

THE PERFORMANCE OF ACCOMPANIED RECITATIVE IN ITALIAN OPERA
ACCORDING TO THE CONDUCTING METHOD OF ILYA MUSIN

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

For several centuries opera composers have made significant use of recitatives in their works. For conductors and singers, recitatives pose significant challenges, many arising because musical notation for recitatives is necessarily incomplete. Conductors must make important interpretive choices and they require sound conducting techniques to implement their interpretive decisions.

This study presents solutions to the specific problems that conductors and singers face when performing accompanied Italian opera recitatives from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a foundation for the study, the first chapter presents a translation of the technical conducting ideas of a master Russian conductor, Ilya Musin (1904-1999). Musin's book, *The Technique of Conducting*, is perhaps the only study ever to consider in great detail the specific techniques best suited for conducting opera recitative. The second chapter surveys the evolution of Italian-style recitatives through the eighteenth century, discussing interpretive options and proposing ways to approach them. This exposition leads to a detailed study of a particular recitative from *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Mozart, showing how Musin's techniques can help bring the recitative alive. Two further chapters carry the story of recitative's evolution through the next century, leading to a similar detailed consideration of an important recitative from Verdi's *Rigoletto*. As a whole, the study helps fill a significant gap in the conducting literature by exploring in detail, particularly for inexperienced opera conductors, the challenges, dangers, and opportunities posed by recitatives and by making available in English, and showing the value of, Ilya Musin's specific conducting techniques.

To Yanzelmalee Rivera and Eric Freyfogle

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1. THE CONDUCTING TECHNIQUES OF ILYA MUSIN	6
CHAPTER 2. TRACING A MUSICAL STYLE: THE OPERA RECITATIVE IN THE 17th AND 18th CENTURY	44
CHAPTER 3. DECODING A RECITATIVE: <i>E SUSANNA NON VIEN</i> FROM <i>LE NOZZE DI FIGARO</i> BY W. A. MOZART	58
CHAPTER 4. THE RECITATIVE IN THE ITALIAN ROMANTIC OPERA	96
CHAPTER 5. DECODING A RECITATIVE: <i>PARI SIAMO</i> FROM <i>RIGOLETTO</i> BY GIUSEPPE VERDI	108
CONCLUSION	133
APPENDIX A. FULL SCORE OF <i>E SUSANNA NON VIEN</i> FROM <i>LE NOZZE DI FIGARO</i> BY W.A.MOZART	136
APPENDIX B. FULL SCORE OF <i>PARI SIAMO</i> FROM <i>RIGOLETTO</i> BY GIUSEPPE VERDI	140
BIBLIOGRAPHY	151

INTRODUCTION

Conductors face special challenges when dealing with the technical and interpretative problems of opera recitative. Many conductors and singers treat recitatives as mere bridging material that links the more important aria and ensemble sections. Too often they rehearse and perform recitatives mechanically, achieving accuracy at the expense of musical understanding. Because they fail to interpret recitatives with insight, operatic performance lacks sustained formal shape. Arias and recitatives are juxtaposed rather than melded into compelling experiences. When that occurs, recitatives sound tedious even when their textual content is essential to the narrative and dramatic flow. Dull singing and colorless instrumental accompaniment compromise the life blood of operatic performance. For generations this problem has elicited critical reaction, including a comment by Georg Benda that appeared in 1783 in Cramer's *Magazin der Musik*:

The soprano in an aria breaks out in lamentation. I am moved – but not so much as I would have been if I had understood what preceded it better.¹

For the audience to appreciate vocal performance a singer must be able to communicate the entire narrative. Singers and conductors working together have greater freedom in presenting recitatives, but how might they best exercise that greater freedom? In what ways might they properly deviate from the notes and other objective signs that appear in the printed music? Most broadly, how can conductors working with singers bring life to recitatives so that they play full rather than subordinate roles in opera productions; so that singers take them as seriously as they do their arias?

¹ Thomas Bauman and G. Benda, "Benda, the Germans, and Simple Recitative," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 130, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/831037> (accessed January 7, 2011).

These questions have been around for nearly three centuries and continue to challenge performers. Modern books on vocal technique offer little practical help and almost no conducting treatise focuses on the technique needed to conduct a recitative properly.

The chief task of a conductor, in any setting, is to envisage a “roadmap” for both rehearsal and performance. A sound roadmap combines interpretation and technique. In the case of an opera recitative, a conductor confronts two particular difficulties. The first arises because recitative notation typically presents the music with only few obvious clues to guide performance. The second challenge is that the conducting technique required for accompanying a recitative differs significantly from the technique needed to conduct a symphony or a motet, for example.

This study undertakes to fill a gap in the conducting literature. It offers practical guidance for conductors and students on the challenges and methods of conducting opera recitative--chiefly accompanied recitative since unaccompanied or *secco* recitative is not typically conducted in performances. It focuses on Italian opera, the most important and influential form of the genre until the birth of the national schools in the 19th century. The study presents and discusses the detailed techniques used in recitative conducting. These techniques are given context through a review of the *recitativo* style—what it is and how it functions in Italian operas written from the Baroque era through the nineteenth century. Technique and comments on recitative style and function are then brought together in what is, in effect, the third step: a practical look at how a conductor can approach particular recitatives from different musical eras and where he can find clues to build and implement interpretive visions combining style and technique.

The need for a study such as this one becomes evident when one looks into currently used conducting manuals. In general, they devote very little space to the specific challenges of recitative. In her pedagogical manual of conducting first published in 1961 Elizabeth A. H. Green, provides a brief list of guidelines and two short examples.² She does not discuss the evolution of recitative over time or differing uses of recitative by different composers, nor does she link her comments with any interpretive issues. Her book is, in this regard, typical of others in use today for the absence of substantive guidance with the issues of recitative conducting.³

This study in a sense takes up where Green's book leaves off. It considers the detailed technical tools needed to conduct opera recitative. It also explores the history of recitative to give a sense of how it evolved over time, how its functions shifted, and how different major composers used it—chiefly by mixing text, vocal line, and orchestral accompaniment in quite varied ways. An understanding of these stylistic variations is just as important for a conductor as a mastery of conducting technique and a sound ability to interpret and prepare the score. Only with such an understanding can a conductor discern from a score the clues that should be followed when presenting it. When a conductor fails to provide sound guidance, singers will follow the musical notation rather blindly, leading to performances that are both incoherent and inflexible.

This study's first chapter introduces technical issues by presenting the ideas of Russian

² Elizabeth A. H. Green, *The Modern Conductor: A College Text on Conducting Based on the Technical Principles of Nicolai Malko as Set Forth in His "The Conductor and His Baton"* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997).

³ There is one recently published conducting book, which presents an exception: Gustav Meier, *The Score, the Orchestra, and the Conductor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 321 – 326. Meier's chapter on recitative conducting is relatively short, but offers exceptional technical and interpretive guidance, which, in its essence, does not differ substantially from Musin's ideas, presented in this study.

conductor Ilya Musin⁴, translated from his treatise, *The Technique of Conducting*⁵. The chapter's introduction explains the practical approach used in translating Musin's instructions, which have been influential among Russian and Eastern European conductors but have not before been made available in English. This technical material on conducting serves as a foundation or point of departure for the larger study of opera recitative that considers style and interpretation as well as technique. Good conducting builds on sound interpretive decisions about a recitative, but good technique is required to turn sensitive interpretation into a successful performance. Musin's text is used to ground the technical component of this study because it is, to my knowledge, the only sustained, systematic discussion of the specific techniques that conductors need to understand and demonstrate when accompanying an opera recitative.

The following chapters, two through five, add to this technical grounding by considering style and interpretation and bringing all these factors together to study particular recitatives. Chapter two considers the rise and development of recitative from its early Baroque beginnings into the Classical era, commenting on how and why recitative was used and on stylistic influences and interpretative choices. Chapter three incorporates the technical insights discussed in chapter one and presents a detailed study on how to conduct the recitative *E Susanna non vien* from Act III of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

Chapter four continues the story of recitative's development into nineteenth century

⁴As noted in chapter 1, one of Musin's significant teachers was Nicolai Malko, and Musin's treatise in important ways extended Malko's basic conducting approach, augmenting it by significantly expanding its coverage of specific conducting techniques. Elizabeth A. H. Green, writing at about the same time as Musin, was also greatly influenced by Malko and stepped forward, after Malko's death, to conclude the second volume of his study of conducting. Green and Musin thus both built on Malko's important work. Musin in his work turned to the more fine-grained level of conducting techniques, while Green maintained Malko's broad coverage (including full attention to the challenges of preparing the score) as she formulated Malko's ideas for a western audience.

⁵ Ilya Musin, *Tehnika Dirizhirovanija (The Technique of Conducting)*, (Moscow: Muzyka, 1967).

Italian Romantic opera. This survey leads, in chapter five, to a similar detailed study of technical and interpretive ideas in the recitative *Pari siamo* from Verdi's *Rigoletto*. A concluding section, synthesizing this research concludes this study.

Skilled conducting of recitatives can significantly improve opera performances. It can accelerate an opera's pacing while making characters and action more natural, while also giving operatic narrative a reality that better connects with the composer's creative intentions. All of this can happen if conductors adequately and thoughtfully guide the performance of operatic recitative. They need to realize that when presenting recitatives, they bear a larger role in the creative process than in the case of arias. They need to see that when it comes to recitatives, creative responsibility divides differently among composer, conductor, and singer than it does with other musical forms.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONDUCTING TECHNIQUES OF ILYA MUSIN

From 1932 until his death in 1999 at the age of 95, Ilya Aleksandrovich Musin taught conducting at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. Among the many conductors who graduated from his class were Valery Gergiev, Yuri Temirkanov, Semyon Bychkov, Arnold Katz, and Yakov Kreizberg. In 1967, Musin published his book *The Technique of Conducting*, which explains in depth the basic method of his teaching – “making music visible with your hands,” as he expressed it.⁶ To date the only translation of this text has been into Bulgarian, published in Sofia in 1983 in *Musical Horizons*, the journal of the Union of Bulgarian Musicians and Dancers.⁷ A second revised Russian edition appeared in 1994.

It is pertinent to ask why this treatise, so highly regarded by Russian conductors, has never achieved an international readership.⁸ The book is by no means unknown in the West and is readily available in electronic form on the internet. The style of its writing, however, poses difficulties for any reader or translator. The central challenge is due to the purely technical subject of the text, which requires an understanding of both conducting technique and the formal academic language of Soviet Russia. Musin’s overall approach resembles recommendations proposed in most treatises known in the West, but provides a level of detail that has no parallel in

⁶ Brenda Leach, "Ilya Musin: A Life in Music," *Journal of the Conductors Guild* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 23.

⁷ Ilya Musin, *Tehnika na Dirizhiraneto (The Technique of Conducting)*, trans. Georgi Chemshirov (Muzikalni Horizonti, 1983).

⁸ A valuable survey of Musin’s writings on conducting, including biographical information on Musin and with particular attention to his late writing on the psychological aspects of conducting, is now available. Mirna Ogrizovic-Ciric, *Ilya Musin’s Language of Conducting Gestures* (D.M.A. dissertation, University of Georgia, 2009). Musin’s work has also drawn attention in Western Europe. In Italy Ennio Nicotra has prepared a DVD in which he demonstrates some of Musin’s particular conducting gestures. The DVD with an accompanying booklet (the two are meant to use together) is available in various languages, issued by Edizioni Curci, Milano, Italy, 2007, under the title *Introduzione alla Tecnica della Direzione d’Orchestra Secondo il Sistema di Ilya Musin (Introduction to the Orchestra Conducting Technique in Accordance with the School of Ilya Musin)*. Similar brief videos, issued to encourage interest in Musin, are available at Nicotra’s website, www.musinsociety.com.

any Western literature on conducting. The writing style is unique in the use of metaphor, which makes it nearly impossible—and certainly unhelpful—to simply supply a literal translation into any language. A more free-form translation is thus needed to convey the author’s meaning accurately, even as the nature of the work, as a strictly technical guide, invites a reasonably high fidelity to the original language.⁹

This chapter begins the study of recitative conducting by presenting Musin’s ideas on the subject. Set forth below in italics is a translation of chapter eight of Musin’s wide-ranging treatise (which covers all aspects of conducting technique). The translation is from the original 1967 Russian edition, as it appears on-line.¹⁰ I examined, but did not, in the translation process, use the Bulgarian edition. To this chapter I have added three brief translated excerpts taken from chapters four and eleven of Musin’s text to enable the translation to stand alone as a full presentation of Musin’s ideas. These excerpts are contained within brackets and footnotes identify their sources within Musin’s text. In various places Musin’s original descriptions are difficult to follow because of idiomatic expressions used to describe certain sensations in the conducting process. In those instances, I have taken the liberty to rearrange and edit some sentences. I have also, in various places, combined several of Musin’s sentences to reduce what modern readers would view as undue repetition or wordiness. The 1967 original edition was inexpensively produced and not all of Musin’s explanations were originally accompanied with

⁹ In a telephone conversation on April 24, 2011, Dr. Mirna Ogrizovic-Ciric, author of the study on Musin’s conducting philosophy cited in note 8, related to me that her original intent was to translate Musin’s treatise *Technique of Conducting* into English. The translation challenges mentioned here were sufficiently great that she dropped the project in favor of a thorough overview of Musin’s conducting pedagogy and philosophy.

¹⁰The treatise is accessible at <http://www.stetsenko.com/Files/Musin.pdf>. This version was used because of the considerable difficulty of obtaining access to a printed copy in the United States. (As noted below, my exposure to Musin came while studying in Bulgaria where I had access to a library copy.) I have not used the 1994 edition of Musin’s text simply because I could not reasonably obtain a copy. The extreme scarcity of the edition suggests that very few copies were issued. (In the US, a copy of the 1994 edition of *The Technique of Conducting* is recorded only in the New York Public Library.) In her work on Musin (note 8), Dr. Ogrizovic-Ciric also did not make use of the later edition.

diagrams of conducting motions. I have included the original diagrams and examples from the Russian version, and added several of my own (in every case so indicated) to illustrate Musin's detailed explanations. Some poor quality score excerpts have been reset. Finally, I have made some additions to the text. These additions are all easily seen by appearing in different type font. In adding them, and in my other efforts to make Musin's text coherent and comprehensible in English, I have in effect played the role of editor as well as translator. In all instances, however, I have endeavored simply to present Musin's ideas without altering their meaning.

Most existing treatises on conducting technique aim at developing patterns of conducting gestures that show the metrical structure of music. The essential difference of Musin's approach is that he treats conducting technique not so much as a mechanical combination of gestures but, instead, as sensations applied in relation to the specific elements or needs of the music.¹¹ His approach differs also by covering techniques not explained in any other book on conducting. For example, in his main chapter on recitative, Musin describes a way to avoid delay in accompaniments by using an *inverted* beat. Many professional conductors use this technique, but Musin's treatise contains the only existing theoretical explanation. Musin's discussion of the technique also illustrates one of the translation methods just mentioned: The author includes an explication of the inverted-beat technique in his chapter on opera recitative but a more complete discussion appears elsewhere in his book. Hence, I have inserted in this presentation Musin's longer description and original diagrams as part of my intent to make Musin's ideas available in English and to use his technical and interpretive principles as the beginning point for this study.

As mentioned in a footnote in the introduction, Musin was a student of the renowned Russian conductor Nicolai Malko (1883-1961). Malko set forth his teachings on conducting in

¹¹ For example, see Musin's explanation of the inverted beat on page 12 and the explanation of the *portamento* gesture on page 34 of this study.

two published volumes. The first of them appeared in English as *The Conductor and His Baton*.¹² The second volume, left incomplete at his death, was brought to publication through the labors of Elizabeth A.H. Green. It finally appeared in 1975, more than a decade after Malko's death, as *The Conductor and His Score* (reprinted in 1985 as *The Conductor's Score*).¹³ Musin's treatise in important ways took Malko's broad ideas about conducting and gave them a more detailed, fine-grained grounding by considering at length the detailed challenges of baton use and conducting gestures.

In her own work, Elizabeth A.H.Green consistently noted her indebtedness to Malko on the title page of her important conducting survey, *The Modern Conductor*. Green built on Malko's ideas. Indeed, her work in important ways served to introduce Malko's ideas to much broader audiences. Green included in her book, as Musin did not in his *Technique of Conducting* from 1967, a thorough consideration of the process of preparing the score. On the other hand she had little to say about opera recitative and did not illustrate the technical tools suited for dealing with the specific challenges of recitative by composers from different historical periods.

Musin's treatise is also usefully compared—as a way to clarify its unique contributions—to a few other leading conducting treatises influential over the past half century. In his seminal work—published before the work of Malko, Musin, and Green—Hermann Scherchen focused on the way an orchestra works and on the problems a conductor faces when working with different instrumental groups in the orchestra. His book from 1933, *The Handbook of Conducting*,¹⁴ addressed conducting as an overall craft, paying particular attention to the process of preparing the score. Scherchen's book still offers much of value to the student of conducting. Musin's

¹² Nicolai Malko, *The Conductor and His Baton: Fundamentals of the Technic of Conducting* (Copenhagen: Wilhelm Hansen, 1950).

¹³ Elizabeth A. H. Green and Nicolai Malko, *The Conductor's Score* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985).

¹⁴ Hermann Scherchen, *Handbook of Conducting*. Trans. M. D. Calvocoressi. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

treatise in important ways complements Scherchen's study at a more detailed, purely technical level. Indeed, the two volumes together form a comprehensive guide to the essence of the conducting profession.

Musin's work is also usefully compared with the significant study of conducting by Max Rudolph, *The Grammar of Conducting*, which first appeared in 1950—the year of publication in English of Malko's first book.¹⁵ Rudolph's study is widely viewed as the best comprehensive guide to conducting, particularly to the meaning of gesture in relation to musical aims. Rudolph makes extensive use of musical examples. His first edition said very little specifically about opera recitative. A later edition included a discussion of the Mozart recitative considered here at much greater length—*E Susanna non vien* from *Figaro*. Rudolph's book is particularly well titled in that it presents the grammar of conducting in the sense of explaining how a conductor can organize the overall language of gestures into a comprehensive whole. This approach can be compared with that of Musin, who, in effect, broke gestures down into far greater detail, exploring how the language of conducting technique can be organized at the most basic level.

My own encounter with Musin's ideas began in 1997, during my second year of conservatory studies. The Russian-language volume of the 1967 edition of *The Technique of Conducting* that I found in the conservatory library became a constant companion. Particularly in my early years of study it proved more useful to me than any other work on conducting.

¹⁵ Max Rudolph, *The Grammar of Conducting: A Comprehensive Guide to Baton Technique and Interpretation*. 3rd ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1994).

Chapter 8 from Ilya Musin's book *The Technique of Conducting*

(with bracketed excerpts from other chapters)

*Technical Challenges of the Opera Accompaniment*¹⁶

When conducting an opera, the conductor should not limit his function to the one of a passive accompanist. His role can be either more active, when leading chorus and soloists, or more passive, when allowing a certain degree of freedom in the solo parts. The proper role depends on the character of the accompaniment and on the interpretative collaboration and agreement between the conductor and the soloist.

Very often young conductors who lack experience tend to drag the orchestra behind the soloist. A common reason for this problem is the manner of conducting, in which the beat coincides with the soloist. The conductor always needs to have in mind that, in slow tempi, the attack of the sound comes with some delay in relation to the gesture. The delayed attack of a new sound (or a transition to another sound) is typical for most orchestras. It does not create particular problems when performing a symphonic work, but it becomes obvious when accompanying a soloist.

