific Melismas**

A recording component in the form of a CD serves as a significant portion of this dissertation project, presenting my vocal interpretations of the seven Rossini arias studied and modeling the support techniques detailed within Chapter 3. In tandem with this audio section is the following analysis of selected coloratura decisions in the seven Rossini arias, with a focus on the following areas of interpretation: range, melisma length, speed and clarity, rhythm and rubato, the trill, and *messa-di-voce*. Some discussion of these interpretive elements will precede the musical examples. Specific musical examples will be taken from the seven arias that appear on the dissertation CD. While reading this section, it may be helpful to refer to the musical scores, along with my recordings of the arias on the CD and those of other singers analyzed at the end of Chapter 4. Due to the broad scope of embellishments available for study, a relatively small, select number have been chosen for display to fit within the scope of this dissertation. Many other varieties are possible.

#### **Appropriate Range**

Considering and deciding upon an improvisatory melisma's range of notes is linked to *tessitura*, as discussed in the previous section. As appropriate range will vary from mezzo-soprano to mezzo-soprano, some general principles for the vocal approach are helpful. Any note

above an F<sup>5</sup> should be sung solely in the head voice, always with the feeling that there is something in reserve; that is, one should never utilize the full strength of the larynx, as this tends to force the voice. Range necessarily moves through the *passaggio* points, passing from one vocal register to the next, or one “voice” to the next (head to middle, middle to chest, and in the reverse). If the mezzo-soprano finds that the registers will not blend satisfactorily, she should always choose the upper one to *work down* from, and not work up from the lower register. This ensures that the range will not be hindered through vocal strain. Similarly, descending intervals should be sung with a sensation of less space between the notes as opposed to ascending intervals (Liebling 1943, p. 6). Such an approach will produce tighter intonation. The natural tendency of the voice is to drop, and thus the mezzo-soprano’s intent must always be to raise it.

The following musical examples display various acceptable ranges of improvised notes for selected Rossini melismas.

Example 5.2, “Cruda sorte,” *L’italiana in Algeri*, mm. 78-81<sup>40</sup> (range D<sup>4</sup>-F<sup>5</sup>)

78  
tut - ti la bra - ma - no, tut - ti la chie - do - no - da - va - ga - fem - mi - na

<sup>40</sup> “Cruda sorte” (from *L’italiana in Algeri*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Angelo Anelli. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured.* Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

Example 5.2a, suggested range for the dramatic mezzo-soprano or contralto (G<sup>3</sup>-G<sup>4</sup>)

78

tut - ti la bra - ma - no, tut - ti la chie - do - no — da — va - ga — fem - mi - na

Example 5.2b, suggested range for the lyric higher mezzo-soprano (D<sup>4</sup>-B<sup>6</sup>)

78

tut - ti la bra - ma - no, tut - ti la chie - do - no — da — va - ga — fem - mi - na

Example 5.3, “Non più mesta,” *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, m. 19<sup>41</sup> (D<sup>#4</sup>-B<sup>6</sup>)

19

co - me un — ba - le - - - - no

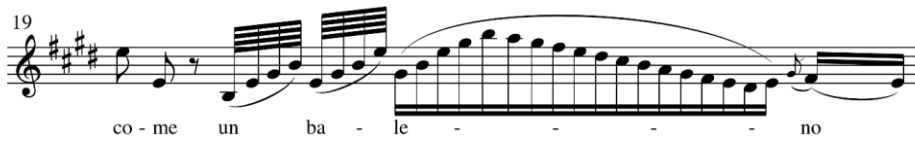
Example 5.3a, suggested range for the dramatic, lower mezzo-soprano (G<sup>#3</sup>-E<sup>5</sup>)

19

co - me un ba - le - - - - no

<sup>41</sup> “Nacqui all'affanno e al pianto... Non più mesta” (from *La Cenerentola*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Jacopo Ferretti. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured. Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

Example 5.3b, suggested range for the highly coloraturic mezzo-soprano (B<sup>4</sup>-B<sup>6</sup>), a variation suggested by Rossini:



Example 5.4, “Ah quel giorno ognor rammento,” *Semiramide*, mm. 96-100<sup>42</sup> (B<sup>4</sup>-E<sup>5</sup>). Suggested range for the dramatic, lower mezzo-soprano: as written (B<sup>4</sup>-E<sup>5</sup>).