Here we will offer a special technique that largely helps avoid such inconvenience. The method offers significant advantage in opera accompaniments and helps avoid the possible delay. If the hand descends calmly and without the usual acceleration towards the conducting surface, the orchestra will not start playing until the moment in which the conductor lifts it again. The technique is especially helpful in transitions after a fermata in the solo part. In such cases, the conductor can wait at the top of the beat, while the singer holds the note. In order to show the next beat, no additional preparatory gesture is needed. It will be sufficient to gently

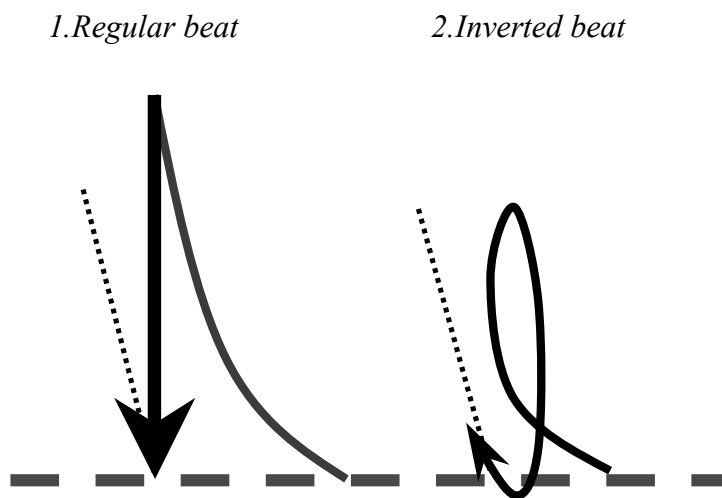
¹⁶ The translated text from Musin's book in this chapter appears in italics. Regular font is used for the occasional commentaries and editorial additions.

approach the conducting surface and then lift the hand up again.¹⁷ [The specific feature of this particular type of beat is that it is based on a circular motion and the sound comes as a result of an upward, not downward motion. This is the reason to call it an inverted beat.

The Inverted Beat

Imagine that you show the sound not with a hitting motion, but as if touching the strings of a harp. The hand goes gently and very slightly below the level of the string and then pulls it with an active upward motion. The moment when the hand changes its direction signals that the sound should begin. The character of the upward motion defines also the sharpness of the attack and depends on the tempo and dynamic of the music. The downward motion of the hand lacks the typical acceleration and the hand approaches the conducting surface with a smooth, circular motion:

Figure 1.1



¹⁷ This text is translated from pages 160 and 161 of the PDF version of Musin, *Tehnika Dirizhirovanija* (Moscow: Muzyka Publishing house, 1967), available on-line at <http://www.stetsenko.com/Files/Musin.pdf>

Another way to describe the inverted beat is to imagine that the hand does not hit or touch the conducting surface, but, instead, picks up an object and lifts it up. *In such case, the active motion will not be the motion down, but the motion up. As seen from the figure, the downward motion of the hand in the regular beat is followed by a rebound. In contrast, the inverted beat is based on a flowing, continuous motion, which largely contributes to its expressive qualities. The regular beat pattern shows the beats with downward – and sideways – oriented gestures. Such patterns do provide clear distinction between the beats, but also somewhat contradict the organic flow of the musical line. It is not difficult to discover that the clearer the beating is (from a technical point of view), the less expressive the conducting becomes. This contradiction cannot be avoided completely, since the necessity of the beat pattern is unquestionable. However, the regular beat pattern scatters the beats in different directions, thus showing them isolated from each other. In order to show their connection the inverted beat proves to be much more helpful, since it is based on a continuous motion that makes the beats of the measure flow into each other without being separated by an ictus. That is why the inverted beat has a wide application when conducting an expressive, legato line in moderate tempo and beats, containing several notes within a single melodic flow.]¹⁸*

Here are some other examples of the advantages of the inverted beat.

[Quite often, the first beat of the measure is not necessarily the center of the phrase (Musical Example 1.1). If conducted in the ordinary way, it will break the flow of the musical line:

¹⁸ The text in brackets on inverted beat has been translated from Chapter 5 of Musin, p.82- 84 of the on-line PDF version of the 1967 edition, available at <http://www.stetsenko.com/Files/Musin.pdf>

Musical Example 1.1 Tchaikovsky, *Symphony No. 6*, 1st movement, 2nd theme

Andante (♩ = 69)
con sordini teneramente, molto cantabile,
p
con sordini teneramente, molto cantabile,
p
con sordini
pp *mp* *pp*

In this example, the entrance of the accompaniment in the second measure of Andante brings additional weight to the first beat. Therefore, it needs to be conducted in a way that does not disrupt the flow of the melody towards the center of the phrase, which, in this case, is the third beat. This can be easily achieved if the first beat of the second measure of Andante is conducted with an inverted beat.]¹⁹

Let's look at another example, showing a particular use of the inverted beat:

¹⁹ This bracketed excerpt, along with the musical example appears on page 218 of the on-line copy, <http://www.stetsenko.com/Files/Musin.pdf>

[Musical Example 1.2 Mozart, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, 2nd movement



*In order to show the connection of the repeated notes in the melody, thus achieving an organic melodic flow, the first two notes can be shown with two equal inverted beats.]*²⁰

*[When using the inverted beat, the contact of the hand with the sound also changes. The conductor does not hit an imaginary surface anymore, but moves as if carrying the sound through the space with the top part of his hand, thus feeling its weight and elasticity. He can imagine that the sound is made of some sticky, dense mass or he can simply throw the notes and make them fly into the air, as in the following example. The lightness of the repeated notes can be shown with inverted upbeats at the tip of the baton, using only a flick of the wrist]*²¹, as in Musical Example 1.3.

[Musical Example 1.3 Bizet, *L'Arlesienne*, Suite No.1, 2nd movement]²²



²⁰ Ibid., 222.

²¹ Ibid., 83.

²² Ibid., 223.

[The inverted beat is a priceless tool when showing pizzicato chords, which are often a big challenge for orchestras (example, the beginning of the Preludes by Liszt). When using an inverted beat, the togetherness of the performance is made easy by a gesture that resembles the actual technique of playing pizzicato.]

The inverted beat by no means replaces completely the need of the regular beating gesture, in which the downward motion is much more emphatic and clear. The advantages of the inverted beat, that is, do not overshadow the positive qualities of the regular beat. Instead, the conductor can apply the different techniques according to the needs of the music.]²³

[There is also another type of inverted beat, widely employed in practice. It is usually used to show short, abrupt or accented chords.²⁴ The hand is first lifted up. Then, with a swift, circular motion, it descends towards the conducting surface and, without hitting it, stops there. The circular motion can be performed in any direction. This movement uses only half of the duration of the regular beat, while the stop occupies the second half. The sound that follows is provoked by an energetic gesture up or forward. For that energetic gesture, imagine that the hand snatches the sound and throws it up or pushes it forward.]

In order to understand this movement better, think also that the hand does not stop its motion after hitting a surface, but instead mimics the motion of catching a falling object. In the first case the active participation of the muscles, which direct the motion downwards, continues until the moment in which the target is reached. In the second case, the stop is a result of an immediate, more controlled reaction of the muscles that catch the falling object.]²⁵

²³ Ibid., 83 – 84, Chapter 5.

²⁴ Often encountered in recitatives.

²⁵ Musin, 67 – 68, Chapter 4 <http://www.stetsenko.com/Files/Musin.pdf>

Basic Techniques of the Recitative²⁶

Conducting an opera recitative presents specific technical requirements. While many young conductors are perfectly able to lead a successful symphonic performance, they often encounter difficulties when trying to conduct an opera. The recitatives usually present the most serious challenge. And even when young conductors of opera do a satisfactory job leading the choir and accompanying the soloists in through-composed moments, they often face difficulties when dealing with recitatives. What are the particular problems that a recitative presents?

In the symphonic repertoire, the experience and the initiative of the orchestra can make up for some technical flaws, lack of experience, and occasional clumsiness of a conductor (if, of course, they don't go beyond the acceptable limits). An experienced orchestra can make the task of a conductor much easier in many ways. He does not always need to cue the entrance of every voice or isolated chord and he is even less obliged to provide constant cutoffs. The rhythmic pulse of the music alone keeps the ensemble together and helps the musicians with their entrances and cutoffs. Special attention from the conductor is not always needed. When accompanying a soloist, the conditions change noticeably. Here the players cannot rely solely on their own initiative and experience. Accompaniments require a certain degree of flexibility in tempo and often require the players to enter after bars of rests. In such cases, the orchestra becomes dependent on the conductor. This is particularly true of recitatives where the lack of constant melodic and rhythmic motion, numerous rests, empty measures, isolated chords and melodic fragments all require a high degree of concentration from the players.

Taken together, these unique features present to greater or lesser degree in all operatic recitatives require the conductor to provide unambiguous gestures and precise beat patterns and to prepare every entrance of the orchestra. It is also important to consider that in recitative

²⁶ Ibid., 149 – 150, Chapter 8, the subheading has been added by the translator.

accompaniments the players cannot easily cut off the sound on their own. And finally, the presence of isolated chords in recitatives, which are usually scattered between rests on different beats, demands a very clear distinction between gestures that mark rests and gestures that prepare a sound.

Needless to say, the obligation to follow the soloist makes the accompanying task even more demanding, since the conductor needs to calculate the exact moment when an upbeat has to be given for the orchestra. Often conductors are either late with their upbeats or rush them, when trying to catch the soloist. Such upbeats fail to define the correct tempo for the following entrance.

In short, the technical aspect of conducting a recitative imposes the following basic requirements:

- a) Noticeable distinction between gestures that mark rests and gestures that indicate sounding beats;*
- b) Always visibly marked first beats*
- c) Clear cutoffs*
- d) Precisely calculated upbeats in relation with the soloist.*

Marking the Empty Measures²⁷

Empty measures are usually marked from the wrist only, with a neutral downward motion of the hand. The players understand this gesture even better if the conductor silently touches the score or the conducting stand with the tip of the baton. It is always better to have the first beats coincide with the first beats in the solo part. However, it is possible to mark them with anticipating motions, in a fast successive manner. It is important to point out that the second

²⁷ Ibid., 154 – 155.

method is not used in purely instrumental accompaniments and is practiced by opera conductors only.

Which technique is better? It is up to the conductor to decide. It often depends also on the habits of the players. The fast marking of numerous measures is appropriate before moments when the players use one of several orientation points in their parts, such as:

- a) New big numbers in the opera*
- b) Orchestral tutti*
- c) Tempo changes*
- d) Changes of key, meter changes, big letters in the parts, etc.*

The method is also useful when conducting a piece that the orchestra knows well. With some less known scores and more difficult recitatives, it is better to mark the first beats of empty measures in the tempo of the solo part.

After an extended section of empty measures, the conductor has to raise his hand one or two measures before the entrance of the orchestra (depending on the tempo) in order to draw the attention of the orchestra (it is always recommended to look at the players and make sure they are ready). When raising his hand, the conductor must take into consideration the type of first beat that follows and whether it contains a rest or an actual sound. The particular technique of showing rests on first beats in recitatives will be explained in this chapter.

When a backstage chorus or instrumental ensemble appears in the score, the rests don't need to be marked at all. The orchestra players respectively make notes in their parts of the exact moment when the conductor will resume his conducting.

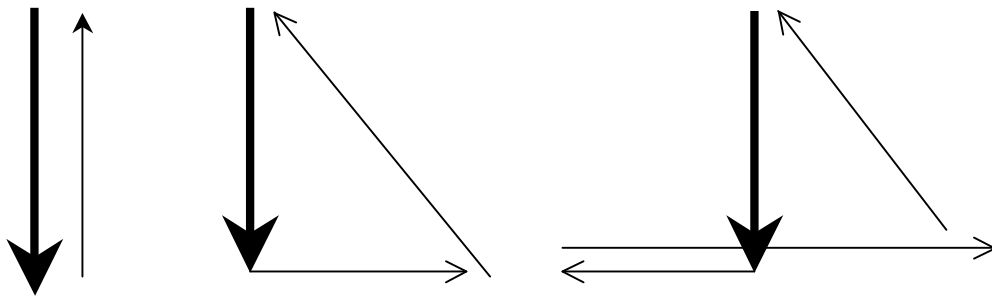
Conducting a recitative or an opera accompaniment requires a highly developed technique for marking the rests in the score. However, this doesn't mean that, in practice,

conductors need to always meticulously follow all the rules. The more experienced the orchestra is, the easier the task of the conductor becomes.

Marking the Rests within the Measure²⁸

In recitatives, as a rule, the rests should be marked with linear motions, stripped of upbeats and reduced to simplified patterns that one often encounters in conducting manuals:

Figure 1.2



Those gestures do not contain the most characteristic elements of the active beat – a downward, falling gesture as well as rounded motions and rebound. With an exception of the first and last beats, all the beats with rests are reduced to horizontal lines and are marked from the wrist only with a minimal help of the forearm. In order to make the gesture from the wrist bigger, it is recommended to hold the baton with the tip pointing straight forward. The first beat of the measure should be marked with an emphatic downward motion, while the last beat, with a linear upward motion as shown on the diagrams.

Rests, when present at the beginning of the measure, must always be marked. Together, the type of recitative and its character affect the use of a particular technique for marking the

²⁸ Ibid., 150 – 152.

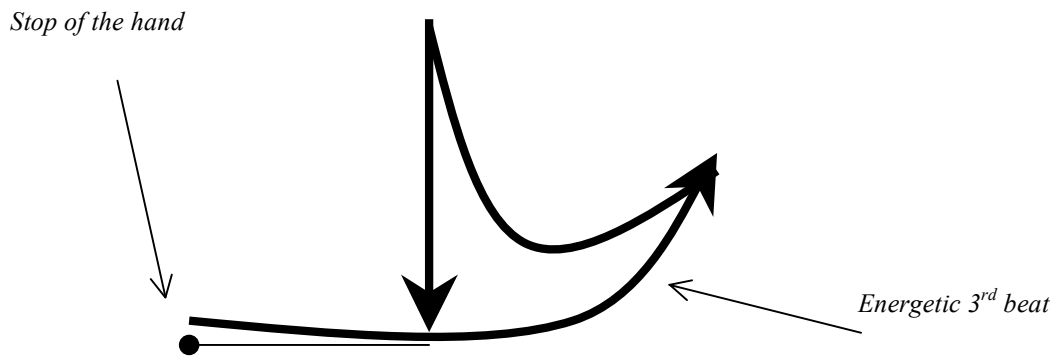
rests. In the case of a more melodic recitative, performed evenly and in a slower pace, the rests can be marked in the tempo of the vocal line. This approach is especially useful when the orchestra accompaniment contains melodic fragments that complement and form a unified motion with the vocal line (Musical Example 1.4).

Musical Example 1.4 Rimsky-Korsakov, *Tsar's Bride*, Act 1

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is for the voice, starting with a rest of 15 measures, then entering with the lyrics: "На. пра. сно ду. мал че. стью кон. чить де. ло, на. пра. сно за. сы." The bottom staff is for the piano, showing a complex accompaniment with melodic lines in both hands. Dynamic markings include *sfp* and *p*.

In most cases, the entrance of the orchestra after the rests is prepared with an upbeat, which begins at the moment of the last rest. In order to make this upbeat effective, the conductor must neutralize as much as possible the preceding motions, which indicate the rests. When marking rests, it has already been suggested to use only linear—not rounded--motions. It is also very helpful to gently stop the hand exactly on the beat that precedes the preparatory beat for the orchestra. For example, if we have to show a chord in *ff* on the fourth beat, the hand should fully stop its motion on the second beat and, from this position, give an energetic preparatory beat in the direction of the third beat as shown in Figure 1.3:

Figure 1.3 [Added by translator]



Even when a recitative is sung freely, it is sometimes better to use the above - described technique. This is especially needed before an orchestra entrance in louder dynamics, when the upbeat needs to start with a bigger and more energetic motion as in the Musical Example 1.5:

Musical Example 1.5 Mozart, *Così fan tutte*, “Ah, scostati” [Added by translator]²⁹

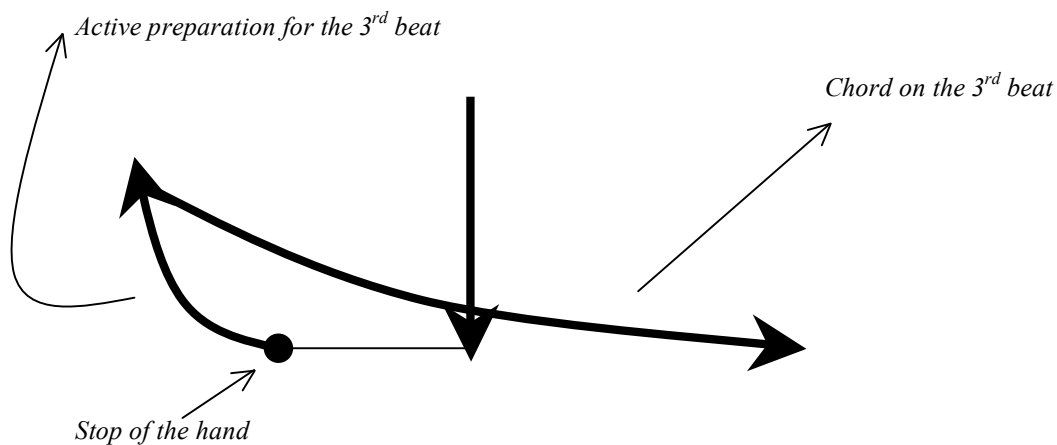
fug - gi per pie-tà, la-scia-mi so-la.

In recitatives, where the free declamation of the singer is combined with isolated chords, a conductor need not mark rests within the tempo of the vocal line. In such cases, it is recommended to quickly mark the beats with rests. When arriving at the beat with the last rest, the hand can stop and wait there until the moment when the upbeat for the orchestra needs to be given. For example, if a chord needs to sound on the fourth beat, then the conductor marks the first two and stops the hand on third beat. From there, when the moment comes, he gives a preparatory upbeat (to the right) for the chord. The same rule can be applied to all the beats of the measure. For example, as shown in Figure 1.4, if the chord is on the third beat, the hand

²⁹ In the example from *Così fan tutte*, the hand quickly marks the first two beats with linear motions from the wrist while Dorabella sings “*Fuggi per pietá*” and then stops after the second beat. When Dorabella finishes her line, the conductor gives an energetic third beat, which prepares the string *tutti*. The next measure (“*Lasciami sola*”) is conducted in the exact same way.

stops and waits on the second beat, and moves to give the preparation for the chord, which follows on beat three.

Figure 1.4 [Added by translator]



Marking the rests with anticipation (before the notated music actually sounds) is an extremely practical method. When following the soloist's free rendition of a recitative, the conductor will likely have difficulty marking precisely every beat in tempo. Movements to mark each beat would have to be executed with stops of different duration on various beats and therefore without a constant tempo – a practice that would only create nervousness in the orchestra. Marking the rests with anticipation can be a useful device even in a more freely sung melodic recitative.

Marking rests in the middle of the measure does not differ at all from the already discussed methods. If the tempo of the vocal line is quite steady, we can conduct in tempo. If instead, the rendition of the soloist is free, marking the rests with anticipation proves to be more useful.

The Rest on the First Beat³⁰

The rest on the first beat always requires some special attention. One should never forget that the orchestra players refer to the first beat when counting rests and pay far less attention to the other beats. From a strictly technical point of view, the first beat is always the most emphatic beat of the measure, regardless whether it indicates a sounding beat, a rest or the most strongly accented pulse of the passage in question. This helps us understand even better why it is so important to give a neutral character to all the other gestures used for marking rests. If those gestures are not completely deprived of a swoop and/or curvy lines, they might be easily perceived as another active “first beat,” which will immediately confuse players who are counting empty measures in their parts.

In this context, it is also important to discuss the specific relationship between the last and the first beat. In order to show the first beat with an emphatic downward motion, the hand (or the wrist along with the stick) must be previously raised. This upward movement, in certain cases, can be easily misinterpreted as the swoop of an active, preparatory upbeat. A particular example in which such confusion might happen occurs when, after a rest on the first beat, an energetic chord or a loud tutti is present on the second beat (Musical Example 1.6).