Example 5.4a, suggested range for the lyric, higher mezzo-soprano (B<sup>4</sup>-B<sup>6</sup>)

## Length

The length of the improvisational selection will depend upon the singer's vocal stamina. Coloratura mezzo-sopranos can more easily navigate longer melismas due to the swiftness of their agility, while more dramatic voices typically move slower and will use shorter melismas for effective performance. Dramatic mezzo-sopranos usually need more *puntature*, particularly extra breaths, throughout melismas in Rossini arias. They select or create embellishments to allow for

<sup>42</sup> *Semiramide: Opera in two acts*. London: Boosey. Public domain score. Retrieved from [http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/6/68/IMSLP26086-PMLP48525-Semiramide\\_Act1.pdf](http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/6/68/IMSLP26086-PMLP48525-Semiramide_Act1.pdf)

such changes, which affect the phrase length. The following musical examples display various acceptable lengths and melisma varieties of improvised phrases for selected Rossini melismas.

Example 5.5, “Cruda sorte,” *L’italiana in Algeri*, final cadenza passage, mm. 84-91<sup>43</sup>.

82  
tà, fe - li - ci - tà, fe - li - ci - tà, da va-ga

85  
fem-mi - na fe - li - ci - tà, da va-ga fem-mi - na fe - li - ci -

88  
- tà, fe - li - ci - tà, fe - li - ci -

90  
- tà, fe - li - ci - tà.

<sup>43</sup> “Cruda sorte” (from *L’italiana in Algeri*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Angelo Anelli. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured. Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

Often in the final cadential section, the mezzo-soprano will take some time, pausing to breathe while the orchestra continues forward at an increasing pace. Below are some options of melismas that allow the mezzo-soprano some extra breaths while feeding on the acceleration of the orchestra:

Example 5.5a, suggested cadential *finale* for the dramatic mezzo-soprano

84

-tà, da va-ga fem-mi-na fe-li-ci-tà, da va-ga fem-mi-na fe-li-ci-

-tà, fe-li-ci-tà, fe-li-ci-tà.

Example 5.5b, suggested cadential *finale* for the lyric coloratura mezzo-soprano<sup>44</sup>

84

-tà, da va-ga fem-mi-na fe-li-ci-tà, Ah\_\_\_\_\_ fe-li-ci-

-tà, Ah\_\_\_\_\_ fe-li-ci-tà.

<sup>44</sup> This *finale* was utilized by Marilyn Horne in several performances, including the Metropolitan production of *L'italiana in Algeri* in 1986: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZW-U0HxaOQ>. This cadenza ends on the low F<sup>4</sup> but could just as easily use the higher F<sup>5</sup>, preceded by C<sup>5</sup>-E<sup>5</sup>. As “Cruda sorte” is a lower aria set in a role designated for contralto, even the lyric high mezzo-soprano should avoid utilizing too much of the high range. The rests before the final ascending scale can be replaced by the original notes if the singer has good breath stamina.

The aria “Ah quel giorno ognor rammento” already contains multiple extra breaths in order to portray the passionate, breathless heart palpitations of Arsace for the woman he loves. The lower *tessitura* of this aria renders it ideal for contraltos, but the aria proves challenging for more dramatic mezzo-sopranos due to the extensive coloratura in the *cabaletta*.

Example 5.6, “Ah quel giorno ognor rammento,” *Semiramide*, mm. 67-73<sup>45</sup>. Note the possible places for catch breaths and even additional rests through brief note omissions:

67

-prò, scor-dar - mi io mai, no - mai - sa - prò, non - sa -  
 -way, ne'er may it fade a - way, fade far a - way, far a -

-prò, non - sa - prò!  
 -way, far a - way.

Example 5.6a, suggested melisma for the dramatic mezzo-soprano needing more breaths

67

-prò, scor-dar - mi io mai, no - mai - sa - prò, non - sa -

-prò, non - sa - prò!

Example 5.6b, suggested melisma for the coloratura mezzo-soprano (same as composed until the final three measures, mm. 71-73)

71

prò, non - sa - prò!

<sup>45</sup> *Semiramide: Opera in two acts*. London: Boosey. Public domain score. Retrieved from [http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/6/68/IMSLP26086-PMLP48525-Semiramide\\_Act1.pdf](http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/6/68/IMSLP26086-PMLP48525-Semiramide_Act1.pdf)

Example 5.7, “Bel raggio lusinghier,” *Semiramide*, final cadenza, mm. 99-107

99

gio - ia e a - mor, di gio - - - ia e a - - -

102

- mor, di gio - - - - ia e a - - -

104

- mor, di gio - ia e a - - mor, di gio - ia e a - -

106

- mor, di gio - ia e a - mor!

46

<sup>46</sup> “Bel raggio lusinghier” (from *Semiramide*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Gaetano Rossi. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured. Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. – Italy



In Example 5.7, some mezzo-sopranos refrain from singing mm. 104-105 in order to have stamina for the high note – or a flashy melisma addition – in m. 106. This 2-measure omission does not diminish the cadenza’s momentum because the orchestra and chorus are increasing speed and volume simultaneously. In fact, the mezzo-soprano voice is often covered by the orchestra and chorus in these two measures, and her expended energy in singing them would be unnecessary.

Example 5.7a, suggested cadenza with extra breaths

99

gio - ia e a - mor, di gio - ia e a - mor, di

gio - ia e a - mor, di gio - ia e a - mor!

### Speed and clarity

One of the positive effects of using appropriate technique in coloratura singing is the ability to sing multiple notes quickly and cleanly. As in playing any instrument, the more movement one makes, the less one is able to perform with speed. A pianist or violinist begins musical training with slow, exaggerated movements in the fingers and arms. As the playing skill increases, the arm and finger movements become small and concentrated. The flexibility remains, but the slow, large movements that established the ease and flexibility are no longer required. Similarly, movements in the vocal mechanism should be streamlined, methodical, and smaller in order to accomplish higher speeds with clean intonation and even tone. The initial, large movements of the breathing mechanism used to build abdominal strength and flexibility give way to smaller, more refined movements in the abdominal region. Other portions of the

vocal mechanism such as the mouth, jaw, tongue, and larynx remain calm while the lower body works to produce the speed. A process of developing the lower abdomen for such motor skills is described in Chapter 3. While developing these muscles for coloratura, the small, quick intervals of melismas should be practiced with only a slightly opened mouth and on a vowel that is not too broad (Liebling 1943, p. 7).

Once the final cadential harmonic progression is reached at the end of Rossini's arias, the mezzo-soprano should add melismas that can be maintained at the accelerated tempo of the orchestra. It is especially at this point that the number of notes and intervals for melismas should not exceed the capability of the mezzo-soprano at the desired orchestral speed. Any form of *rubato* at this point would be stylistically and musically inappropriate. The following musical examples display various acceptable improvisations for selected Rossini melismas that should be performed with particular speed.

Example 5.8, "Una voce poco fa," *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, mm. 104-107.<sup>47</sup> Suggested melisma for the more dramatic mezzo-soprano: as written.

104

*a piacere a tempo*

ce - - de - re, e cen - to trap - po - - - le fa - - - rò, fa - - - rò gio - - - car,

*col canto a tempo*

*f*

<sup>47</sup> "Una voce poco fa" (from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Cesare Sterbini. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured.* Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy



Example 5.9b, suggested melisma for the lyric mezzo-soprano

104

ah, fu un lam - po, un so - gno, un gio - ...etc.

Example 5.9c, suggested melisma for the highly agile mezzo-soprano<sup>50</sup>

104

ah, fu un lam - po, un so - gno, un gio - ...etc.

Example 5.10, “Tanti affetti,” *La donna del lago*, mm. 91-93<sup>51</sup>, third phrase repetition. Suggested melisma for the dramatic mezzo-soprano: as composed.

91

Ah! chi spe - rar - po - te - - - a,

*p a tempo*

*simile*

<sup>50</sup> This melisma was recommended by Rossini for his best singers. There has yet to be a recording of a singer who has attempted it, as the leaps are extremely difficult.

<sup>51</sup> “Tanti affetti” (from *La donna del lago*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Andrea Leone Tottola. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. All Rights Reserved. *International Copyright Secured*. Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

Example 5.10a, suggested melisma for the lyric mezzo-soprano

92

Ah! chi spe - rar - po - te - - - a

Example 5.10b, suggested melisma for the more agile mezzo-soprano

92

Ah! chi spe - rar - po - te - - - a

### Rhythm and Rubato

Rossini's arias generally require an exactness in the rhythmic movement and a meticulous attention to keeping the tempo (Garcia, 1975, p. 71). This is particularly important when the orchestral line includes repeating short-value notes, creating a decided rhythm. Such exactness is always necessary at the end of Rossini arias, as the orchestra increases the musical intensity. It should also be observed in sections depicting war, anger, determination, and enthusiasm.

*Tempo rubato* is the primary exception to this rule for Rossini arias, along with the give-and-take of *cantabile* and *recitative* sections. Unlike the *accelerando* (hurrying the tempo) and the *rallentando* (slowing the tempo), which apply to the accompaniment as well as the voice, the *tempo rubato* applies only to the vocal line, and not to the accompaniment. Thus, in Rossini arias, one can take more time for certain notes or phrases in the voice, but should then move faster on other notes or phrases in order to maintain time with the accompaniment. *Tempo rubato* can be utilized during the repetition of the melody in the *cantabile* section. Here, the voice has the freedom to soar through complex melismas while a simple harmonic accompaniment progresses underneath without rhythmic demands.