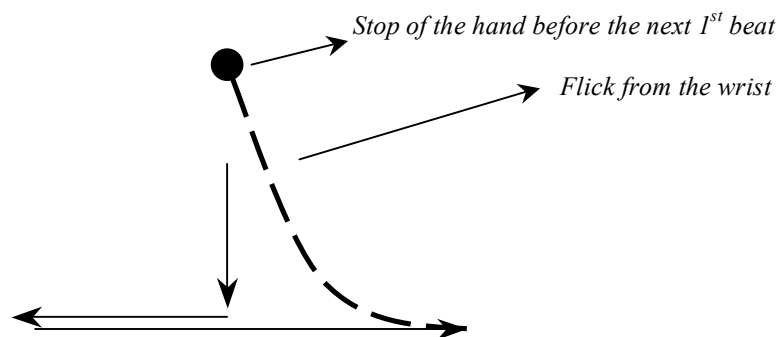
³⁰ Musin, 152 – 153, <http://www.stetsenko.com/Files/Musin.pdf>. The subheading has been added by the translator.

Musical Example 1.6 Rimsky-Korsakov, *Tsar's Bride*, Act 2



In order to avoid any confusion, the upward motion of the fourth beat should not look like an active preparation for an entrance. This differentiation can be achieved in the following manner: after quickly marking the rests of the preceding measure, the conductor raises the hand with anticipation, stops the motion at the top of the last beat, and waits there for the soloist before showing the next first beat (Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5 [Added by translator]



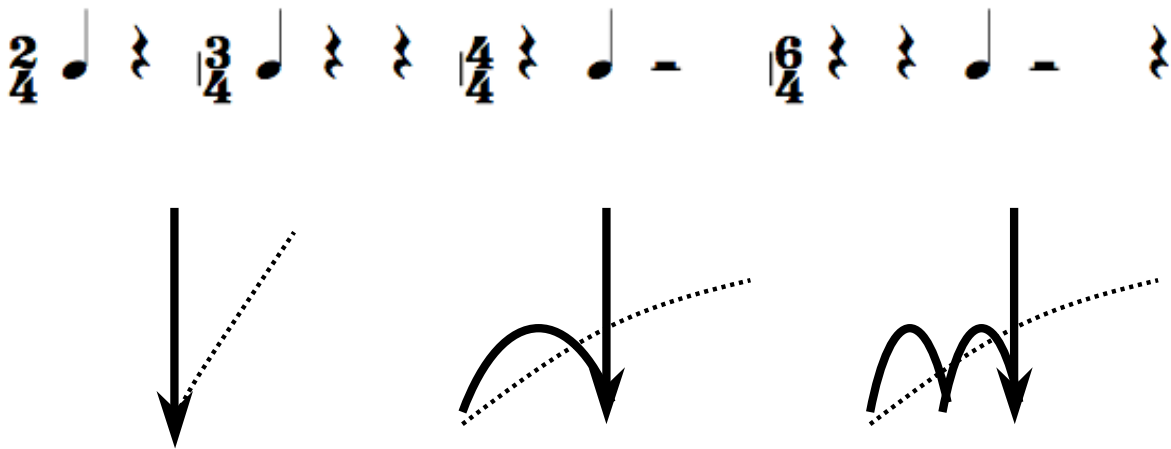
*For an even clearer marking of the rest on the first beat another technical approach can be recommended. In the moment when the hand reaches the last beat of the previous measure, make a gentle, but swift, throwing motion upwards from the wrist only (as if towards the body) and, while holding the baton up with only thumb and index fingers, release the grip of the other three fingers. When this is done, the tip of the baton will freely point back. This method has big advantages. With a minimal and very light hand motion the conductor can raise the baton in a way that will secure an energetic downbeat with a double purpose: to mark the rest and at the same time to serve as a preparation for an entrance on the second beat. In such case, the fingers resume the grip on the stick with the downbeat. If the rest on the first beat is followed by rests on the following beats, then the first beat can be shown in the ordinary way, with an emphatic downward motion, without using a special technique. The same is valid if the rest on the first beat comes after a sounding last beat, as in Musical Example 1.5 from *Così fan tutte*.*

Rests in the second half of the measure do not have a particular importance for the players. As already been suggested, simple linear schematic motions are sufficient. Such rests can be marked with anticipation as well with faster motions. If the next measure begins with a sounding beat after previous rests, the hand needs to gently stop at the level of the conducting surface, to the right of the first beat. From this position, and at any moment, it is easy to give an upbeat for the new entrance of the orchestra. If, on the other hand, the next measure starts with a rest, then the hand stops at the top of the last beat and the first beat can be easily shown with a downward motion from the wrist without preparation.

Conducting Short Chords in Recitatives³¹

Let's look first at the various ways of showing short chords that often occur in recitatives and do not require a cutoff. If the short sound comes, for example, on the first beat in 2/4 and 3/4 measures, on the second beat of 4/4 measure or on the third beat in 6/4 measure, then the hand should make a quick rebound to the right (Figure 1.6). If the next first beat contains a sound, the hand makes the rebound and then stops at the level of the conducting surface. From there it will be easy to give an upbeat for the next measure. If, on the other hand, the next first beat contains only a rest, then the hand is directed to the right and up. This motion is followed immediately by a flick of the wrist that shows the last beat of the measure and, as already suggested, stops at the top, before showing the next first beat.

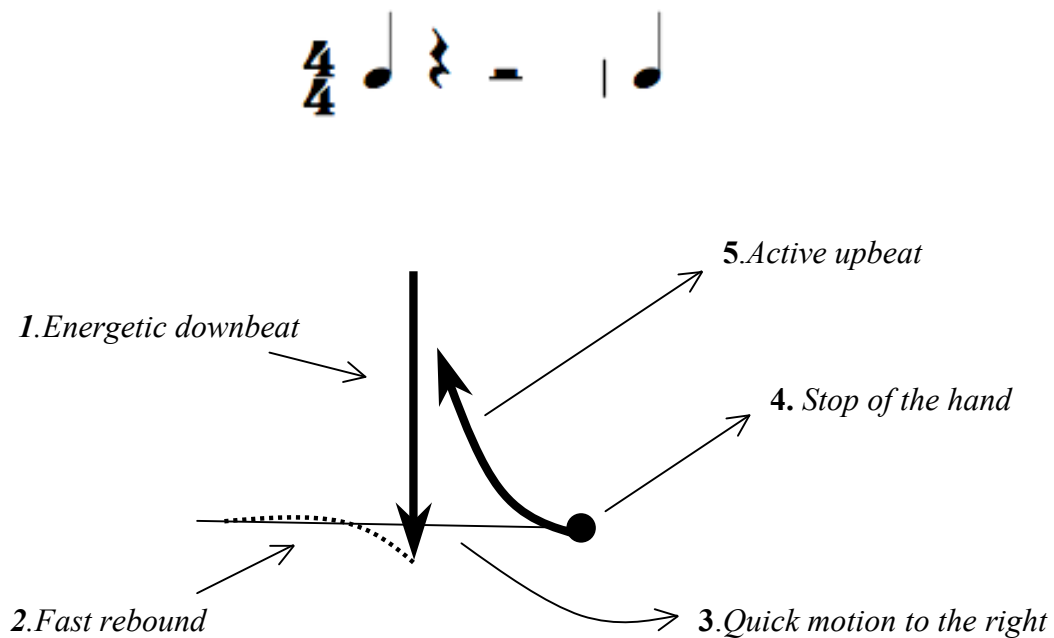
Figure 1.6



³¹ Ibid., 154. The subheading has been added by the translator.

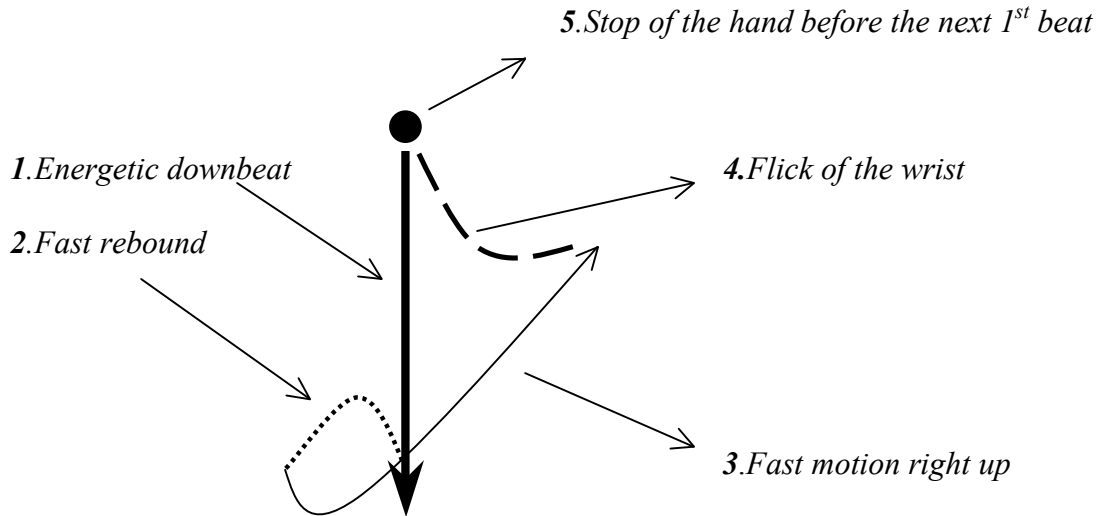
When a short sound appears on the first beat of a 4/4 measure, or a second beat of 6/4 measure, the hand should make a rebound in the direction of the following beat (in this case, to the left). After that it should be quickly moved to the right. With the resulting motions, the conductor schematically marks the measure. If the following measure starts with a new sound, the motions of the hand before the following upbeat can be graphically represented as follows:

Figure 1.7 [Added by translator]



If the next measure starts with a rest, the graph will look slightly different. Note that in this example the fast marking motion after the rebound is immediately followed by the flick of the wrist on the fourth beat and the hand stops at the end of the fourth and not the third beat:

Figure 1.8 [Added by translator]



When the rest comes after a longer sound, which requires a cutoff, the same technique is applied. The only difference is that the hand does not make a quick rebound, but marks the rests with a calm gesture.

Cutoffs in Recitatives³²

Cutting off the sound of the orchestra is an important technique when conducting a recitative. The presence of long sustained chords, whose length could be extended or shortened in response to the free rendition of the solo part, requires from the conductor constant care for the precise moment in which the sound has to be cut off.

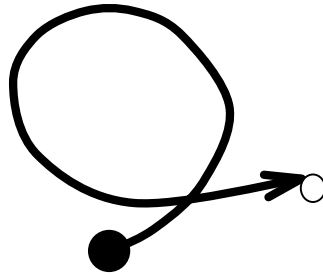
There are different ways in which a cutoff can be performed. However, they can be usefully grouped in three different categories.

***1st type** is applied when the sound has to be cut off abruptly. The most typical use of this technique is in long chords, occupying several beats of the measure. It is a technique that is similar to the one used to cutoff the sound of a fermata. The cutoff of the 1st type is performed in*

³² Ibid., 157 – 160.

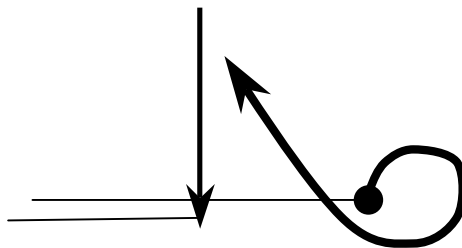
the following way: After marking all the beats of the long chord with a faster and neutral schematic gesture, the hand stops exactly on the beat where the sound needs to be cut off. This stop of the hand must be performed smoothly, with no push or click of any kind. The cutoff itself is performed with a circular motion:

Figure 1.9



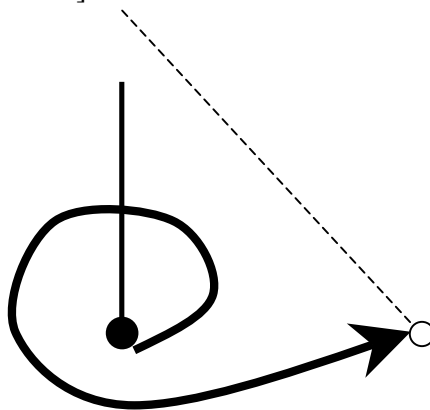
In the figure above, the black dot indicates the stop of the hand and the white dot, the actual stop of the sound. *The stop of the hand draws the attention of the orchestra and facilitates the performance of the circular motion. It serves as a clear signal that separates the previous motions from the cutoff. The circular cutoff is always performed in the direction of the next beat (the beat with the rest). For example, if the recitative is accompanied by a long chord that needs to be cut off on the fourth beat, the conductor marks with faster motions all the beats and then stops the hand on the third beat before the cutoff in the direction of the fourth beat:*

Figure 1.10 [Added by translator]



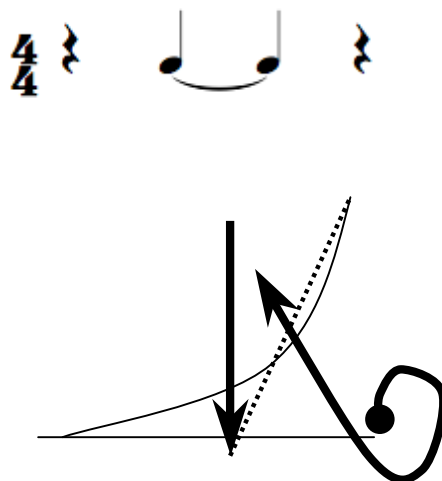
In chords that last only two beats the second beat does not have to be marked. After holding the first beat, the conductor can use the duration of the entire second beat for the cutoff (Figure 1.11). The black dot indicates the stop of the hand.

Figure 1.11 [Added by translator]



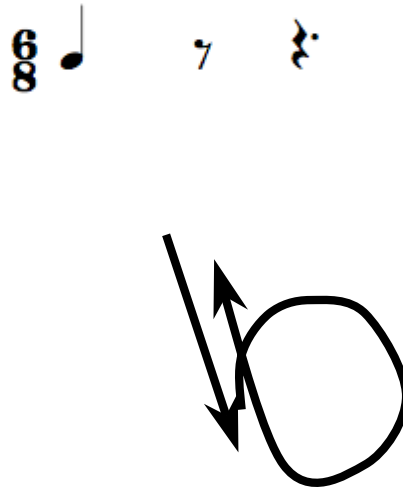
However, this method is not always practical. If, for example, we have a chord on the second and third beats in 4/4 measure, stopping on the second quarter note will be impractical since from this position it will not be possible to show the fourth beat. In such situation it is recommended to stop the hand on the third beat:

Figure 1.12 [Added by translator]



The stop of the hand usually precedes the circular motion of the cutoff. In faster tempo, when the duration of the sound does not permit a stop of the hand but still requires an energetic cutoff, then this technique can also be used (Figure 1.13).

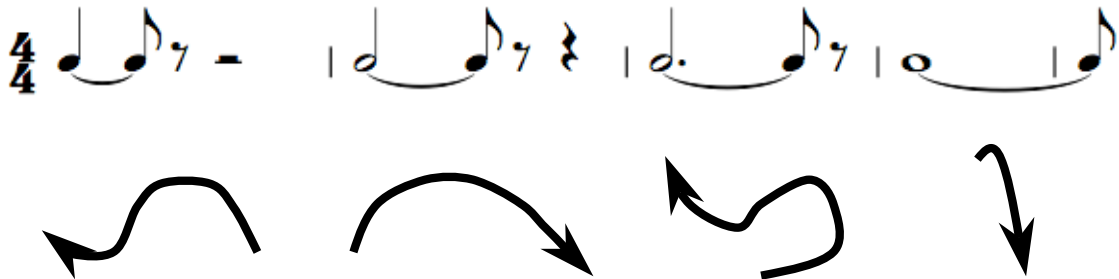
Figure 1.13



The cutoff gesture should be accelerated towards the end and has to halt with a little flick of the wrist, which in fact interrupts the sound. This cutoff has all the characteristics of an active beat. The conductor should feel the swoop of the movement when the hand goes up and the little “click” at the end of the gesture, where the sound stops. In this way the players won’t feel surprised and will be able to cut the sound together. The speed of the cutoff gesture and its size depend on the tempo and the dynamics of the music.

2nd type is applied when a long chord stops at the beginning of a following beat:

Figure 1.14



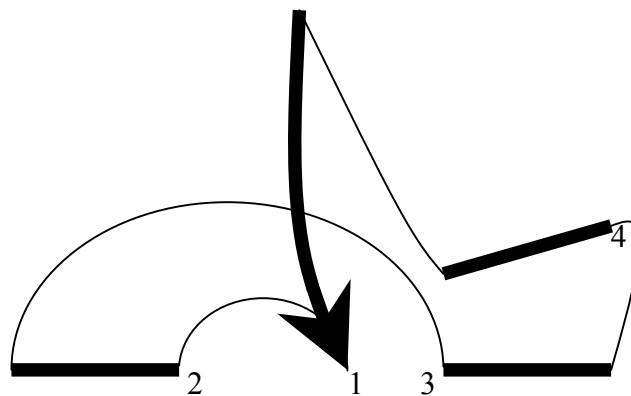
Here the cutoff is performed when the hand simply shows more emphatically the beat on which the sound should stop. This technique is applicable to any beat of the measure.

The two forms of the 3rd type are used to cut off single notes (chords) that are neither too short – in which case one can show them with an abrupt gesture and with no cutoff – nor too long, in which case one of the above two methods can be used. There are two ways in which the conductor can signal that the sound needs to be sustained: through a portamento gesture or through a stop of the hand and the end of the beat.

3rd type A: Sustaining the sound through portamento gesture. [In order to explain the portamento gesture, we'll offer some associations, which can help develop the right muscle sensation. This gesture is performed with a gliding, caressing motion, while also applying some pressure. Imagine that, while showing the beat, the palm of the hand glides and at the same time presses against an imaginary surface (for example, some kind of fabric or paper). The sound will stop at the moment in which the hand releases the pressure and/or changes direction, as if pulling away. In the portamento gesture, the stop of the sound could also be achieved with a gentle flick of the wrist/baton at the end of the "gliding" motion. The portamento gesture is also

very useful when gentle subdivision in a slow tempo is required. This technique needs a certain amount of space. If we perform the movement on the second or third beat, using their regular location in the beat pattern, then the possibility of showing a longer sound will be somewhat limited. It is recommended to slightly alter the beat pattern, as shown below. The bold lines indicate the part of the beat in which the portamento gesture (pressure) is applied:

Figure 1.15

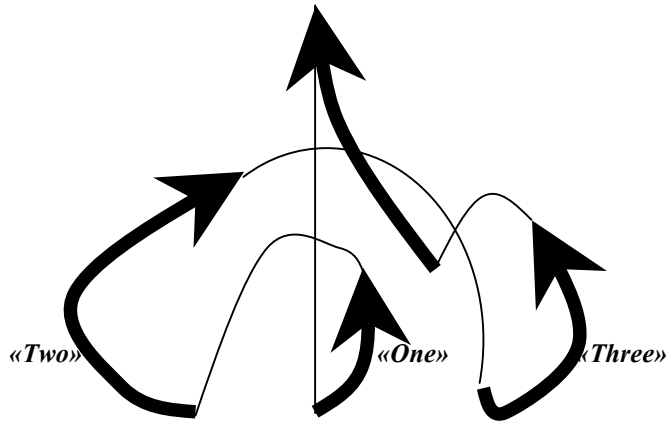


*The portamento gesture can also be performed without an abrupt change of direction after the pressure of the hand is released.]*³³ The second example presents the *portamento* gesture used with an inverted beat.³⁴ The hand gently descends towards the conducting surface and performs the *portamento* gesture with an upward motion, as if lifting the sound from the conducting surface. The same sensations are applied, but the motion is more rounded, without abrupt changes of direction. The darker lines indicate the pressure of the hand:

³³ The excerpt in brackets, explaining the nature of the *portamento* gesture that Musin mentions in Chapter 8 is explained in the previous Chapter 7, p. 137 <http://www.stetsenko.com/Files/Musin.pdf>. The original version of Figure 1.15 appears on the same page.

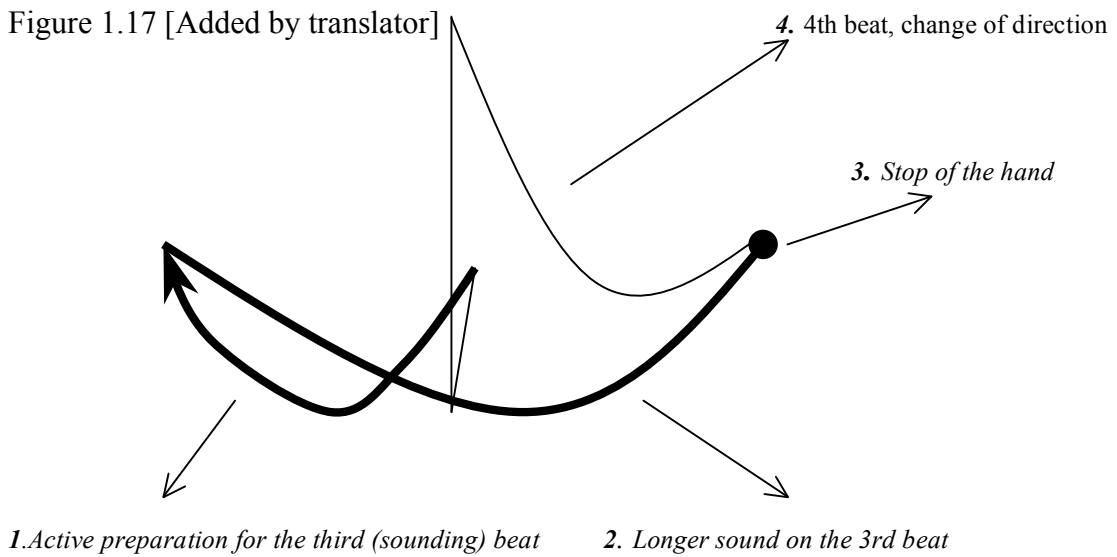
³⁴ Example 1.16 appears on p. 136 of Musin, <http://www.stetsenko.com/Files/Musin.pdf>. The explanation of the conducting motions has been added by the translator and it is based on Musin's ideas, presented on p. 136.

Figure 1.16



3rd type B: *Sustaining the sound through a stop at the end of the beat. If the conductor chooses to stop the hand at the end (top) of the sounding beat, the sound will stop at the very moment when the hand resumes its motion. For example, if showing the third beat to the right with a bow-like movement the conductor should, after stopping the hand, move it in the direction of the fourth beat, as if suddenly “breaking away” from the previous sound:*

Figure 1.17 [Added by translator]



In both cases, the sound is not cut forcefully as in the first two types of cutoffs. Instead, it stops as if on its own, when the reason that provoked it is no longer present (the portamento gesture or the stop). Those two techniques are used especially when very short chords are followed by a slightly longer, more sustained one. The techniques point out the necessity for performers to sustain the sound. This differentiation is particularly important in recitatives since players very often tend to ignore the subtle relationship between longer and shorter chords (Musical Example 1.7).

Musical Example 1.7 Rimsky-Korsakov, *Tsar's Bride*, Act 1³⁵

(подходя к Грязному ближе)
espressivo

II.
- жи, за что ты на ме - ня сер-дит? Чем,

pp *f*

In general, the portamento gesture is better suited for softer, more gentle cutoffs, whereas the technique in which stop of the hand is used is better for more abrupt ones. The second type

³⁵ In this excerpt from the 1st Act of the opera *Tsar's Bride* by Rimsky-Korsakov, the first measure can be marked with understated, quick schematic motions. The next measure starts with a rest, followed by a chord on the second beat. It has already been mentioned that conductors have to be particularly careful with this particular pattern in the accompaniment of recitatives. After marking the rests of the previous measure, the conductor should stop the hand at the top. The following downward motion marks the rest on the first beat and serves as preparation for the chord. The chord on the second beat can be shown with a *portamento* gesture. However, it is better to show the next chord using a stop of the hand at the end of the fourth beat. This stop will have a double purpose: to sustain the sound and to prepare the hand for marking the rest at the beginning of the next measure. When the conductor shows the next first beat with an energetic motion down, this motion will signal the cutoff of the previous chord and at the same time will become an active preparation for the *forte* on the second beat.

can be used to show a longer, final chord in faster tempo (especially in pieces from the Classical period). This type of cutoff is also recommended in music with a more stable rhythm, where the pulse itself hints to the players the moment when the sound needs to stop.

The two variants of this third type of cutoff are often used in slow tempi, where the beats are long enough and the other two types can also be used. In such a case, the third technique is used to end the sound in the softest possible way. This effect, however, is possible only in the string section where the players (in a diminuendo) do not need to stop perfectly together and their uneven endings are part of the fading effect. This technique is not appropriate in the winds.

*The third cutoff method can also be used for chords that last for more than one beat. But since it does not guarantee absolute precision, it is used as an exception and only in the strings, usually in soft dynamic. For example, measure 15 of the orchestral fantasy *Romeo and Juliet* by Tchaikovsky, the sound can be cut on the second beat to show a caesura in the 1st violins.*

The intensity of the sound and the softness or sharpness of the desired cutoff also affect the way this gesture is performed. A soft, fading ending in pianissimo allows the use of a rounded gesture with smooth lines, without an abrupt motion of breaking away from the sound or using a flick of the wrist. If the sound is cut with the left hand it is enough to close the fingers at the end of the beat. In more abrupt cutoffs, using the 3rd method, the hand, after performing the portamento gesture or a stop, breaks away suddenly from the sound and/or changes direction.

Conducting a Recitative with Long Sustained Notes in the Accompaniment³⁶

When the orchestra is playing a long sustained chord for several measures, the beats can also be marked with the already described linear schematic gestures. If the conductor wants to give more freedom to the soloist, he shows all the beats (except for the first one) with small, barely noticeable gestures. If, on the other hand, the conductor wants to lead or help the soloist, the gesture can be noticeably bigger and more active.

The change of harmony at the beginning of measures, especially chords with accents, should be prepared with active upbeats.³⁷ Any change of harmony within the measure is also prepared with an active upbeat, noticeably different from the schematic gestures used for marking (measure 7 of Musical Example 1.8).

³⁶ Musin, 155 – 156, <http://www.stetsenko.com/Files/Musin.pdf>

³⁷ It is also possible, in such situations, to use an inverted beat (measure 5 of Musical Example 1.8). When the change of harmony is shown with an inverted beat in a more free-style recitative, the conductor can wait for the soloist at the top of the previous beat. After that, and without preparation, the hand gently descends towards the conducting surface and simply “lifts” the sound of the next chord.

Musical Example 1.8, Gounod, *Faust*, Prologue

Andante. (He raises the goblet again.)

The image shows a musical score for Gounod's *Faust*, Prologue. It consists of two systems of music. The first system features a vocal line (marked 'F') and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics: 'sez! way! —' followed by 'Ô cou-pè des a - ieux, qui tant de fois fus' and 'My last and on - ly hope, O gob-let of my'. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings 'f' and 'fp', and a 'tr. (tr.)' marking. The second system also features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics: 'plei - ne, Pour - quoi trem-bles - tu dans ma main? Pour - quoi' and 'fa - thers, What fear makes you tremble in my hand? What fear'. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings 'fp' and 'cresc.'.

When a crescendo or diminuendo is present within a sustained harmony or if the conductor wants to show a more active tremolo, the neutral schematic motion used for marking the beats needs to be replaced by active conducting. The free rendition of a recitative allows a conductor also to shorten the beat patterns and conduct 4/4 in two, a 3/4 in one, etc.

An extended number of measures that contain a sustained harmony or sustained accompaniment of a single long note do not need to be marked. Conducting can be resumed at the moment of transition between the sustained harmony (or single note) and the following music. The last act of Verdi's *Rigoletto* provides a typical example of when this technique can be

used (Musical Example 1.9).³⁸ However, the players must be previously warned, in order to avoid possible confusion:

Musical Example 1.9 Verdi, *Rigoletto*, No.13. *Scena, Terzetto e Tempesta*

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Verdi's *Rigoletto*, No. 13. Each system includes staves for Ob. I., R. (Tenor), S. (Soprano), and Vc. (Violoncello). The lyrics are in Italian and are written below the vocal staves. The first system shows the beginning of the scene with the lyrics: "-not-te ri-tor-ne-rò." and "No,". The second system continues with "Non ca-le. A get-tar-lo nel fiu-me basto io so-lo." and "no: il vo' far io stes-so. Vuoi sa-per an-che il Si-a! Il suo no-me?". The third system concludes with "mi-o? E-gliè De-lit-to, Pu-ni-zion son i-o." and includes performance instructions for the strings: "ppp appena sensibile".

³⁸ In the original Russian edition from 1967 Musin refers to the excerpt from *Rigoletto*, but a musical example is not provided. The musical example has been added by the translator.

The above material can be usefully summarized before moving ahead to broaden this inquiry into opera recitative and to illustrate the use of Musin's techniques in specific operas.³⁹

1. Numerous successive empty measures in opera scores are marked with a downward motion of the hand only, in the tempo of the solo part or with the correct number of fast, repeated downbeat gestures.
2. Rests in recitatives are marked with smooth, schematic linear motions from the wrist only, with no upbeats or rebounds.
3. A rest on the first beat must always be marked with a clear downward motion.
4. Rests in recitatives can be marked in two ways:
 - a) With quick, anticipating motions, regardless of the tempo, if the solo declamation is free, or
 - b) In tempo, if the case of a more steady solo line.
5. When showing rests with anticipation before a new entrance of the orchestra, the hand stops on the beat with the last rest and waits for the soloist to finish his/her line. The new upbeat for the orchestra starts from the position of the last rest.
6. When conducting chords in *forte* after rests, the hand stops two full beats before the chord. This technique will secure a bigger and more emphatic upbeat. For example, if the chord is written on the 3rd beat, the hand stops after the downward motion of "one," and from there gives an energetic, preparatory 2nd beat. If the chord comes on the 4th beat, the hand stops after marking the second beat, etc. The same principle can be applied to all beats of the measure. The only exception is an entrance of a chord on the second beat, after a rest on the first.

³⁹ The following summary has been added by the translator.

7. When an entrance of the orchestra immediately follows a rest on the first beat, the hand must stop at the top, before showing the first beat with an energetic downward motion. This motion will mark the rest and serve as a preparation for the chord on the 2nd beat.
8. Beats of a sustained accompaniment (or long tremolo) are marked with the exactly same technique used for marking rests. Points 3 – 6 fully apply to measures with long sustained notes in the accompaniment. The only exception applies when a conductor wishes to show *crescendo/diminuendo* within the long note. In such cases an active beat can replace the passive gestures used for marking.
9. Short chords in recitatives are shown with an energetic downward motion, followed by a quick rebound.

CHAPTER 2

TRACING A MUSICAL STYLE:

THE OPERA RECITATIVE IN THE 17th and 18th CENTURY

The Origins of Opera Recitative

In the waning years of the sixteenth century the city of Florence was home to a group of musicians who gathered around Count Giovanni de' Bardi (1545-1613). This group included Vincenzo Galilei (father of the astronomer Galileo), Giulio Caccini, Pietro Strozzi, and poet Ottavio Rinuccini.⁴⁰ Among group members, Galilei was particularly forceful in his criticism of elaborate 16th century polyphony as a mechanism for conveying texts, whatever its glories as music. "For the expression of ideas," Galilei contended, the accepted rules of counterpoint, as presented in his own teacher Gioseffo Zarlino's esteemed text of 1558, were simply "pestilent."⁴¹ In his writing on the subject, from 1602, singer-composer Caccini (1545-1618) explained the reasoning behind his own efforts to restore the clarity of vocal texts:

I thought to follow that style so praised by Plato and the other philosophers who maintained music to be nothing other than rhythmic speech with pitch added.⁴²

The desire to restore the primacy of the text and to retain the rhythms and melodic patterns of speech led to the emergence of the early operatic monody of the Florentine Camerata. Caccini writes in a passage, based on Plato, that the composer must start with the consideration of "word, rhythms and then tone, not the other way around".⁴³ Monody, as explained by scholars today, lays "partway between song and speech"; it calls on singers "to declaim text in a style that

⁴⁰ The group is known as the Florentine Camerata.

⁴¹ Mark E. Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture*. 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2010), 1:198.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 203.

⁴³ Manfred F. Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era from Monteverdi to Bach* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1947), 26.

is at once measured and free, lyrical yet rhythmically fluid.”⁴⁴. In the treatise “On Ancient Music and Good Singing,” Giovanni Bardi provides some of the earliest performance practice guides on how the new style of monody should be approached. What we consider a treatise now was in fact a collection of letters sent to Giulio Caccini. In them, Bardi referred extensively to writings by Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch to defend his aesthetic concepts. What is of a particular interest is the practical advice he gives to Caccini:

The great philosophers, and specifically Plato, say that the singer must follow the verse of the poet, adjusting his voice like a good cook who adds to the food that he has seasoned well a little sauce or condiment to make it pleasing to his lord...⁴⁵

Above all else your principal objective should be not to spoil the verse in singing by making a long syllable short, or a short one long, as it is habitually done every time; and what is worse, it is done by those who consider themselves great men in this art...⁴⁶

When singing alone or to the lute, harpsichord or other instrument one may contract or stretch the measure at will, granted that it is up to the singer to lead the measure according to his judgment...⁴⁷

You will search out only a few notes, revolving around the median of the tonos, which you will employ as often as possible, remembering that a human being reaches for only a few notes in speaking, and rarely, or perhaps never, talks in leaps, unless stirred by anger or some other passion...⁴⁸

The Florentine Camerata expressed and promoted an aesthetic concept but fell well short of setting forth a new musical style. Creating a musical drama out of poetry needed more than theoretical speculations on antiquity. For that to happen, as Joseph Kerman points out, art had to move into real action, while the composer needed to become the dramatist himself.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Bonds, 202.

⁴⁵ Giovanni Bardi, "Discorso Mandato a Giulio Caccini Detto Romano Sopra La Musica Antica, e 'l Cantar Bene." in *The Florentine Camerata: Documentary Studies and Translations*, ed. Claude V. Palisca (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 115.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁹ Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 20-21.

Monteverdi's Discovery

The first composer to take the important step from the classical Greek aesthetic temperament to new style was Claudio Monteverdi. He found a way to translate the art of stage rhetoric into the language of music, thus fusing music and words in a genuinely dramatic way.⁵⁰ “Monteverdi discovered recitative,” Kerman writes. “He did not invent it, but in the deepest sense he certainly discovered it. . . . Words formed musically for him. And to whip the recitative into passion, he hallowed every available musical means for tension.”⁵¹ Monteverdi expanded the dramatic impact of monody by juxtaposing sharply contrasting note values, bold rhythmic syncopation, and quick declamation in ways not found in the compositions of the Camerata. For example, near the end of Act 4 of *Orfeo*, Monteverdi employs a sustained 16th-note declamation to portray Orfeo's outrage as he convinces himself that the furies are working to steal Euridice from him.⁵² This example illustrates the unique and compelling aspects of Monteverdi's contribution to early opera.

The biggest strength of Monteverdi's discovery was also its biggest weakness: exactly like early chant, the recitative was a post-verbal form of musical expression. Because it was completely dependent on an extra musical factor--the rhetoric of the text—it could not easily evolve into an independent musical form. Unlike the madrigal, recitative sprang not from some general poetic feeling but instead from the implications of individual words. And music as an expressive art, as Charles Rosen argues, is “essentially preverbal, not post-verbal”⁵³; the advantage that it always has had over other arts is that it can stretch, practically with no limits, a

⁵⁰ Ibid., 21

⁵¹ Ibid., 21.

⁵² Gary Tomlinson, "Madrigal, Monody, and Monteverdi's "*Via Naturale Alla Immitatione*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 67, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/831035> (accessed January 8, 2011).

⁵³ Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 173.

momentary emotional experience. This is what the Renaissance madrigal and the Baroque *da capo* aria did: they reduced the essence of a poem to a single affect, in which “the words come to seem like a commentary, generalized and denatured, on the music.”⁵⁴

The greatest creative force behind Monteverdi’s recitative and, at the same time, its basic flaw, was the fact that it relied on words, which, once set by the poet, could not be controlled by the composer in purely musical terms. This lack of control meant lack of form, of an independent musical structure. In opera, as Kerman writes, the art of control means the art of aria, which, instead of an “impulsive flash of passion,” offers a reflection upon something already lived; a single affect, an emotional retrospection, organized in time through a musical structure of precise proportions. The art of aria would be perfected only in the next century.⁵⁵

In the ensuing 150 years, Monteverdi’s invention proved highly useful to composers. By means of recitative singers could deliver large amounts of text, moving story lines along while sticking closely to the pacing and inflections of dramatic speech. From its emergence, the style of recitative gave a significant degree of rhythmic freedom to the singer. Rhythm was a relative reflection of the inflections in the text. This tradition is often described in performance practice guides on 17th century music under the name *sprezzatura* and is explained by the Italian opera scholar Rodolfo Celletti in the following way: “It signifies a kind of singing liberated from the rhythmic inflexibility of polyphonic performance and allowing the interpreter, by slowing down or speeding up the tempo to ‘adjust the value of the note to fit the concept of the words’ and hence to make the phrasing more expressive.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Kerman, 30.

⁵⁶ Sally Sanford, "Solo Singing 1," in *A Performer's Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music*, ed. Stewart Carter (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 9.

In the scores of Monteverdi and his followers this technique is made possible through the extensive use of syncopations, in which the continuo part plays the respective beats while the solo part seems often metrically displaced.⁵⁷ In early operas, lyrical passages were connected to the recitatives with little clear differentiation. A separation of recitative from more lyrical writing increased gradually during the 17th century, with many passages sharing qualities of both recitative and aria.⁵⁸ But by 1670, the aria started to displace the recitative soliloquy. The displacement, though, seemed to come at a cost of complexity: the arias usually presented single emotions or affects; the operatic soliloquies that they displaced, in contrast, were more varied, particularly the lengthy ones that “came to portray quickly changing or conflicting emotions.”⁵⁹ In comparison with the recitative, the Baroque aria had one big disadvantage: It could not move the action forward; instead, it had to always hold the plot for lyrical introspections.

This polarization between aria and recitative significantly distorted the dramatic flow of the 17th century opera. As Charles Rosen explains it, “action was reserved for recitatives, and the highly formal patterns of the arias became fit only for the most static role, the expression of sentiment and the display of virtuosity.”⁶⁰ Audiences were fascinated by virtuosity and the composers were forced to deliver. As a result, Italian opera *seria* at the end of the 17th century developed into an absurd farce, requiring an exceptional number of arias per night simply to display the technical abilities of the singers.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Kerman, 23.

⁵⁸ Oxford Music Online, “Recitative”

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/23019> (accessed December 15, 2010).

⁵⁹ Margaret Murata, “The Recitative Soliloquy,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 47, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/831268> (accessed January 13, 2011).

⁶⁰ Rosen, 179.

⁶¹ Kerman, 47.

Italian vs. French

Unlike the Italians, French were not willing to sacrifice the plot of their operas in order to show off the technical skills of their singers. Despite the rise of the new aria form, recitative as a basic dramatic language of the opera kept its supremacy in France in the court of Louis XIV. It was the Italian-born composer, Jean-Baptiste Lully, who around 1670 set the Baroque formula for French opera and successfully imported the recitative to Paris. But Lully lacked the dramatic genius of Monteverdi and, as a result, the French version of this purely Italian invention was a dry, rhythmically controlled declamation⁶². As Bukofzer explains, “the French conceived the recitative in rhetorical rather than musical terms, and while the Italians traced the words primarily by the melodic curve, leaving the rhythm to the singer, the French directed their main attention to the rhythmic patterns giving only small attention to the melody.”⁶³ From its inception, French recitative, unlike its Italian counterpart, did not allow the same degree of interpretive freedom either. A later source (Rousseau) similarly isolated the differences between the two styles:

The Italians use nothing, but quadruple time , , , but the French mix all sorts of meters together in their recitative.⁶⁴

In November 1751, Carl Heinrich Graun wrote a long letter to his friend and fellow opera composer Telemann, describing his distaste for French operatic recitative. Included among Graun’s complaints was a testy comment on the Gallic predilection for frequent changes of meter; in his opinion the only justification for metrical freedom was to make difficulties for singers and accompanists.⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., 42.