Example 5.11, “Cruda sorte,” *L’italiana in Algeri*, mm. 43-45<sup>52</sup>, to be performed at a steady tempo set by the rhythmic accompaniment and reflecting Isabella's confident and flirtatious mood.

Example 5.12, “Di tanti palpiti,” *Tancredi*, mm. 20-24<sup>53</sup>, a sparse accompaniment in the *recitativo* and a reminiscent mood in the lyrics allow for *tempo rubato* in the voice.

Sometimes the musical direction is momentarily suspended in the midst of a cadential point, a phenomenon that Manuel Garcia called *point d’orgue* (organ point) (Garcia, 1975, p. 130). Singers often take advantage of the *point d’orgue* for the sake of an extra deep breath before taking the plunge into a lengthy cadential melisma. The mezzo-soprano may end the text

<sup>52</sup> “Cruda sorte” (from *L’italiana in Algeri*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Angelo Anelli. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured.* Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

<sup>53</sup> “Di tanti palpiti” (from *Tancredi*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Book by Gaetano Rossi. Copyright © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured.* Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

more abruptly than written, with final cadential melismas sung on “ah, si” or some such exclamation, or repeating the word after a breath. *Point d’orgues* are often found at the end of Rossini arias and sometimes within the aria at cadential points. Permissible areas for *point d’orgues* usually appear at a  $\frac{6}{4}$  chord followed by the dominant seventh or on the ninths. Unlike the *puntature*, the *point d’orgues* are utilized primarily for expressive purposes, setting up the final explosion of coloratura before the end of the aria. They can also serve the same function as *puntature*, however, by giving the singer a much-needed respite before the final melisma or series of melismas.

Example 5.13, “Tanti affetti,” *La donna del lago*, mm. 99-107<sup>54</sup>. This phrase has no written breaths, and would be difficult to perform as written. Breaths can be taken at the top B<sup>b</sup>'s of the ascending scales. Also, the “ah” in m. 103 can become a sixteenth note to provide more time for the breath.

99

Fra il pa - dre, e fra l'a - man - te, oh, qual be - a - to i -  
 - stan - te! Ah! chi spe - rar - po - te - a tan - - ta fe - li - ci - tà!

<sup>54</sup> “Tanti affetti” (from *La donna del lago*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Andrea Leone Tottola. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. All Rights Reserved. *International Copyright Secured*. Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

Example 5.14, “Bel raggio lusinghier,” *Semiramide*, mm. 93-94<sup>55</sup>. After having sung a very long preceding melisma, many mezzo-sopranos take a sizeable breath before “e amor,” which begins a new melisma. The conductor pauses briefly for the vocalist at this juncture if she has planned this breath. If the breath is not deep enough or if no breath is taken, the audience will likely sense the mezzo-soprano's lack of air and become uncomfortable instead of impressed.

93  
gio - ia, di gio - ia e a - mor,  
pp

Accents are the primary means whereby the rhythmic pulse of coloratura is conveyed, stabilizing the fast-paced tempo and maintaining the melodic direction. Embellishments to particular melodic notes should never detract from the intended accents on the essential notes, nor the rhythmic lilt of the intended line. This will affect how and where embellishments are added. Along with being melodically pleasing, melismatic passages should be divided into groups that make sense rhythmically. The first note of each group should be accented to distinguish the groups within the melisma.

Rossini sometimes uses off-beat accents and/or the arpeggiated leap upwards on the off-beat, thereby emphasizing the unusual and adding a playful air. This was typical performance practice in Rossini arias, as reflected by the embellishment notations in singers' scores from his

<sup>55</sup> “Bel raggio lusinghier” (from *Semiramide*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Gaetano Rossi. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured. Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. – Italy



era. Such off-beat accents serve to enliven the otherwise predictable rhythmic emphases, adding humor to the aria or re-emphasizing a repeated text.

Example 5.15, “Tanti affetti,” *La donna del lago*, m. 7<sup>56</sup>, accents on second and fourth beats.

7  
fan - no al - co - re in - -

Example 5.16, “Bel raggio lusinghier,” *Semiramide*, mm. 53-55<sup>57</sup>, accents on second and fourth beats.