⁶³ Bukofzer, 156.

⁶⁴ J.-J. Rousseau, “Récitatif,” in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, ed. D. Diderot and L. le R. D’Alembert, 13 (Paris, 1765/R1966), 854.

The Opera Recitative of the 18th Century

Kerman summarizes the difference between the Italian and French opera at the onset of the 18th century when he states that “French opera was a stilted entertainment combining Baroque excesses with the driest neoclassicism. Italian opera was a shameless virtuoso display, emasculating classic history into a faint and tedious concert in costume.”⁶⁶ Italian opera could not survive long under such conditions. The needed reform came around 1700 when Apostolo Zeno and later Pietro Metastasio implemented a new standard that provided an easy way to move action quickly through recitatives while fully preserving the supremacy of the aria. Unlike the earlier soliloquies, the new *secco* recitatives were fast-paced and devoid of passion. Their purpose was to confront, in each little scene, at least one character with new information or a new situation. The character’s emotional reaction occupied the ensuing aria.⁶⁷

Once set loose as a discrete musical genre, the aria continued to evolve as an independent musical form. Outside of this form, the overall structure of the opera also became a standard convention. Composers embraced a set way of handling a libretto while poets knew exactly what kind of text they were expected to supply for a recitative or an aria. Increasingly, the new quick-moving recitative was a boring necessity, preceding show-off arias with their dazzling virtuoso coloratura. The aria made the dramatic action even more static, because the Baroque style lacked the means of handling emotional transitions. As Rosen explains this stylistic limitation, “a change of sentiment could not take place gradually: there had to be a definite moment where one sentiment stopped and another suddenly took over.”⁶⁸ As a result of these developments, the opera of the High Baroque became a display of musical events, lacking in true

⁶⁵ Lois Rosow, "French Baroque Recitative as an Expression of Tragic Declamation," *Early Music* 11, no. 4 (October 1983): 468, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/3137873> (accessed January 10, 2011).

⁶⁶ Kerman, 40.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁸ Rosen, 167.

dramatic unity. The aria developed a strict convention and so did the recitative. To the early 18th century composer, an aria required a text that presented a steady emotional state. All other texts were used for recitatives.

The practice in Italy in the eighteenth century soon distinguished between two types of recitatives—those that were passionate (*stromentato* or *accompagnato*) and those that were not (*semplice* or *secco*). The *secco* recitatives continued to be presented with modest accompaniment. In contrast, “moments of intense dramatic crisis (disasters, irreconcilable decisions, general stress), mental confusion (particularly madness), magic scenes and other suitable moments were clothed with an enriched, colorful background” and were supported by greater accompaniment.⁶⁹ Texts that dealt with fluctuating emotions or complex situations were “incompatible with the regularity of the measure and that unity of strain essential to the air,” as John Brown explained in his *Letters on Italian Opera* from 1789.⁷⁰ Such passages were set aside for *recitativo stromentato*, which gained particular value because they could include elements impossible in the *da capo* aria--daring modulations and juxtaposition to remote keys--as expressions of confusion, distress or even madness.

The expressive, dramatic declamations of the earlier Baroque soliloquies were replaced by a more rapid and even delivery, based on predetermined melodic patterns that the composer could apply to create different moods. Particular conventions quickly appeared. In statements, the voice usually rose in pitch and closed with a downward leap. An ascending line set a question while exclamations used a descending leap. High tessitura expressed strong emotions; large intervals in the solo line expressed distress, while neutral passages were set in lower register of the voice.

⁶⁹ Oxford Music Online, “Recitative”

⁷⁰ John Brown, *Letters upon the Poetry and Music of the Italian Opera; Addressed to a Friend, by the Late Mr. John Brown, Painter* (London: Ecco Print Editions, 1789), 14.

Performance conventions of the 18th century recitatives also covered rhythm and pacing. Performing a recitative, according to Sulzer, did not require “uniformity of motion.” On the other hand, “every syllable of the text must only be expressed through a single note” and “no tone is held noticeably longer than it would be in declamation.”⁷¹ In 1707 Le Gallois emphasized that “one must not beat time in recitative, because the actor must be the master of his song and allow it to conform to his expression.”⁷² J.J.Rousseau in *Encyclopédie* (1765) offered similar suggestions for the performance of a recitative:

One does not count the recitative at all while singing it, for the cadence that measures song would ruin declamation; it is passion alone that should determine the slowness or rapidity of the sounds. The composer, in notating the recitative with some fixed meter, has nothing more in mind than to indicate approximately how one should pass over or stress lines and syllables, and to mark the exact relation between the basso continuo and the voice.⁷³

The danger that the late Baroque opera faced, as Kerman puts it, was “losing the very roots of passion”⁷⁴ by becoming a convention itself. The first composer who managed to successfully break away from the rigid 18th century conventions was Christoph Willibald Gluck. He dispensed with the sharp border between recitatives and arias, which blocked the dramatic flow. Gluck addressed the problem in several ways: He orchestrated all recitatives, abolished the virtuoso ornaments of the aria, simplified the overall musical texture, and created a dramatic unity by subordinating, as Monteverdi did 150 years before, the role of the music to the supremacy of poetry. The disappearance of *recitativo secco* in Gluck’s music, however, came at a cost: it reduced the stage action to the expression mostly of noble sentiments. Thus, the start and stop quality of the High Baroque opera was replaced by a more continuous but static

⁷¹ Sulzer, “Recitativ,” in *Allgemeine Theorie*, 4,5 and 8, as quoted in Laurel E. Zeiss, “Accompanied Recitative in Mozart’s Operas: the *Chef d’Oeuvre* of the Composer’s Art” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2001), 34.

⁷² Oxford Music Online, “Recitative”

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/23019> (accessed December 15, 2010).

⁷³ Rousseau, 854.

⁷⁴ Kerman, 37.

neoclassical drama.⁷⁵ Gluck's style provided the necessary dramatic unity to his operas, but could not save the conventions of the Metastasian operatic tradition from their continued downward slide.

By the first half of the 18th century opera, in short, had already entered a period of crisis. The main cause of decline was neither the conventions of Metastasio nor the Italian cult of the virtuoso singer. The problem was broader and had to do with the way in which, since Monteverdi's time, composers had balanced the three main components of the genre: the music, the text and the dramatic action. As Rosen explains the relationship of music, text and action in 18th century opera, "music interprets the text and the text interprets the action," which meant that the words "in almost every case [stood] between the music and the drama."⁷⁶ Music had never had a direct power and control over the dramatic action, and would not attain that goal until Mozart. He infused the operatic genre with what was already becoming the moving force behind the instrumental music of the Viennese classical style: an understanding of form and tonality as an expression of psychological complexity. Kerman throws light on the traits of this new musical style:

Passages in rest alternate with passages of impulse, yet they do not simply alternate in the older fashion, but rather grow in and out of one another in a way that gives a vital impression of leading and arrival Moreover, the new dynamic style made it possible to join together elements in essential contrast-soon treated as elements in essential conflict Conflict, passage and flux could be handled within a single musical continuity.⁷⁷

As it has already been discussed, Baroque composers could handle quickly changing emotions in the libretto only through recitatives. Mozart, on the other hand, with his new style, could easily incorporate emotional complexity in ensembles throughout entire scenes. For him

⁷⁵ Ibid., 29 – 38.

⁷⁶ Rosen, 173.

⁷⁷ Kerman, 59.

the recitative continued to be a handy dramatic tool: *secco* recitatives moved the action, while accompanied recitatives often preceded arias of introspection. But what Mozart's music could do by adding layers of meaning to the drama far surpassed early 18th century opera conventions. For example, the variety in a Mozart opera does not come from the redistribution of the text between recitatives and arias. Instead, it results from how the composer defines his characters in purely musical terms; as Rosen points out, Mozart was able to write, for instance, for each of the three sopranos in *Figaro* in an "individual and characteristic way,"⁷⁸ something that no operatic composer had done. Earlier in the 18th century the *secco* recitative was the main vehicle for both dialogue and action in opera. The *accompagnato* was reserved for emotionally complex and intense monologues, while arias were set aside for static introspections. With Mozart, music was finally liberated from the supremacy of the text and the recitative lost its leading role as principal carrier of the dramatic action.

During the early Romantic era the *secco* recitative gradually disappeared from the operatic tradition, while its accompanied version, as in Mozart, was preserved as a proven way to provide variety, since its very nature was perfectly suited to psychologically complex monologue scenes, naturally leading to an aria. But this attractive trait only partially explains why the style of *accompagnato* kept its dramatic weight in Mozart's operatic oeuvre. An additional factor was also at work.

The Accompanied Recitative in Opera *Buffa*

Accompagnato developed gradually as a particular idiom in the elevated style of the 18th century Italian *opera seria*. As such, it was then part of an established convention used by composers to express particular types of sentiments in particular types of texts. Those texts usually presented the idealized world of mythology or history with characters of highly noble

⁷⁸ Rosen, 182.

and virtuous nature. In expressing the high passion and abrupt emotional shifts of this world, it was the accompanied recitative that was the most trusted vehicle. Mozart, however, had other musical means to portray such sentiments. What dramatic need then did he have for *accompagnato* in his operas?

One would probably surmise Mozart's reasons in the case of an opera *seria* such as *Idomeneo*, but *Figaro* and *Così fan tutte*, for example, are quite far from the Metastasian formulas. Instead, they both belong to the genre of *opera buffa*, the "lower-class" twin sister of *seria* that was invented in Italy as a reaction to the ideal world in operatic schemes set by Zeno and Metastasio. It was an unpretentious, comic genre for popular entertainment, which presented themes from the common life and often ridiculed the higher social classes. Many elements of the *opera seria* were gradually imported into *opera buffa*, and when separated from their original context changed their meaning. Thus, when introduced into a *buffa* work, the accompanied recitative became a way to present characters or events that regularly appeared in the *seria* genre. From a conventional formula designed to portray conflicting emotions and "images of an agitated heart,"⁷⁹ the *accompagnato* was expanded into a way to portray particular, known types of characters. As Lauren Zeiss explains, since *accompagnato* was an uncommon language for a *buffa* work, it came to mark "several types of uncommon characters: nobility, characters who possess extreme sensibility and supernatural beings."⁸⁰

Both *Figaro* and *Così fan tutte* belong to this genre and Mozart, in them, uses the *accompagnato* in just this way, to portray characters of a particular type. Yet Mozart does so only in situations in which an element of the drama needs special emphasis. For example, from

⁷⁹ Laurel E. Zeiss, "Accompanied Recitative in Mozart's Operas: the *Chef d'Oeuvre* of the Composer's Art" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2001), 32. For further discussion on the dramaturgical purposes of Mozart's use of *accompagnato*, see p.177 – 238.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 238.

the two main arias of the Countess in *Figaro*, only the second (Act 3) is preceded by *accompagnato*. Despina, Cherubino, and Barbarina, on the other hand, being typical *buffo* characters, have arias with no *accompagnato* preceding them. Susanna also belongs to this group, but her second aria (“*Dei vieni*”), curiously enough, is introduced by an *accompagnato*. This strangely simple *accompagnato*, being the untypical idiom for a *buffo* character, is used by Mozart as a symbol of deception.⁸¹ The picture becomes even more interesting when one realizes that her unusual musical behavior follows almost immediately upon Figaro’s typical *buffo* aria (“*Aprite un po’ quegl’occhi*”) in a monologue scene that also starts with an accompanied recitative. Figaro’s *accompagnato* also presents a *buffo* character, but this time in a particularly troubled mood. Figaro’s moodiness, however, does not lead to an introspective reminiscence, which would be a dramatic misfit. Instead it leads to a sarcastic, audience-pleasing lecture on the treacherous nature of women.

Even from a few examples one can see that the accompanied recitatives in Mozart’s operas became interesting tests for performers with their layers of dramatic nuance hidden behind conventional formulas of a declining style. In vital ways, they contribute to the unique dramatic complexity of Mozart’s operas.

The next chapter looks in depth at a particular Mozart recitative. To undertake such a task, one needs to keep in mind the ways that Mozart’s musical genius built upon the accompanied recitative conventions of late Baroque Italian opera. As noted, Mozart largely respected the two main requirements of recitative--the need to keep the text primary and to move the dramatic action along without interruption. Mozart, however, managed also to give the music a greater role, without undercutting the text, by using the music to reflect subtle nuances in the personality and plight of the character singing. Finally, he succeeded in using accompanied

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

recitative in special ways in *opera buffa* to introduce particular types of characters and situations.

A conductor or singer approaching any Mozart recitative should appreciate these musical

elements and advances, so as to avoid, in performances, undercutting

Mozart's significant accomplishments.

CHAPTER 3

DECODING A RECITATIVE:

E SUSANNA NON VIEN FROM *LE NOZZE DI FIGARO* BY

W. A. MOZART

A significant recitative from a Mozart opera can provide a useful context for drawing together the two preceding chapters and illustrating how, in a specific setting, proper conducting techniques and interpretive insight can help a conductor bring a recitative alive.

“*E Susanna non vien*,” the recitative of the Countess from Act III of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, precedes the famous aria “*Dove Sono*” (“Where are the lovely moments...”), the Countess’s quiet recollection of her youthful love for the Count who has, since then, lost romantic interest in her and gone after Susanna, her maid. In contrast with the lyrical aria that follows, this recitative presents an example of late 18th century *recitativo accompagnato* with all the psychological complexity inherent to the style.

Table 3.1 Text of *E Susanna Non Vien*

E Susanna non vien! Sono ansiosa di saper come il Conte accolse la proposta. Alquanto ardito il progetto mi par, e ad uno sposo sì vivace, e geloso! Ma che mal c'è? Cangiando i miei vestiti con quelli di Susanna, e i suoi co' miei ... al favor della notte ... oh cielo, a quale umil stato fatale io son ridotta da un consorte crudel, che dopo avermi con un misto inaudito	And Susanna doesn't come! I'm anxious to know how the Count took her proposition. The scheme seems too bold to me, and to a husband so wild and jealous! But what harm is there? Changing my clothes with those of Susanna, and hers with mine ... by the night's favour ... oh heavens, to what a humiliating state I am reduced by a cruel husband, who, after marrying me, with an unheard of mixture
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Table 3.1 (cont.)

d'infedeltà, di gelosia, di sdegni, prima amata, indi offesa, e alfin tradita, fammi or cercar da una mia serva aita!	of infidelity, jealousy and scorn, first loved, then offended, and at last betrayed me, now makes me turn to one of my servants for help!
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This chapter explores the challenges a conductor faces in presenting this well-known Mozart composition. It begins by discussing interpretive choices, paying attention to questions relating to the structure of the recitative, to choice of keys and tempo, and to the use of traditional ornaments, all of which routinely offer clues to the composer's musical motives and thus insights on performance. The performer's main aim, of course, is to remain faithful to the poetic text and to the emotions embedded in it while, at the same time, mimicking insofar as possible the patterns of speech. This overall aim should properly guide a recitative's phrasing and rhythm. It affects placement of phrase accents as well as the interpretation of note values and rests. The chapter considers these compositional elements and choices as ways for conductors and singers to make sense of the singular musical language of recitatives in general as well as in relation to Mozart's particular example. Following this discussion--and forming the bulk of the chapter--is a detailed, measure-by-measure consideration of the specific conducting techniques best suited for this exceptional piece.

Structure, Text and Phrasing

In every aspect of life, Oscar Wilde tells us, form is the element that gives both beginning and finality to things. In the world of art in particular, form is the element that creates within the viewer or listener an aesthetic instinct, one that, Wilde contends, reveals all things

under their conditions of beauty.⁸² The problem in the instance of the recitative as an operatic idiom, as explained in chapter 2, is that it lacks a defined musical structure. But recitative is nonetheless a distinct form of artistic expression, with its own conditions of beauty. It therefore must be conceived according to a formula that shapes the overall design and creates order and balance among its components.

The music of both 17th and 18th century recitatives followed closely the structure of the poetic line. There, poetic verse provides the formal frame, and the only way to understand the musical design of a recitative is to begin with the logic of the verse. Verses for recitatives in Italian opera librettos, unlike verses intended for an aria, were written in *versi sciolti* of freely combined lines of mainly 7 (*settenario*) and 11 (*endecassilabo*) syllables with only occasional rhymes. As explained below, however, variations in line length were common and performers must understand the way in which such variations occur. The Italian *settenario* was not really a uniform seven-syllable verse. On the contrary, it could have six, seven or eight syllables, depending on the placement of the accent at or near the end of the line. Similar considerations affect *endecassilabi* verses, which can have 10, 11 or 12 syllables – in rare cases even more than twelve.⁸³

As composers set verses of varied length to music they made regular use of rests for diverse purposes. It is vital to understand why rests were used; only in that way can conductors and singers properly decide which to respect, in whole or in part, and which to ignore. Eighth rests were regularly used to represent a punctuation mark in the text. In addition, rests of different length can reflect a separation of poetic lines. In both instances, the rest can highlight an

⁸² Oscar Wilde, “The Critic as Artist” in *The Collected Oscar Wilde* (New York: Barnes & Nobles Classics, 2007), 454.

⁸³ Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Operas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 43 – 44.

emotional shift within the music or create a feeling of expectation, thus increasing dramatic tension. When this is the case, a rest should be properly respected. Many rests, though, were used for more mechanical purposes. Bar lines in 18th century recitatives had no purpose other than to facilitate the general organization of the musical material and Italian recitative always uses common 4/4 time. Due to these conventions, composers often inserted eighth rests merely as metrical filling. Such rests can be either emphasized or omitted as appropriate in an effort to be faithful to the drama. In all instances, careful choices must be made. As explained by a contemporary specialist in 18th century opera, the Belgian conductor René Jacobs, a singer should not routinely ignore short rests in recitatives because some are intended to give greater emphasis to the part of the phrase that follows.⁸⁴

The interpretation of rests – like the interpretation of poetic lines generally – should be guided by a sense, not just of the text, but of the natural flow of the Italian language. Maria Callas emphasized this truth when describing her method of preparing a recitative in an interview from 1968 with Lord Harewood.⁸⁵ Callas was a protégé of the legendary Maestro Tullio Serafin who asked her always to start learning a recitative exactly as written, with all the precise note values and rests. Then she had to speak it to herself for days, while sensing the best way of representing the emotional intention behind it:

Now you go home, my dear Miss Callas, and speak these lines to yourself and let's see what proportions, what rhythms you find. Of course, respect what is written, but try to be freer, try to find a flowing rhythm for these recitatives.⁸⁶

In other interviews Callas reiterated Serafin's advice, always pointing out that the main character of Italian vocal music is a flowing movement, no matter how slowly things go.⁸⁷ This flowing

⁸⁴ Booklet from Wolfgang A. Mozart, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, conducted by René Jacobs, Concerto Köln, Harmonia Mundi (CD), 2004.

⁸⁵ Maria Callas, *The Callas Conversations*, DVD, interview by Lord Harewood (EMI Records-1968, 2003).

⁸⁶ John Ardoin, *Callas at Juilliard: The Master Classes* (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1998), 8.

movement of the vocal phrase is a direct result of the liquid quality of the Italian language. But in order to attain a flowing movement in recitatives, one needs to look for clues in the structure of the verse line and especially in the placement of the accents within it, which is the most important requirement for good phrasing.

A sound sense of Italian's natural flow is needed to make effective presentation of the three different types of *settenari* or *endecassilabi* verse lines: *tronco*, *piano* and *sdrucchiolo*.⁸⁸ The type of poetic line gives clues to proper phrasing, along with a recognition that, in Italian verse, as a rule, the final vowels of one word elide with the first vowel of the next and the combination is considered one syllable. The three main types of verses can be defined as follows:

1. *Tronco* – the line ends with an accented syllable. *Settenario tronco* has 6 syllables, *endecassilabo tronco* has 10 syllables.
2. *Piano* – the line ends with an accented, followed by an unaccented syllable. *Settenario piano* has 7 syllables, with an accent on the 6th syllable. *Endecassilabo piano* has 11 syllables, with an accent on the 10th syllable. This is the most common type of poetic line in Italian verses.
3. *Sdrucchiolo* – the line ends with an accented syllable, followed by two unaccented ones. This verse form is more rarely used and is usually encountered in verses intended for comic scenes. *Settenario sdrucchiolo* has 8 syllables with an accent on the 6th. *Endecassilabo sdrucchiolo* has 12 syllables with the accent on the 10th.