53  
ca - ro, do - po il tor - men - to, è il bel mo - men - to di - gio - ia e a -

<sup>56</sup> “Tanti affetti” (from *La donna del lago*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Andrea Leone Tottola. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. All Rights Reserved. *International Copyright Secured*.  
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<sup>57</sup> “Bel raggio lusinghier” (from *Semiramide*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Gaetano Rossi. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. All Rights Reserved. *International Copyright Secured*.  
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Example 5.17, “Una voce poco fa,” *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, mm. 105-106<sup>58</sup>, upward vocal leaps on the off-beats at the *a tempo* marking.

104

*a piacere* *a tempo*

ce - - de - re, e cen - to trap - po - - - le fa - - - rò, fa - - - rò gio - - -

*col canto* *a tempo*

## Trills

The trill is a type of embellishment that consists of “a more or less rapid alternation of the main note with the one a tone or semitone above it” (“Trill”, 2001). Trills differ from vibrato in that they are built on a clear intervallic concept. The trill in Rossini arias most often serves as the termination of an important cadence and is often preceded by elaborate vocal feats such as scales, arpeggios, and other melismas. The end of the trill should always be distinctly made, arriving securely on the lower note of the trill, or using a trill mordent, prior to the resolution. Trills should be centered, forward, flexible, as clear as possible, and never belabored. The unifying resonance of the vocal tone should be maintained; that is, one should avoid letting one tone of the trill become more prominent or rich, while letting the other tone fall into the back of the mouth (Mancini, 1912, p. 132). Trills are often added where fermatas rest over a note near the end of a cadence, often marking the end of a section of the aria. Some mezzo-sopranos choose to display a trill instead of a flashy embellishment at such points. If performed cleanly, trills are just as impressive as coloratura lines, and doubly so if they incorporate a *messa-di-voce*

<sup>58</sup> “Una voce poco fa” (from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Cesare Sterbini. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured.* Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

in the process. For example, in measure 25 at a cadential point in “Non piu mesta” (Example 5.18), the final B can be embellished by adding a trill as well as a crescendo-decrescendo on the trill.

Example 5.18, “Non piu mesta,” *Cenerentola*, mm. 25-26<sup>59</sup>, trill instead of cadenza on the fermata on *can-*. This will often require a breath just prior to the word *cangiò*.

25 *Allegro*  
mi - a, la - sor - te mi - a can - giù.  
*pp* *f* *p*

Example 5.19, “Bel raggio lusinghier,” *Semiramide*, m. 77<sup>60</sup>, a trill can take the place of a melisma or decrescendo on *Ah!*

77 *Allegro*  
Ah! dol - ce pen - sie - - - ro di quel - l'i  
*p*

<sup>59</sup> “Nacqui all'affanno e al pianto... Non più mesta” (from *La Cenerentola*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Jacopo Ferretti. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured.* Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

<sup>60</sup> “Bel raggio lusinghier” (from *Semiramide*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Gaetano Rossi. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured.* Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. – Italy

Example 5.20, “Tanti affetti,” *La donna del lago*, m. 120<sup>61</sup>. Due to the speed of the section, singers often limit these specified trills to grace notes or merely two repetitions of the trill notes.

120

tr. tr. tr. tr.

chi spe - rar po - tea

### *Messa-di-voce*

The *messa-di-voce* (Italian for “placing of the voice”) is the singing of a long note so that it begins quietly, crescendos to a *forte*, and decrescendos to a soft tone at the end. Rossini put *messa-di-voce* exercises at the beginning of his *gorgheggi*, or vocalises, and they would have been one of the prerequisite skills for his opera singers (Bloem-Hubatka, 2012, p. 120). There were apparently two methods of singing the *messa-di-voce*. Vennard maintained that the *messa-di-voce* involved a transition from head voice to chest then back to head to accomplish the *piano-forte-piano* effect (Stark, 1999, p. 116). The other method was to maintain the same register during the process, but simply use more airflow and control of the air pressure in order to create the dynamic change.

The *messa-di-voce* is, in a sense, a very long, sustained and exaggerated version of the pulse. Both the *messa-di-voce* and the pulse begin with a soft onset on the breath, increase in volume to a peak, and then diminish, all requiring immense breath control. The main difference

<sup>61</sup> “Tanti affetti” (from *La donna del lago*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Andrea Leone Tottola. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. All Rights Reserved. *International Copyright Secured*. Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

between the two is that the *messa-di-voce* is long and slow, while the abdominally-induced vocal pulse is short and fast. The *messa-di-voce* is the ultimate test of the mezzo-soprano's breath control, and is thus one of the most impressive feats within the art of Rossini arias.