The first four measures of the Countess's recitative illustrate how the verse structure directly affects the phrasing and indirectly affects the interpretation of rests. The first line in measure 1 ("*E Susanna non vien*" - "And Susanna doesn't come") is a *settenario tronco* with 6

⁸⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁸ Gossett, Divas and Scholars, 43.

syllables. The singer should phrase the melodic contour with emphasis on the last syllable, represented in the music by a longer note value (quarter note):

Table 3.2

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>E</i>	<i>Su -</i>	<i>san -</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>non</i>	<i>vien!</i>	

The second line spans between measures 2 and 3 and is an 11 – syllable *endecassilabo piano*:

Table 3.3

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>so-</i>	<i>no an-</i>	<i>sio-</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>di</i>	<i>sa-</i>	<i>per</i>	<i>co-</i>	<i>me il</i>	<i>Con-</i>	<i>te</i>

The rest in measure 2 after “*ansiosa*” is an example of metrical filling. A short *caesura* can be used to give rhetorical emphasis on the following word, but the verse line must not be divided into two separate thoughts. The direction of the musical phrase, along with the one of the poetic line, is towards the 10th syllable. An ending of an accented and unaccented syllable, as in this case, is most often represented by two equal eighth notes. Yet, they should never be sung as equal: the first one is always longer and more emphasized than the second one.

This musical example also shows how an awareness of poetic structure helps interpret the relative meaning of note values. Here Mozart uses a longer, quarter note on the 7th syllable. The quarter note indicates a syllabic accent, but if held too long it can break the flow of the phrase. In such cases, one needs to remember Sulzer’s admonition on performing 18th century recitative:

“No tone is held noticeably longer than it would be in declamation.”⁸⁹ In general, longer note values are employed for accented syllables, but the main direction of the phrase – even when the phrase is broken in two by a short rest – should lead towards the last accented syllable of the line.

The line of the verse in measure 4 starts at the end of the previous measure and is in *settenario piano* form:

Table 3.4

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>ac-</i>	<i>col-</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>pro-</i>	<i>pos-</i>	<i>ta</i>

This line does not pose difficulties, but it is important to remember that the 6th syllable should be slightly longer and more emphasized than the 7th, even though both are eighth notes.

The next line (measures 5 – 6), in contrast, presents a challenge: it is an *endecassilabo tronco*, which naturally has 10 syllables but in this case includes 11 notes:

Table 3.5

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Al-</i>	<i>quan-</i>	<i>to ar-</i>	<i>di-</i>	<i>to il</i>	<i>pro-</i>	<i>get-</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>par</i>	

Mozart separates the 5th syllable into two notes and thus emphasizes the semantic meaning of the words that follow. A rest also appears after “*ardito*,” but the line must not be split into two independent elements. The rest here should again be also used as a short *caesura*, which will

⁸⁹ Sulzer, “Recitativ,” in *Allgemeine Theorie*, 4,5 and 8, as quoted in Zeiss, 34.

help put emphasis on “*il progetto*” – that is, on the plan that the Countess and Susanna plot to trick the Count. It is an important word in the recitative, so much so, as will be shown later, that it even has its own orchestral motive.

In some occasions, the composer sets the text of a single verse line more freely. In such a case, a thorough analysis can help both singer and conductor grasp the logic of a single thought that is not obvious in the music. Measures 8 and 9 present a relevant example:

Table 3.6

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Ma</i>	<i>che</i>	<i>mal</i>	<i>c'e?</i>	<i>can-</i>	<i>gian-</i>	<i>do i</i>	<i>miei</i>	<i>ve-</i>	<i>sti-</i>	<i>ti</i>

Endecassilabi lines often contain a break in the middle that a composer can set in different ways, often so as to increase rhetorical contrasts. As seen, the line is an *endecassilabo piano* that appears in the music as two separate thoughts. An interpretive awareness of this subtle nuance can help maintain the necessary dramatic tension in measure 10, right after the question.

As seen from the analysis of selected lines of this recitative, one can naturally attain an organic flow in recitatives by tailoring the musical phrase to the rhythm of the poetic lines.

The Appoggiatura in 18th Century Recitatives

The musical shape of the solo line cannot be well formed without also dealing successfully with the ornamentations traditionally used in 18th century recitatives. Appoggiaturas often appear as editorial options above the main text in Mozart’s operas in the critical edition of

the *Neue Mozart Ausgabe*. Many conductors and singers are uncertain when their use is necessary, when optional, and when perhaps even undesirable. Scholars of 18th century opera have been diligent in analyzing and documenting the inventions of performers. As a result, much information is available to help evaluate the dramatic need for appoggiatura in particular recitatives. Frederick Neumann's article, published in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* from 1982, identifies the essential principles for adding appoggiatura, derived from his thorough study of 18th century treatises on performance practice:

1. Appoggiaturas on tone repetitions range from necessary to undesirable, with a grey area of ambivalence between the two.
2. Appoggiaturas should descend stepwise from above. They mirror the prosodic accent and should be used whenever a distinct accentuation is warranted by the situation.
3. Ascending appoggiaturas on questions should be avoided. They involve a misunderstanding of Italian and German diction.
4. Appoggiaturas leaping from below are never appropriate because they conflict too sharply with proper declamation.
5. In rare cases, in *accompagnato*, a chromatically rising appoggiatura may be admissible if prepared and fitted smoothly into the melodic line; but it is never necessary and is best avoided.
6. For the fall of a third, even where the speech accent is very weak, an appoggiatura is often used in a lubricating function to avoid an unwarranted break in the speech melody.
7. An appoggiatura is undesirable:
 - a) When it infringes on a characteristic melodic design
 - b) For words expressing firmness, finality, resolution, hatred, terror, or any state of mind that should not be subjected to the softening effect of the grace
 - c) For commonplace utterances in fast *parlando* style and for unimportant words
8. An appoggiatura is optional when approached from below by either step or leap, where the melodic rise alone is often sufficient to render the prosodic accent.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Frederick Neumann, "The Appoggiatura in Mozart's Recitative," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 137, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/831288> (accessed December 13, 2010).

The *Neue Mozart Ausgabe* includes 18 editorial suggestions for appoggiaturas in the Countess's recitative in *Figaro*. They will be discussed below, in relation to the measures in which they appear. Proper choices about them can significantly improve performance.

The Tempo

A further problem that a performer has to solve in any accompanied recitative is the composer's tempo indication. To whom are tempo indications primarily addressed: the soloist or the orchestra? An 18th century treatise by Agricola offers an answer: "The short phrases that instruments play between the sung phrases of the accompanied recitatives must be performed in strict time. However the singer is not bound to this."⁹¹ This advice is sound, but sometimes hard to apply. The difficulty in the case of Mozart is in finding "strict time." Mozart was not consistent in using tempo markings and a particular tempo indication can and should be taken at different speeds in different compositions. For example, the first entrance of the orchestra in "*E Susanna non vien*," marked *Andante*, is often performed at a tempo much slower than one would expect from the marking above. There is a logical reason for this common interpretive choice: the same *Andante C* appears in *Die Zauberflöte*, in the High Priests famous phrase "*Sobald dich führt der Freundschaft Hand*" (Musical Example 3.1), where a slow tempo is clearly in order.⁹²

⁹¹ Johann Friedrich Agricola, *Introduction to the Art of Singing*, trans. and ed. Julianne C. Baird (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 173.

⁹² Jean-Pierre Marty, *The Tempo Indications of Mozart* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 8 – 9.

Musical Example 3.1 Mozart, *Zauberflöte*, Act 1

Priest **Andante a tempo**

en? So - bald dich führt der Freundschaft Hand ins Hei - ligtum zum ew - - gen
As soon as friendship's guid - ing hand Has led you to the ho - - ly

If the Countess's recitative, however, is taken at the same solemn speed, the accompaniment will acquire an almost liturgical gravity, totally opposed to the general mood of the scene. A Mozart *Andante* marking requires interpretation.

So how a conductor can solve this puzzle? Useful guidance can be found in the book *The Tempo Indications of Mozart* by Jean-Pierre Marty, the only comprehensive guide to the variety of tempo indications in Mozart's music. Marty groups *Andante C* in 3 categories:

Table 3.7 Types of *Andante* in Mozart⁹³

Type 1: Tempo is determined solely by the speed of the quarter note ♩ = 92
Example: <i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i> , No.18 "Hai già vinta la causa," measure 14 "Ma s'ei pagasse" and No. 19, Sextet "Riconosci in questo amplesso"
Type 2: Tempo is determined by the main impulse of the quarter note underlined by the secondary pulse of the eighth note; quarter note ♩ = 72
Example: <i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i> , No.20 "E Susanna non vien" and 2 nd Act Finale No.29 "Pian, pianin..."
Type 3: Tempo is determined by the main impulse of the eighth note related to the secondary pulse of the quarter note. ♩ = 104
Example: Magic Flute, above

⁹³ Ibid., 9 – 10.

As seen from Marty's thorough study, the tempo of Countess's recitative belongs to the second category. The tempo ultimately used, of course, is an interpretive choice. What Marty's study shows is the need for a conductor to make a well-reasoned selection. In general, 18th century tempo indications were used as indications of musical character in relation to pace and not as strict prescriptions of speed. Therefore, they should be interpreted always in relation to the musical context. In this case, the *Andante* in *E Susanna non vien* is a reminder that, no matter how strong the emotions, the noble, elegant essence of the character must be preserved. Or, as Mozart himself wrote to his father in 1781:

Passion, whether violent or not, must never be expressed to the point of exciting disgust, and as music, even in the most terrible situations, must never offend the ear...⁹⁴

Tonal and Harmonic Dramaturgy

As conductor Erich Leinsdorf points out in his book *The Composer's Advocate*, the biggest challenge in presenting the Countess lies in interpreting her character as a sensitive human being – as it should be – rather than as a desperate, abandoned wife who relentlessly complains.⁹⁵ To avoid such misinterpretations and to thus understand the dramatic nuances behind the music, the first task of both conductor and singer is to identify in the score those musical elements that, when well studied, can lead to a fuller understanding of the character.

To understand the Countess we need to start with her first appearance, at the beginning of Act 2, when she offers a prayer-like aria, "*Porgi amor*": (bring, o Love, some comfort). It is introduced directly, without *accompagnato*. Instead, a single E-flat major chord is repeated 4 times in the first two measures, creating a feeling of solemnity and harmonic stasis. Before she

⁹⁴ Wolfgang A. Mozart, *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, ed. Emily Anderson (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 769.

⁹⁵ Erich Leinsdorf, *The Composer's Advocate: A Radical Orthodoxy for Musicians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 117.

lets us into her most personal thoughts, the music portrays her as a confident, noble woman. As for Mozart's choice of key, an interesting interpretation of the E-flat major can be found in Cramer's *Magazin der Musik* from 1786 (Figaro had its first performance on May 1 of the same year):

Quiet majesty, which – although to its benefit – neglects something of the splendor of A-flat major and is not so removed from the feeling of the listener, but rather touches the emotion, becomes interesting and never repulsive, and thus receives something indescribably gentle that also does not remain hidden from the musical feeling of the non-expert.⁹⁶

For her second aria, "*Dove Sono*," Mozart has chosen C-major: "Completely pure. Its character is: innocence, simplicity, naivety..."⁹⁷ This aria, however, Mozart introduces with the dramatically elaborated *accompagnato*, *E Susanna non vien*, which becomes the psychological center of her presence in the opera.

The 18th century Italian convention for recitatives had developed two particular ways of interpreting tonality in relation to the sentiments in the libretto. Major keys with predominantly diatonic, triadic harmony and occasional dominant sevenths were largely used for commonplace dialogs as well as for simple narrative. They were suitable as well, however, for the expression of noble and joyful sentiments. Minor keys with dissonant harmony and chromatic melodic inflections were usually employed to express strong feelings and amorous sentiments. Similar effects can be frequently encountered in both *secco* and *accompagnato* style, but should never be interpreted blindly, since exceptions always apply.⁹⁸

The beginning of the Countess's recitative reveals how the varying degree of emotion is related to the harmonic plan. The first line, "*E Susanna non vien*" ("And Susanna doesn't

⁹⁶ Rita Steblin, "A History of Key Characteristics in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries" (PhD diss., UMI Research Press, 1983), 245.

⁹⁷ Schubart, C. F. D, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, 1784 quoted in Steblin, 223.

⁹⁸ Raymond Monelle, "Recitative and Dramaturgy in the *Dramma Per Musica*," *Music and Letters* 59, no. 3 (July 1978): 248, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/733757> (accessed January 4, 2011).

come”) is sung over a C-major chord, as a simple, casual statement. The soprano should not be tempted to plunge into an emotional delivery of the text from the very beginning, since there is no apparent musical or dramatic necessity for it. An element of slight, capricious anxiety is introduced in the next two measures through a sustained dominant chord on D in its first inversion, over a free vocal declamation. The next four measures (4-7) go back again to a simple triadic harmony on G-major and Mozart almost shocks us with the following *Allegretto* by quickly introducing A-minor through dominant seventh chords on G and E (see measure 8). The meaning of A-minor in the *Allegretto* section will be discussed later. Here it is important to note the use of G-major, which is a key strongly related to the character of the Countess, since it becomes the symbol of her act of forgiveness towards the end of the opera. In this recitative, the G-major introduces the motive of the plan, destined to trick the Count (see measure 4-7). In the article cited above from Cramer’s *Magazin der Musik* from 1786 offers an interesting comment on the curious relationship of C to its dominant, G-major, which are the only tonalities in the first seven measures of the recitative:

The gentle seriousness of C-major is almost totally lost in a greater degree of cheerfulness, which however is still mixed with a lot of charm.⁹⁹

The text in this section (“The scheme seems too bold to me”) is frequently delivered rather blandly, as a narrative, which contradicts not only the choice of key, but also the playful, almost mischievous instrumental accompaniment.

These few comments about Mozart’s choice of keys illustrate nuances of character that Mozart could embed in his score. The sound presentation of a recitative should express and help develop that character, which means the interpretation of a recitative requires a careful study of the score as a whole. The character of the Countess, as noted, is chiefly that of a sensitive,

⁹⁹ Steblin, 275.

wounded human being. The conducting techniques discussed next are designed to convey that interpretation.

Theory into Practice: Conducting a Recitative

With these general points in mind we can turn to a more detailed study of this recitative, noting how a conductor's interpretive choices can be implemented into specific conducting gestures.

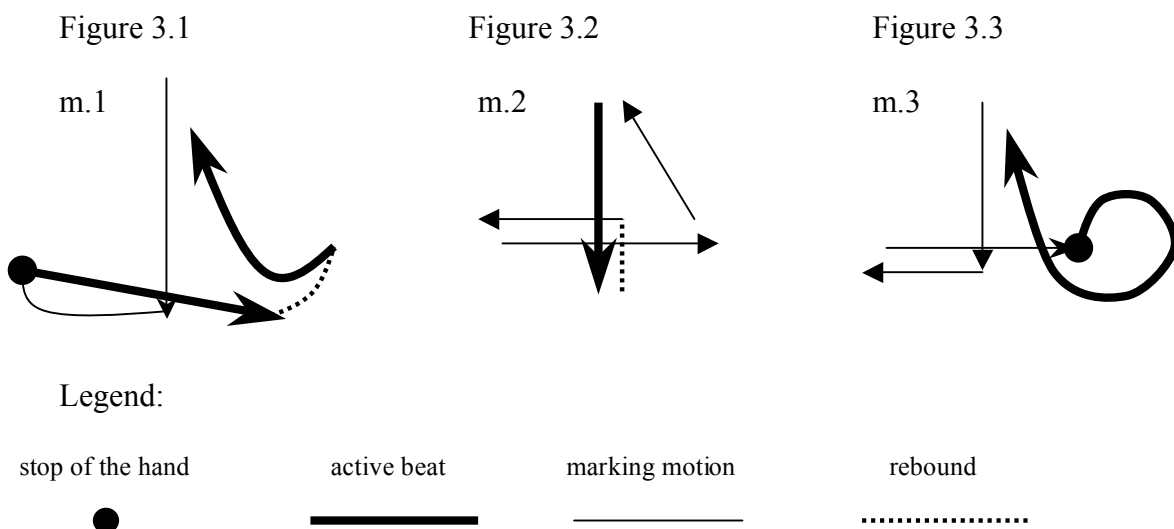
If one looks at the Countess's recitative, the first three measures present a typical example of a solo declamation with long sustained notes in the accompaniment (Musical Example 3.2). The conductor needs to provide the necessary amount of freedom to the singer, but at the same time must not forget that the lack of rhythmical pulse makes the orchestra dependent on the clarity of gesture.

Musical Example 3.2 Mozart, *E Susanna Non Vien*, measures 1-3

The musical score for measures 1-3 of Mozart's 'E Susanna Non Vien' features the following parts:

- Violino I**: Treble clef, 2/4 time. Measure 1 has a whole rest. Measure 2 has a quarter note G4 (p), followed by a half note G4 in measure 3.
- Violino II**: Treble clef, 2/4 time. Measure 1 has a whole rest. Measure 2 has a quarter note G4 (p), followed by a half note G4 in measure 3.
- Viola I, II**: Bass clef, 2/4 time. Measure 1 has a whole rest. Measure 2 has a quarter note G3 (p), followed by a half note G3 in measure 3.
- LA CONTESSA**: Treble clef, 2/4 time. The vocal line is a recitative with lyrics: "E Su-san - na non vien! so - no an-sio - sa di sa - per co-me il Con-te ac -".
- Continuo (Cembalo, Violoncello)**: Treble and bass clefs, 2/4 time. Measure 1 has a whole rest. Measure 2 has a quarter note G3 (p), followed by a half note G3 in measure 3.
- Violoncello e Basso**: Bass clef, 2/4 time. Measure 1 has a whole rest. Measure 2 has a quarter note G3 (p), followed by a half note G3 in measure 3.

The C-major cembalo chord on the first beat can be marked with a downbeat from the wrist only, with no preparation. The first line of the Countess is free, whereas the orchestral accompaniment must enter in tempo (*Andante*) on the second half of the 3rd beat. After quickly marking the first two beats with anticipation to the soloist, the wrist and the baton, with a minimal participation of the forearm, are raised and the hand stops in this position (Figure 3.1). This technique is recommended in order to give an emphatic 3rd beat for the entrance of the orchestra in the new tempo. The hand shows the 3rd beat, starting the downward motion with “*vien*” (Figure 3.1). After the downbeat of measure two, the hand naturally makes a small, barely noticeable rebound and marks the following beats with linear, faster motions from the wrist (Figure 3.2). The first three beats of measure 3 are marked in the same way. Then, the hand stops on the 3rd beat of measure 3, where it waits for the soloist to finish her line and then gives the cutoff (Figure 3.3). This is a typical example when Musin’s cutoff of the first type should be used: in long chords, occupying few beats of the measure. The cutoff is quick, begins with the word “*conte*” in the solo part and is given in the direction of the forth beat (Figure 3.3). The first 3 measures of the recitative (Musical Example 3.2) can be graphically represented as follows:



The suggested appoggiatura in measure 3 on “*conte*” is possible, but not necessary and it is usually avoided by singers (see points 6a and 8 of Neumann’s principles on adding appoggiaturas listed above on page 66). At the end of his article Neumann points out that “the appoggiatura will be the more effective, the more discriminately it is used, and the more its use is attuned to word meaning and speech melody in a given passage.”¹⁰⁰ Neither the meaning nor the speech melody in measure 3, prompt a necessity for adding this ornament.

In measures 4-7 (Musical Example 3.3) the declamation is free, so the rests should be marked with faster, linear motions. Marking the rests with anticipation, along with clear first beats from the wrist only, will provide the necessary freedom to the soloist.