Example 5.21, “Una voce poco fa,” *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, m. 89<sup>62</sup>, written-out *messa-di-voce*.

88

reg - ge-re, mi fo gui - dar. Ma se mi toc - -

*ff* *sf* *p*

Example 5.22, “Cruda sorte,” *L’italiana in Algeri*, m. 25<sup>63</sup>, a potential place for an added melisma or an expressive *messa-di-voce* on the fermata.

24

si - glio? Chi con - for - to mi da - rà?

<sup>62</sup> “Una voce poco fa” (from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Cesare Sterbini. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured.* Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

<sup>63</sup> “Cruda sorte” (from *L’italiana in Algeri*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Angelo Anelli. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured.* Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

Example 5.23, “Tanti affetti,” *La donna del lago*, m. 89<sup>64</sup>. The high B<sup>b</sup> after the chromatic two-octave ascent can be decorated by a talented coloratura mezzo-soprano with a swift *messa-di-voce*.

The image shows a musical score for Example 5.23, starting at measure 89. The score is written for a mezzo-soprano voice and piano accompaniment. The voice part begins with a chromatic two-octave ascent, starting on a middle C and rising to a high B-flat. This high note is followed by a swift *messa-di-voce*, which is a decrescendo. The piano accompaniment consists of a few chords in the right hand and a few notes in the left hand, providing harmonic support for the vocal line. The key signature is B-flat major, and the time signature is 4/4.

Rossini sometimes composed only the final half of the *messa-di-voce* in the arias studied, asking for a prolonged decrescendo trailing from a final accent on a “no” or “si” at the end of a phrase. The decrescendo is the most challenging aspect of the *messa-di-voce* exercise. Thus by including it frequently, Rossini was challenging the mezzo-soprano to display the most impressive aspect of her technique. In a study by Manén (1987) performed at the University of London Institute of Laryngology and Otology, measurements of singers’ lung capacity revealed that the production of the decrescendo in the *messa-di-voce* exercise requires the use of more air than the crescendo (p. 51). This finding suggests that professional singers must properly anticipate their breath stamina in order to successfully finish the *messa-di-voce* phrase, making it an excellent test of a singer’s ultimate vocal abilities.

<sup>64</sup> “Tanti affetti” (from *La donna del lago*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Andrea Leone Tottola. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. All Rights Reserved. *International Copyright Secured*. Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. - Italy

Example 5.24, “Bel raggio lusinghier,” *Semiramide*, mm. 76-79<sup>65</sup>. In measure 77, the mezzo-soprano may either add a melisma or display an expressive prolonged decrescendo, the most challenging portion of the *mezza-di-voce* exercise.

76

Ah! ——— dol-ce pen - sie - - - ro di quel-l'i

*p*

### Chapter Summary

The performance guidance detailed in this chapter enables the mezzo-soprano to find and develop melismas for Rossini arias that are stylistically appropriate and within her vocal capability. Guidelines and musical examples direct the mezzo-soprano in choosing appropriate melismas based on her current level of agility development and voice type. This guidance begins with an acknowledgment of key prerequisites, including a natural flexibility in the voice, a solid vocal technique based on abdicostal connection to the breathflow, and an artistic musical intelligence.

Creating unique performances of Rossini arias requires a knowledge of the variety of Rossini melismas available, including those on performance recordings and in musical scores. The mezzo-soprano should implement as much variety as possible in her melismas, phrasing, and dynamic choices in order to create a uniquely compelling interpretation of a Rossini aria. These choices should be based on her voice *fach* (dramatic or lyric, dark or bright timbre), her

<sup>65</sup> “Bel raggio lusinghier” (from *Semiramide*). Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Gaetano Rossi. This Engraving © by Casa Ricordi S.r.l. – Milan, Italy. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured.* Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe S.r.l. – Italy

most comfortable range, or *tessitura*, and her coloratura skill. All melismas should meld into Rossinian style as seamlessly as possible. The position of the melisma within the aria and the phrase should be taken into consideration when creating a melisma, along with the surrounding harmonic and rhythmic structure. Melismas suggested in this chapter have been approached with the following facets taken into consideration for the variety of vocal abilities: appropriate range, length, speed and clarity, rhythm and *rubato*, trills, and *messa-di-voce*. Each mezzo-soprano voice will require a slightly different approach to Rossini melismas, since each voice has a variety of strengths and limitations. By following the guidelines found in this chapter in the seven Rossini arias studied, the mezzo-soprano will be equipped with the information necessary to embellish the arias in a healthy, unique fashion.



## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

The development and implementation of coloratura technique in the selected Rossini arias of this dissertation have been explored and detailed for the benefit of the mezzo-soprano seeking to better prepare and perform Rossinian coloratura. Coloratura in Rossini's mezzo-soprano arias is worth studying for its captivating brilliance as well as its historical and functional properties. The benefits of vocal techniques, particularly those of the Accent Method, have been discussed in relation to the development of coloratura. The principles of this method are especially beneficial to the lyric mezzo-soprano performing agility. They can also be applied to all voice types for the development of a healthier, stronger breath flow in connection to the singing voice. Interpretation and performance guidance for the implementation of coloratura technique in Rossini arias has been explored from the perspective of modern scholars and historical practice. The modern mezzo-soprano can confidently practice and perform Rossini arias using proper abdominal support techniques and coloratura embellishments based in Rossinian style.

This dissertation has added to the available Rossini resources by addressing the need for a systematic approach to the development of Rossinian coloratura. Multiple pedagogical and historical resources are available on the life, times and operas of Gioachino Rossini, along with detailed analyses of his musical style and ornamentation. A systematic approach for the development of Rossinian coloratura, however, had not been presented. The listed sources in Chapter 2 were written by musicologists, theorists, historians, and performers and have produced valuable information that supports the research in this dissertation. The best technical means of performing Rossini's arias should be preserved in addition to the knowledge of his scores,

historic traditions, and performance styles of the era. A systematic method of developing the mezzo-soprano coloratura voice establishes the groundwork for future generations to explore its amazing capabilities and preserves the knowledge of the technical skill required to perform Rossini arias.

Historical performance practices documented as early as the sixteenth century attest to the importance of agility training. Though varying slightly in terminology and practice, the approach to coloratura development has remained consistent in the classical singing world. Historically, the mezzo-soprano should meet certain requirements prior to beginning agility training. She must have a natural flexibility in her voice, a willingness to practice consistently and diligently, and a mastery of basic vocal techniques such as the *legato* line, even registers, and the *messa-di-voce*. Vocal maxims and practice tips given throughout early singing documents imply the existence and consistent practice of systematic approaches to coloratura development. Early coloratura training involved the development of low breath support, a *legato* line, a compact mouth position, forward vowels, and head voice resonance. These facets of agility training were essential to the proper development of coloratura, particularly the challenging and extravagant coloratura of Rossini arias.

A patient, meticulous attention to the practice of technical vocal exercises will enable the modern mezzo-soprano to perform Rossini arias with success. According to modern vocal pedagogy, the singing breath flow is best harnessed through connecting to the abdicostal muscles. Survey results of the Accent Method breathing technique suggest that this kind of systematic abdicostal approach to the vocal instrument is an effective means of developing the singing voice. This breathing method for singing engages and develops the abdicostal muscles through systematic rhythmic pulsing exercises. Rossinian coloratura is unparalleled in its

demand for vocal stamina and flexibility. A solid vocal technique such as the Accent Method will enhance the musical interpretation of these arias. The diligent mezzo-soprano who applies a systematic abdicostal practice method to vocal agility exercises can rest on a reliable, balanced connection to the breath flow. This strong, flexible connection to the breath flow introduces the possibility of performing healthy, impressive, and inspiring Rossinian coloratura.

Methods of engaging abdicostal breath support along with the rhythmic pulsing exercises of the Accent Method include panting, *messa-di-voce* exercises, exaggeration, repetition, and smoothing out the vibrato rate. In my unique singing journey detailed at the end of Chapter 3, I utilized all these methods of engaging the abdicostal muscles for singing to a noticeably positive effect. Avoiding the pitfalls that come with these approaches is also vital to healthy coloratura development.

The seven Rossini arias studied and performed for this dissertation project were discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to their performance histories, plotlines, forms, harmonic structures, libretti, and styles. Rossini utilized the multi-movement form for his arias, creating a flexible framework for inserting embellishments. The two main sections of his arias are the lyric *cantabile* followed by the fast, rhythmic *cabaletta*. His harmonic structures remain simple within these arias to highlight the coloratura skill of the mezzo-soprano. Rossini used *libretti* based on their colorful plotlines and vivid texts. His stylistic approach remains consistent throughout his operas and involves a high degree of embellishments, rhythmic motifs, repetition, and dynamic acceleration.

Modern and historical performance recordings of the seven Rossini arias in this dissertation have been analyzed, with particular attention given to how each mezzo-soprano approaches melismas, phrasing, tone placement, register shifts, and vibrato rate. The analysis

revealed a general adherence to *legato* line, even registers, and swift execution of melismas. Over the course of the twentieth century (1903-2014), performing artists' interpretations of Rossini arias began to generally shift toward a darker, pharyngeal resonance and the inclusion of some straight tone. Nevertheless, mezzo-sopranos that follow the principles of healthy coloratura technique and Rossinian style continue to perform Rossini arias with conviction and skill on the modern operatic stage.