Musical Example 3.3 Mozart, *E Susanna Non Vien*, measures 4-7

In both measures 4 and 6, the hand should stop at the end of the second beat with a raised wrist (Figure 3.4 and Figure 3.6), just as in measure 1 (Figure 3.1), in order to give a clear preparatory

¹⁰⁰ Neumann, 137.

third beat. The quarter note on the first beats of measures 5 and 7 is played in soft dynamic and does not require an abrupt cutoff. The measures exemplify when a *portamento* gesture is properly used. As suggested by Musin, imagine that, while showing the first beat, the palm of the hand glides and at the same time presses against an imaginary surface (for example, some kind of fabric or paper). The sound will stop at the moment at which the hand releases this pressure and/or changes direction, as if pulling away from the sound (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.4

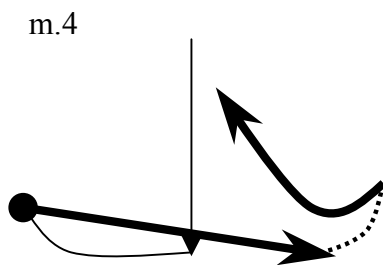


Figure 3.5

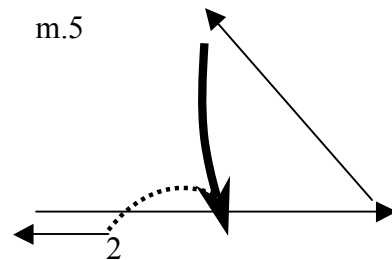


Figure 3.6

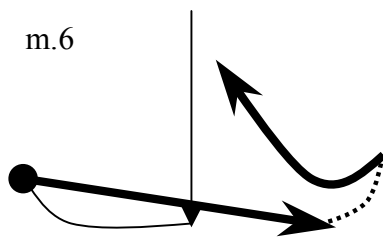
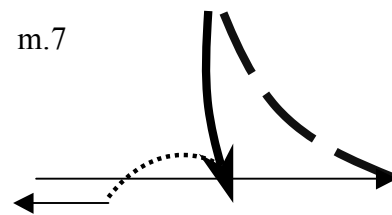


Figure 3.7



Legend:

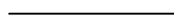
stop of the hand



active beat



marking motion



rebound



flick of the wrist



As discussed in Chapter 1, the last beat of measure 7 must not be perceived as an active preparatory beat since measure 8 starts with a rest on the first beat (Musical Example 3.4),

immediately followed by a chord. In order to avoid any confusion, after marking the 3rd beat of measure 7, the hand makes a quick flick from the wrist and stops at the top of the 4th beat, as shown on Figure 3.7. The stop of the hand that Musin suggests is a powerful technical device in recitatives that restrains the orchestra from an early entrance. This technique is always recommended when a rest in the entire orchestra on the next first beat is immediately followed by a new entrance. There are three appoggiaturas in measures 4-7 (Musical Example 3.3): on “*proposta*,” “*ardito*” and “*sposo*.” The use of the first two is perfectly justified, since they fill out a descending interval of a third and the general dramatic mood is relatively calm (see page 66, point 6, Neumann). The third one should be avoided. The emotions of the character before the *Allegretto* are at stake and the softening effect of the appoggiatura breaks the dramatic build up (see points 7b and 8, Neumann)¹⁰¹.

Measure 8 is the most problematic of the recitative (Musical Example 3.4). The first half of it belongs to the initial tempo marking, *Andante*, whereas the second half, beginning with the word “*geloso*,” introduces a new tempo-*Allegretto*. Stefano de Arteaga, in his book *Le Rivoluzioni del Teatro Musicale Italiano* from 1783, mentions that the fluctuating musical style of the accompanied recitative is due to the fact that it usually presents characters that are “uncertain” or “wavering.”¹⁰² This is the reason why tempo changes occur quite frequently in 18th century recitatives:

The introduction of new motivic material and changes of articulation (primarily *legato* to *marcato* and vice-versa) work in conjunction with alterations in tempo, dynamics, and harmony either to reflect or prefigure changes in mood or topic.¹⁰³

Tempo changes imply mainly a change of mood, which interpretively affects also the articulation in the instrumental parts. In measure 9 of *E Susanna non Vien*, Mozart himself suggests this, as

¹⁰¹ Neumann, 137.

¹⁰² Arteaga, *Le Rivoluzioni*, 1:49, quoted in Zeiss, 53.

¹⁰³ Zeiss, 80.

dots appear for the first time over the eighth notes in the viola and cello parts (Musical Example 3.4).

The basic interpretive problem that the tempo change presents is the relationship of the new tempo to the previous one in terms of speed. In Mozart, *Allegretto* is the ascending link between *Andante* and *Allegro*. There are few examples in Mozart's operas of *Allegretto C* and many of them occur in opera recitatives. According to Marty, the type of *Allegretto* that appears in this particular recitative is comparable to the one found in *Sanctus* of the Mass K.257, where "the eighth-note pulse literally bursts out from the first beat with the *fortissimo* syncopations."¹⁰⁴ The primary agent of the pulse in this *Allegretto* is the eighth note and Marty suggests a tempo indication of ♩=144 or ♪=72, which is the same as the indication for the second type of *Andante*, the main tempo of the recitative. As one can easily see, the *Allegretto* in measure 8 indicates only a change of mood and not of speed. However, the eighth note in the *Andante* is a secondary element, while here it becomes the primary carrier of the pulse. Interpretively, this can be expressed by emphasizing the articulation of the eighth-note pulse, but without making the sound too heavy and dramatic. The conclusion that can be made after carefully observing the relationship between the two tempi is that a conductor has to take into consideration not only the character of the music, encoded in the tempo, but also its harmonic rhythm. As in the *Allegretto*, a quicker change of harmony implies a quicker harmonic rhythm that shifts the main carrier of the pulse from a quarter note in *Andante* to an eighth note in *Allegretto*. A quicker harmonic rhythm logically requires a sharper articulation and a moderation in pace, in order to preserve the clarity of musical texture. Yet, the dramatic intention in the instance of Countess's recitative

¹⁰⁴ Marty, 67.

cannot be fully understood without considering also the choice of key for the short *Allegretto* section.

According to Laurel Zeiss, relative keys occur in recitatives when a feeling of doubt is being introduced. Both Donna Anna and Dona Elvira contemplate their feelings towards Don Giovanni through harmony that ventures between relative major and minor keys.¹⁰⁵ The starting key of Countess's recitative is C-major and the harmonic shift in the *Allegretto* is towards the relative A-minor. A-minor had a particular importance for Mozart. It is the key of one of his only two piano sonatas written in minor keys, K.310, composed around the time of the death of his mother. The already quoted *Magazin der Musik* from 1786 refers to A-minor as a key representing "tenderness of character"¹⁰⁶ and in 1837 Ferdinand Hand, in *Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, describes A-minor as a key that suggests "timid softness."¹⁰⁷ Curiously enough, the a-minor appears only few scenes before the Countess recitative with the following text: "*Crudel! Perché finora farmi languir così*" ("Cruel one, why have you caused me thus to languish"). Although the line can be easily attributed to the Countess, it belongs instead to the Count, and he sings it to the maid, Susanna. It is the first time in the opera when we see the Count so tender and vulnerable.

In the case of the Countess, Mozart shows us a woman in doubt and the *forte* of the A-minor should not sound, as it often does, like an outburst of rage. She wants to win her husband's desire by playing the part of the servant. But is the plan worth trying? The orchestra answers: in measure 4 and 6, the strings introduce a playful, cunning motive, which, as one can tell from the text, is directly related to the Countess's intrigue. As Laurel Zeiss writes, "from *Idomeneo* onward, repeated orchestral material in an accompanied recitative often frames a topic in the

¹⁰⁵ Zeiss, 67 – 68.

¹⁰⁶ Steblin, 293 – 294.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

text.”¹⁰⁸ When the tempo changes, this same motive, transposed, is repeated again while its second element, the playful short notes, are developed sequentially. The sense is that the orchestra enters in a dialog with the confused Countess, reaffirming that the plan should be carried out. One would expect an almost comical effect. But Mozart is not Rossini. As Philippe Sollers points out: “Everything is acted, but everything is sincere.” What we see on stage in a Mozart opera are “human beings with their contradictory emotions, their passions, their self-interest, their disagreements, their lights, their shadows.”¹⁰⁹

The difficulty for the singer consists in preparing this dramatic moment so that the *Allegretto* comes as a logical result of the increasing internal drama. Valuable suggestions on how to interpret tempo changes in recitatives can be found in John Ardoin’s book where he documents a series of master classes that Maria Callas offered at the Juilliard School of Music in 1971. Her advice is clear: think of the tempo change as if it begins a measure earlier. In this way the voice will naturally lead the music into the next mood. As Callas points out, “everything must be measured in your mind and in your voice.”¹¹⁰ When singers do not perform the recitative in this way, the conductor must help. In cases when the composer gives significant freedom to the soloist, the conductor must always keep a keen ear on the solo part and, especially in rehearsals, limit his role to the one of passive accompanist only in terms of conducting technique, not in terms of shaping the overall interpretation. This is why it is so important to understand the dramatic meaning behind a recitative. For example, a particular need for help arises at the very beginning of measure 8, where the editors suggest an appoggiatura on the first beat, on “*vivace*,” and the soprano has the choice whether to add it or not. The conductor should insist that this

¹⁰⁸ Zeiss, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Philippe Sollers, *Mysterious Mozart*, translated and with an introduction by Armine Kotin Mortimer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 109.

¹¹⁰ Ardoin, 28.

appoggiatura be avoided: it contradicts the state of mind of the character¹¹¹ (see page 66, 7a, Neumann) and its use will be a mannered, tasteless misinterpretation of the dramatic intention of the music.

As seen from Musical Example 3.4, the technical challenges for the conductor in measure 8 are basically three: first, good coordination with the soloist, second, clear cutoff after the second beat, and third, energetic preparation for the syncopated entrance of the *Allegretto*.

Musical Example 3.4 Mozart, *E Susanna Non Vien*, measures 8-9

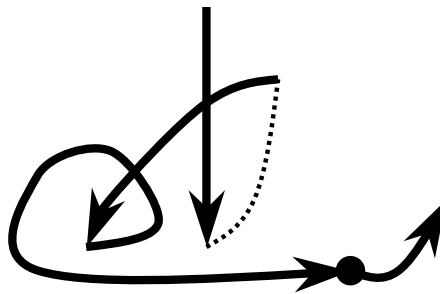
The musical score for measures 8-9 of Mozart's *E Susanna Non Vien* is presented in a five-staff format. The top three staves are for the string ensemble: Violin I (v. I), Violin II (v. II), and Viola (Va.). The bottom two staves are for the vocal soloist: Cello (La C.) and Bass (Vc. e B.). The score is divided into two sections: *Allegretto* (measures 8-9) and *Andante* (measures 10-11). The *Allegretto* section begins with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) and features a rhythmic pattern of a sixteenth note followed by a quarter note. The *Andante* section begins with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano). The Cello part includes the lyrics "va-ce, e ge-lo-so!" and "Ma che mal c'è?".

The rhythmic combination of a sixteenth note leading to a quarter note is a pattern that appears often in 18th century accompanied recitatives. Unlike with other motives, the purpose of the orchestral stroke is not to define a particular mood, nor to frame a topic, but instead to

¹¹¹ Neumann, 137.

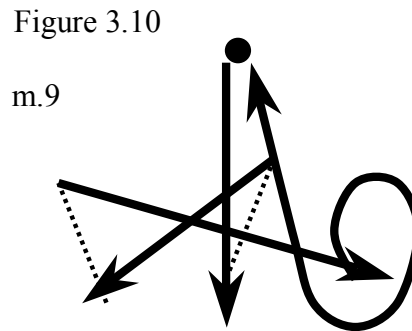
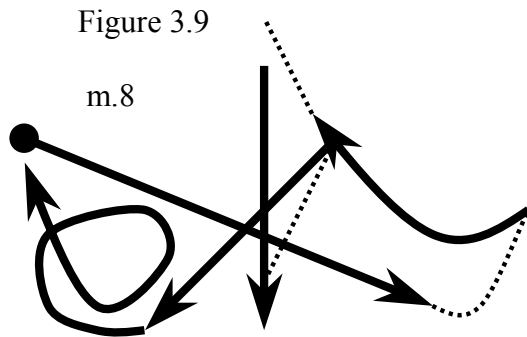
function as an audible punctuation mark.¹¹² Therefore, it must be conducted without any delay, in strict coordination with the soloist. The beginning of measure 8 presents a typical example. The downward motion of the hand should start at the exact moment when the Countess attacks the first eighth note of the measure (“*si vi-VA-ce*”). The previous measure is quite free and the conductor must be prepared to give the downbeat of measure 8 on time, but not earlier than needed, since an early entrance of the orchestra will make the end of the solo line inaudible. The quarter note on the second beat is played *forte* and requires an energetic cutoff. Neither the second nor the third type of cutoffs would be appropriate here. Following Musin’s theory, a cutoff of the first type should be given in the direction of the third beat:

Figure 3.8



In this particular case, however, this cutoff will create technical difficulties. When the hand arrives on the third beat after the cutoff, the preparatory gesture for the next entrance will lack the necessary space for an energetic preparatory 3rd beat (Figure 3.8). This difficulty can be easily solved if, after the second beat, the hand performs the cutoff in the same direction (of the 2nd beat) and then stops with a raised wrist/baton. From this position, it is easy to give a strong, energetic 3rd beat for the start of the *Allegretto* (Figure 3.9). Measure 9 does not present particular technical difficulties. The quarter note on the third beat is cut off in the direction of the fourth beat (Figure 3.10).

¹¹² Zeiss, 85.



At the end of the cutoff on the 4th beat of measure 9, the hand should stop, as shown in Figure 3.10, and wait for the soloist (the next measure starts with an eighth rest on the first beat, followed by a new entrance of the orchestra).

The words that follow the *Allegretto* in measure 9, “*Ma che mal c’è?*” (But what harm is there?) are introduced after an eighth rest of enormous dramatic value and, confusingly enough, belong to the *Allegretto* measure (Musical Example 3.4). Callas’ advice on tempo transitions in recitatives is especially valuable here. Mozart indicates *Andante* again in measure 10. Measure 9 presents a perfect example of the relative values of rests in recitatives. The rest before the Countess’s words reflects her internal struggle and doubt, which produce the childish tenderness of her words *Ma che mal c’è?* By no means should the singer enter – the way it is actually indicated in the score – before the conductor cuts off the orchestra. Those words introduce an abrupt change of mood and present the Countess in her most vulnerable state. Even a short extra rest can be incorporated after *Ma* (but), if the singer wishes to emphasize further the element of doubt. This feeling is also underlined in the orchestral accompaniment: dominant and diminished seventh chords along with large leaps in the violins give a figure of a “questioning” character. The presence of the diminished seventh as melodic interval (Musical Examples 3.5 and 3.6), on

the other hand, was a particular mannerism in the 18th century Italian recitative, associated mostly with amorous sentiments.¹¹³

The “questioning” motive and the way it is treated harmonically provide important interpretive hints for shaping the solo line. In his *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, Sulzer gives the following description of how instrumental motives contribute to the dramatic shape of the accompanied recitative: “In places where the speech is full of *Affekt*, however, very broken and with single words Then during the pauses in the speech the instruments depict the feeling.”¹¹⁴

In measure 10 the motive that draws particular attention appears with a seventh chord (Musical Example 3.5) on E, followed by two lines of a quicker narrative statement (“I shall change my clothes with those of Susanna”). The appoggiatura on “*vestiti*” is possible, but not necessary (see Neumann, 7c and 8)¹¹⁵. The following line in measure 12 (“and hers with mine”) contains an F, which is the highest note in the recitative up to this moment and is followed by a transposition of the motive from measure 10 (diminished seventh chord on C sharp), which introduces the line “*al favor della notte . . .*” (“by the night’s favor”, Musical Example 3.6). The “questioning” motive becomes a motive of nocturnal seduction and the soloist should consider the necessary inflections that the lines in measure 12 and 13, as both ending with an ellipsis, imply. Within this interpretive context, the appoggiatura in measure 12 is highly desirable, since it adds a particular sensuality and softness to the line. The F can be slightly emphasized and held longer, while the following measure 13 should be delivered, as it often is correctly done, in a slower way, with emphasis on “*notte.*”

¹¹³ Monelle, 248.

¹¹⁴ J. G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, 1774, quoted in Zeiss, 73.

¹¹⁵ Neumann, 137.

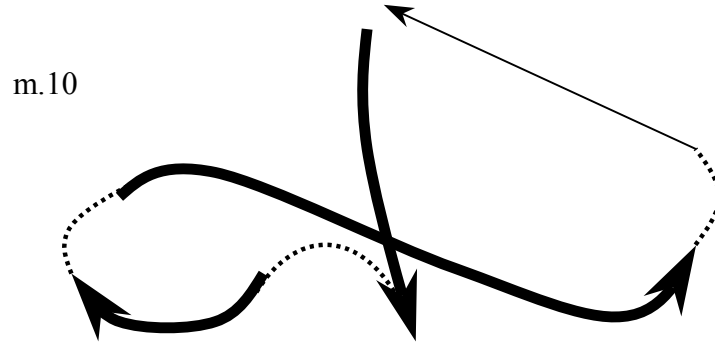
The “questioning” motive in measure 10 illustrates very well when a *portamento* gesture can be used to give a gentle subdivision within a slower tempo. This technical method gives an additional *espressivo* quality to the sound. The *portamento* gesture is also appropriate on the third beat, in order to show the length of the quarter note (Musical Example 3.5 and Figure 3.11).

Musical Example 3.5 Mozart, *E Susanna Non Vien*, measures 10-11

Andante

Ma che mal c'è? can-gian-do i miei ve-sti-ti con quel-li di Su -

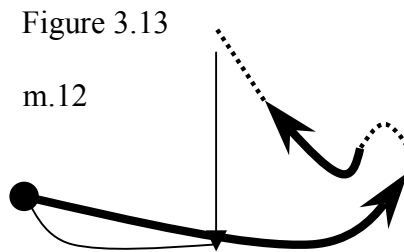
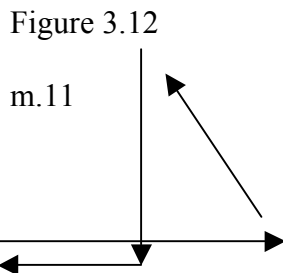
Figure 3.11



The rest on the 4th beat of measure 10, as well as measure 11 and the first two beats of measure 12, are marked with faster, linear motions (Figure 3.12 and Figure 3.13) and the hand, with a slightly raised wrist, stops after marking the second beat of measure 12. This is suggested, as in measure 10, if a conductor uses a *portamento* gesture again, this time to show a gentle subdivision at the end of measure 12 (Figure 3.13). Otherwise, the hand can stop after marking the 3rd beat, at the place of the last rest. The *portamento* gesture is still applicable at the 4th beat.

Musical Example 3.6 Mozart, *E Susanna Non Vien*, measures 12-13

The musical score consists of five staves. The top three staves are for Violin I (V. I.), Violin II (V. II.), and Viola (Va.). The bottom two staves are for the Cello and Double Bass (Vc. e B.). The vocal line (La C.) is positioned between the Viola and the Cello/Double Bass staves. The score begins at measure 12. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'p' (piano). The vocal line includes the lyrics: "san-na, ei suoi co'mie-i... al fa-vor del-la not-te...".



The first notes of measures 13 and 14, like the first notes of measures 5 and 7, require a cutoff. As before, a *portamento* gesture is perfectly justified (Figure 3.14 and Figure 3.15).

Musical Example 3.7 Mozart, *E Susanna Non Vien*, measures 14-15

oh cie-lo, a qual u-mil sta - to fa - ta - le

Measure 14 (Musical Example 3.7) presents an instance in which an inverted beat can be applied. After showing the first beat with a *portamento* gesture, the rebound is performed to the left and the hand stops for a moment at the level of the conducting surface, as shown on Figure 3.15. When the Countess sing the quarter note on the second beat, the hand makes a “floating” curvy motion to the right, followed by an energetic motion up with “*cielo*,” as if lifting a heavy object from the conducting surface. After that the hand quickly marks the 4th beat from the wrist only, simply continuing the motion (Figure 3.15).