The performance guidance detailed in Chapter 5 enables the mezzo-soprano to find and develop melismas for Rossini arias that are stylistically appropriate and within her vocal capability. A mezzo-soprano's current level of agility development and voice type determine the kind of melismas she should choose. The guidelines and suggested musical examples direct her in this process. Embellishment guidance begins with an acknowledgment of vocal requirements for successful coloratura performance, including a natural flexibility in the voice, a solid vocal technique based on abdominal connection to the breath flow, and an artistic musical intelligence. Once these requirements are met, a knowledge of the variety of Rossini melismas is necessary, including recordings and composed melismas within the Rossini style.

Melisma choices should be made according to voice *fach*, *tessitura*, and coloratura speed of the mezzo-soprano, and should blend into the Rossinian style of the aria. Variety of phrasing and dynamics can be used along with melismatic diversity to create a unique interpretation. When composing a melisma, the mezzo-soprano should consider the position of the melisma within the aria and musical phrase, along with the surrounding harmonic and rhythmic structure. The musical examples of melismas at the end of Chapter 5 took into consideration appropriate range, length, speed/clarity, rhythm/*rubato*, trills, and *messa-di-voce*. Each mezzo-soprano voice will require a slightly different approach to Rossini melismas because each voice has different

strengths and limitations. The guidelines found in Chapter 5 for the creation and execution of Rossini coloratura should give the mezzo-soprano the information necessary to embellish Rossini arias in a healthy and unique fashion.

I hope that the contents of this dissertation will be of use to future mezzo-sopranos in their quest to develop and implement coloratura into Rossini arias. The practical benefits of a systematic approach to coloratura development has been seen in such studies as the survey by Ron Morris in his research on the Accent Method, along with research by such esteemed vocal pedagogues as Appelman, Sundberg, Miller, and Rothenberg, among others. Future research into the topic of rhythmic pulsing exercises for the voice is needed in order to further verify the positive results of Ron Morris' Accent Method survey for the specific purposes of coloratura development. A broad survey of mezzo-sopranos in relation to how coloratura can be developed based on the Accent Method would be a point of great interest to me and to all coloratura singers. As mezzo-sopranos continue to perform Rossini arias on the stage and in recordings, such studies will continue to be relevant in the coming decades.

## APPENDIX

### CD Component

The CD component of this dissertation is comprised of seven tracks, one for each of the seven Rossini arias that I studied and recorded for this dissertation project. My vocal interpretations of these arias demonstrate the support techniques discussed in Chapter 3 and appropriate ornamentation choices as detailed in Chapter 5.

### Permissions

Emailed permission for use of Rockwell Blake's words at the UCLA Rossini Award competition, November 2015:

Lauren Walker <laewalke@uemail.iu.edu>  
to Rockwell

Jan 27 ☆ ↩

Hello Mr. Blake,

I hope this email finds you well! Since it's been two years since our last email correspondence, I'll briefly mention that I am Lauren Walker, a mezzo-soprano (or soprano!) who sang for you and Henry Price for the Rossini Award at the UCLA competition two Novembers ago.

I have a kind of confession to make: while you answered the question I asked concerning how to help a student gain better coloratura during the finals' round, my dad was filming! He got your response to my question on tape. I am wondering if I might quote you from that tape and include the quote in my dissertation? Before I add any specific quote that I would like to extract, I will notify you of the exact wording used. If you do not want it to be used, I will of course refrain from adding any quote (I don't have the quote with me right now).

My dissertation is entitled "The Development and Implementation of Coloratura Technique in Selected Rossini Arias for Mezzo-soprano." I have the first couple chapters finished, and am working on the third. It's such a daunting task for me currently, and I think I've bitten off more than I can chew with my topic. But I'm plowing ahead all the same.

If possible, I would love to have your permission for use of an excerpt from the film.

Sincerely,

Lauren

\*\*\*

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**Cruda sorte (from "L'italiana in Algeri")**

Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Angelo Anelli

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**Una voce poco fa (from "Il Barbiere di Siviglia")**

Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Cesare Sterbini

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**Tanti affetti (from “La donna del lago”)**

Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Andrea Leone Tottola

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**Bel raggio lusinghier (from “Semiramide”)**

Music by Gioachino Rossini / Lyrics by Gaetano Rossi

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Best wishes

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