Figure 3.14

m.13

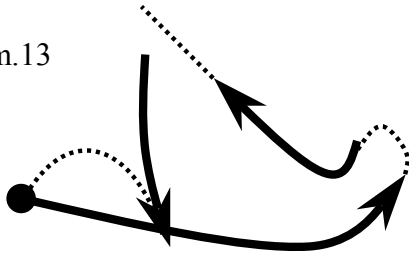
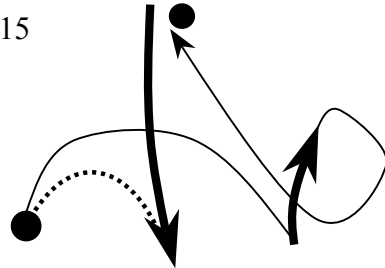


Figure 3.15

m.14



In this particular case, the strings are waiting with the bow on the string, and the energetic upward motion of the hand signals the moment when the players need to draw the bows. This avoids any delay in the orchestra and coordinates the accompaniment with the solo part. A strong downward motion of the hand on the 3rd beat can also be used (Figure 3.16). When the soloist sings the second beat, the hand is raised, stops for a moment, and shows an energetic, accented 3rd beat. The conductor must be very careful not to wait for the soloist; if that occurs, the downward motion of the hand on “*cielo*,” will cause the attack of the orchestra on the 3rd beat to be delayed. No matter which of the two approaches the conductor chooses, the hand must stop after marking the 4th beat. The first beat of measure 15 only needs to be marked, since the chord is sustained from the previous measure. Yet, everything that has been said about an entrance on a second beat after a rest fully applies here. Musin’s suggestions are usefully applicable (Figure 3.17).

Figure 3.16

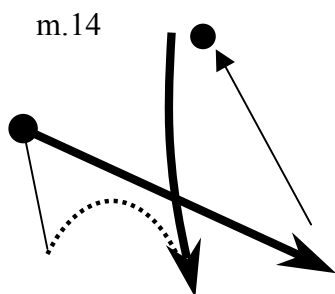


Figure 3.17

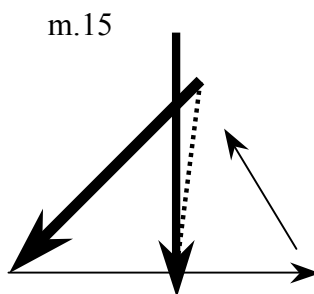
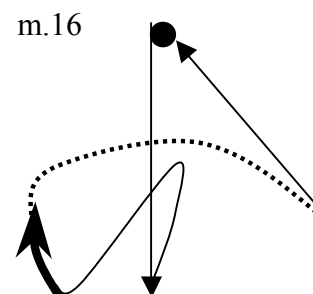


Figure 3.18



It is better to mark the 3rd and 4th beat of measure 15 in the tempo of the solo part. The mood changes in measure 15 when a powerful diminished seventh chord rings in the orchestra under the words *A qual umil stato fatale io son ridotta* (What a humiliating state I am reduced to...). At this point, the listener faces an intense personal drama. For that reason, the appoggiaturas typically sung in measure 14 on “*cielo*” and measure 15 on “*fatale*” should not be inserted. The vocal line requires good accents and a clear, steady delivery of the text, without the lubricating quality of the appoggiatura¹¹⁶ (see Neumann, point 7b on page 66). The same principle argues for not inserting an appoggiatura in measure 16, on “*ridotta*.”

The first beat of measure 16 should be marked immediately after the Countess sings the word “*fatale*” (Musical Example 3.7). The next line starts with a short rest (Musical Example 3.8). On the second beat the conductor needs to cut off the orchestra, while also coordinating the viola part with the soloist.

¹¹⁶ Neumann, 137.

Musical Example 3.8 Mozart, *E Susanna Non Vien*, measures 16-18

The musical score shows measures 16, 17, and 18. The first three staves (V. I., V. II., Va.) show a portamento gesture starting on the first beat and continuing through the second beat. The Cello part (La C.) has the lyrics: "io son ri-dot - ta daun con-sor - te cru-del, che do-po a - ver-mi con un mi-sto in-au-di - to d'in - fe-del-". The Bass part (Vc. e B.) has a similar portamento gesture. The dynamic marking 'f' is present in measures 17 and 18.

For the second beat, a *portamento* gesture within an inverted beat is suggested (Figure 3.18). The advantage of this approach is that the hand does not need to make a rebound after the 1st beat and can simply “float” towards the second, where it gently “lifts” the sound. The *portamento* gesture will show the duration of the eighth note. After that, the hand changes direction, as if “breaking away” from the sound by making a quick motion to the right (Figure 3.18).

Measures 17 and 18 do not offer particular conducting challenges and can be graphically represented as follows:

Figure 3. 19

m.17

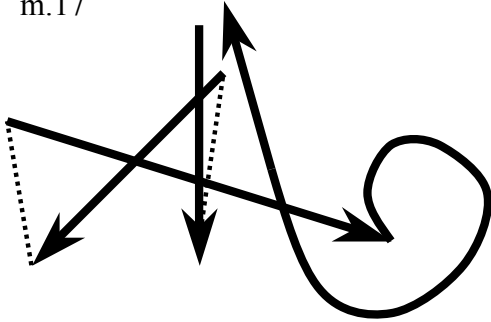
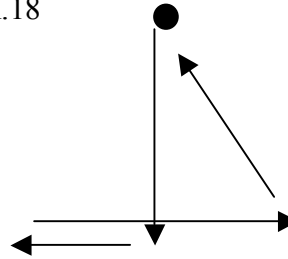


Figure 3.20

m.18



The third beat on measure 17 is followed by an energetic cutoff of the first type, given in the direction of the 4th beat. Measure 18 is marked with fasted motion and the hand stops at the top of the last beat. The challenge for the singer in measure 18 is to deliver the text with clarity. The challenge arises because of the dense concentration of syllables and a quicker pace that reflects the mood. More accented delivery is entirely appropriate, and an appoggiatura on “*inaudito*” should be ignored (see Neumann, point 7b, 7c and 8).

The three orchestral strokes in measures 19 and 20 (Musical Example 3.8) are identical with those in measure 8. They must be conducted with no delay, in strict coordination with the soloist. At the beginning of measure 19, prompt entry can be achieved if the energetic downward motion of the hand after the stop starts with “*fe-del-TA.*” The same advice is valid for the third beat (“*ge-lo-SI-a*”) and first beat of measure 20 (“*di-SDE-gni*”). The first two beats of measure 19 present the same exception as the one already discussed in measure 8. The cutoff of the second beat is given in the same direction. The hand stops after the second beat since a bigger, strong third beat is required for the next entrance of the orchestra (Figure 3.21). In both measures, cutoffs of the first type should be used. The cutoff in measure 20 is given in the direction of the third beat (Figure 3.22).

Figure 3.21

m.19

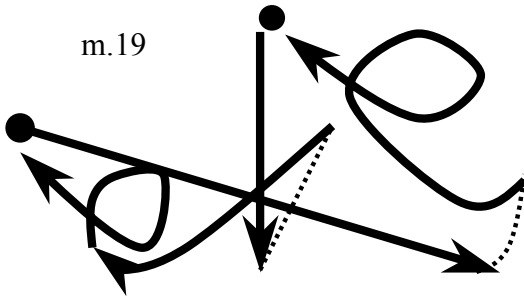
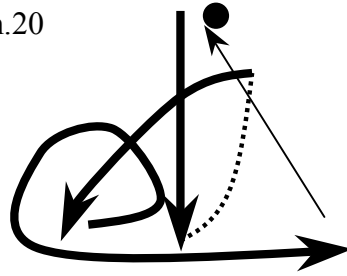


Figure 3.22

m.20



Musical Example 3.9 Mozart, *E Susanna Non Vien*, measures 19-25

19

V. I

V. II

Va.

La C.

Vc. e B.

tà, di ge-lo-si-a, di sde-gni, pri-ma-a-ma-ta, in-di-of-

p

22

V. I

V. II

Va.

La C.

Vc. e B.

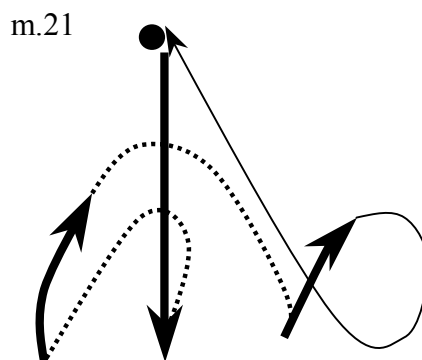
fe-sa, e al-fin tra-di-ta, fam-mi or cer-car da u-na mia ser-va-a-i-ta!

f fp p

The fourth beat of measure 20 (Figure 3.22) is quickly marked after the cutoff and the hand stops again at the top to prepare for the rest on the first beat, followed by an orchestra entrance on the second. Appoggiaturas in both measures 19 and 20, on “*gelosia*” and “*disdegni*,” should not be added (Neumann, point 7b)¹¹⁷.

The end of the recitative, from measure 21 to the beginning of the aria, presents a more lyrical vocal writing and a singing quality closer to the style of the aria. The tempo is steadier, which means that it is better to mark the rests in the tempo of the solo line. In order to connect the short notes and avoid unnecessary accents in measures 21 and 22, the conductor can use inverted beats. When an inverted beat is used to show *marcato* or *staccato* articulation, the upward motion is more energetic, as if the hand grabs the sound from the conducting surface and throws it up with the help of the wrist. Those two measures are almost identical from a technical point of view (Figure 3.23). The only difference is that the *piano* at measure 21 can be shown with inverted beats from the wrist only and at measure 22, where *forte* is marked, the upward gesture can be bigger and more vigorous. Although the rests are marked within the tempo of the soloist, it is better to stop the hand at the end of measure 21, before giving an energetic downbeat at the beginning of measure 22.

Figure 3.23



¹¹⁷ Neumann, 137.

There is a short traditional *fermata* in the solo line at the end of measure 22 (“*e al-FIN*”). The challenge for the conductor is to show the entrance of the orchestra at the beginning of measure 23 on time with no delay in relation to the solo part. This technical difficulty can be solved in the following way. After showing the third beat of measure 22 with an inverted beat, the hand makes a quick motion as shown on Figure 3.23 and stops at the top, while the singer holds the *fermata*. At the moment when she sings the last sixteenth note of the measure (“*TRA-dita*”), the hand makes a gentle downward motion towards the conducting surface. When the Countess sings (“*tra-DITA*”), the hand should lift the sound from the conducting surface with an energetic motion up. This is a classic example of the use of the inverted beat in opera accompaniments with a free vocal line.

When using inverted beats, the conductor does not necessarily have to change the beat pattern. The main difference consists in the way the hand approaches the conducting surface. In the case of a regular beat, the motions of the hand resemble the motions of a pendulum. With the inverted beat, the hand approaches the conducting surface gently. The sound begins when the hand is lifted up, as if lifting an object from the conducting surface. The pattern can remain the same; only the direction of the active beats changes.

The last three measure of the recitative can be conducted with inverted beats. After showing the chord on the third beat of the last measure an exception can be made and a cutoff of the first type can be performed in the direction of the third beat, but in the tempo of the aria. The fourth beat is given in the same tempo and becomes the preparation for the *Andante* of “*Dove sono.*” It is a simple technique through which the conductor can easily make the recitative flow organically into the tempo of the aria.

As this discussion illustrates, Musin's conducting techniques provide effective tools for presenting the style of *accompagnato*. Their use, as shown, builds upon a careful study of the elements in the music that present various interpretive challenges each unique in musical shape and emotional content. A thorough understanding of the compositional techniques used in recitatives allows conductors to make sense of musical notation in a way that goes beyond literal reading of the score. Performers must make important choices about nearly all elements of the music – rests, note values, structure of verse lines, and phrasing and, as well, be aware of the composer's choice of keys and tempi. In the case of Mozart, these choices should respect his exceptional dramatic genius and clearly show how he integrated accompanied recitatives into his operas to express character, emotion and drama.

CHAPTER 4

THE RECITATIVE IN THE ITALIAN ROMANTIC OPERA

Important changes occurred in Italian opera during the early decades of the 19th century. At the center of them was a growing embrace by composers of a musical aesthetic that aimed, above all, at emotional immediacy and instant comprehensibility.¹¹⁸ In his book *The Rise of Romantic Opera*, musicologist Edward Dent gives a useful description of this ascending trend, which would characterize the continued development of the genre throughout the century:

Romantic opera is based on a system of manners by which everybody acts on immediate impulse, without ever stopping to think what the consequences may be. This all hangs together with the musical construction, the desire of the composers being to develop the lyrical numbers, at the cost of recitative, which they wish to minimize at all costs.¹¹⁹

This directness of expression was not an isolated stylistic change. Along with it came a change in the type of story lines that operas typically presented. The shift is described by Italian musicologist Rodolfo Celletti:

Romantic opera represented a radical about-turn in relation to one of the basic structures of earlier opera: the tragic ending in place of the happy ending. This automatically dramatized characters and situations and released sentimentality of the time in the direction of that delight in tears which was one of its goals.¹²⁰

This move toward an emotionally charged aesthetic—with the tragedies presented on stage as vividly as possible – ushered in significant changes to the roles and forms of recitatives. In general, composers infused their recitatives with greater lyricism, to such a degree that in many instances the music overtook primacy of the text. Instrumental accompaniments, on the

¹¹⁸ Kerman, 121.

¹¹⁹ Edward J. Dent, *The Rise of Romantic Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 138.

¹²⁰ Rodolfo Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, trans. Frederick Fuller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 190.

other hand, became more important and often presented material that was sufficiently significant and coherent to stand alone as meaningful music.

Put otherwise, the conventions of the recitative pervasive in the 18th century came under considerable pressure from the new musical trends in the 19th century. Throughout the history of opera to this point, recitatives had maintained a rough balance between sentiment and reason. The guiding principle, as explained in previous chapters, was the primacy of the text. As Italian Romantic opera developed, this balance shifted. Composers sought to drown audiences in extreme sentiment. Expressive declamation had been well suited for the comparatively idealized feelings of the 18th century, but it was much less fit for what Italian Romantic opera wanted most: direct emotional impact through music.

The many changes in 19th century Italian recitative made the conductor's technical job simpler because it became necessary to follow the musical score more closely. Recitatives still differed from purely lyrical numbers, but in ways that blurred the once rather clear stylistic line between them. No longer was the music merely an adornment to the text. It had roles of its own, sometimes quite significant ones, and it became the conductor's task to identify those roles and ensure that the overall performance fulfilled them.

Recitatives of “Inspired Unreason”

Historically, the operatic technique regularly used to project the intensity of emotion was not the expressive declamation of the recitative. It was the melody, with its greater ability to meld the words and, as Peter Conrad puts it in his book *Romantic Opera and Literary Form*, to envelope them with “an inspired unreason.”¹²¹ The home of melody in opera was the aria and the Baroque masters had long used it effectively to reveal a character's feelings. As the

¹²¹ Peter Conrad, *Romantic Opera and Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 5.

Romantic era dawned, however, composers were less inclined to restrict their melodic invention to arias. They sought to maintain emotions more continuously through the opera, and thus began to revise recitatives in form, function and musical content. Early indications of this new direction can be already seen in the operas of Rossini, which were popular in the second and third decades of the 19th century. Rossini, however, propagated recitative practices that were clearly derived from 18th century practice. He is thus best understood as a transitional figure. A greater sense of change showed up in the operas of the other two leaders of early Romantic Italian opera, Bellini and Donizetti. It is in their work that one becomes aware how much “inspired unreason” was embedded in the recitative.

Romantic composers disposed of *secco* recitatives, which were considered unsuitable for a tragic Romantic drama, since, in the early 19th century, they had become associated with the general low-grade intrigue of comic operas. The new trend, introduced by Rossini and particularly evident by the 1840s, was to orchestrate all recitatives. Verdi’s contemporary Abramo Basevi, writing later in the century, divided the early 19th recitatives into two broad categories. In one type, the *recitativo semplice*, the vocal part retained the expressive lead. This first type, as Robert Moreen interprets Basevi’s writing, was not much different from an orchestrated version of *secco*. In the second type, *recitativo obbligato*, the orchestra took on heightened importance, at times taking on an importance equal to that of the singer.¹²² This new form of recitative grew out of but, in fact, could differ significantly from 18th century *accompagnato* practice. The 18th century *accompagnato*, regardless of tempo, required a free and relatively quick declamation, and the rhetorical inflections of speech were never obscured by melodic lyricism. In contrast, the 19th century *recitativo obbligato* was often presented

¹²² Robert Anthony Moreen, "Integration of Text Forms and Musical Forms in Verdi's Early Operas" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1975), 28.

melodically, reflecting to one degree or another the supreme importance of lyrical writing. Due to the greater role for orchestra and melody these recitatives were typically slower in pace and rhythmically more controlled than their 18th century predecessors.

Basevi's dichotomy is a useful one to keep in mind. But it is important to note also that the distinction between *semplice* and *obbligato* recitatives was often blurred and it was more an after-the-fact description of practice rather than a rule to follow. Quicker declamation with sparse accompaniment often appeared in early Romantic opera. The newer form of *obbligato* recitative became more evident when a composer allowed emotions to take over and used a solo vocal line that seemed to aspire to an *arioso*-like state.

A good illustration of this type of writing can be found in the extended recitatives that form part of the so-called *scena*; that is, the introductory part of a larger number in opera that featured an exposition of the situation utilizing recitative structures. Among the favorite dramatic moments were the notorious "mad scenes," which frequently appear in the operatic libretti of the first half of the 19th century. A typical mad scene appears in the last number of Bellini's opera *Il Pirata*. Its complex emotional structure is basically of the same type as the earlier *accompagnati*. Nevertheless, Mozart could exhaust the psychological substance of the narrative in only four measures, whereas Bellini requires twelve bars. Bellini's scene opens with a long introduction. The unaccompanied entrance of the soloist is marked *recitativo*, but instead of free declamation, one can easily identify a regular melodic structure, comprised of three almost identical phrases with an underlying musical meaning far more evocative than the generic melodic contours of the 18th century recitative:

Musical Example 4.1 Bellini, *Il Pirata*, final scene

IMOG. REC.ºº
Oh! s'io po - tes - si dis - si - par le nu - bi chem'ag-

REC.ºº

1º TEMPO
-gra - van la fronte!... 61 1º TEMPO

ppp

IM.

REC.ºº ANDANTINO
È gior - no, o se - ra? ANDANTINO

REC.ºº pp a tempo

The descending melodic curve contributes to the image of oppressive sorrow that the text conveys (“Oh, if only I could scatter the clouds that oppress my brow”) and the solo line, with its regular phrase structure, contrasts distinctly with the recitative formulas of the 18th century. Accompanied recitatives in the 18th century were typically composed of brief, clearly articulated phrases containing short, often-repeated notes and an overall quality closer to that of dramatic speech. The melodic curve generally lacked expressive meaning on its own and served chiefly to enhance the rhetorical inflections of the text. In contrast, the aim of the Italian Romantic composer was to “conceive and evoke a melody from the accent of the declamation of the text,” according to composer Gaetano Donizetti in a speech given on the occasion of his acceptance as

a correspondent of French Academy. Anything less than that, Donizetti exclaimed, was considered “devoid of sentiment.”¹²³

The Romantic obsession with melody also affected the way in which recitatives had to be performed. This meant, as Maria Callas later explained, that the singer “must respect the value of the notes,” and, “must create the illusion of one large breath when in actuality it will be made up of many little breaths.” “The tone should never drop,” Callas asserted. Only in that way could the line create a feeling of a continuous emotional flow.¹²⁴ Callas, of course, was a master of the 19th century *belcanto* tradition, which she learned from Serafin, one of the early practitioners of that style.

The final mad scene of Donizetti’s opera *Anna Bolena* provides a good illustration of this new approach to recitatives. Just as in the example from Bellini above, one can feel here the pleasure with which Donizetti “infected” his recitatives with the “inspired unreason” of melodic sentiment as part of a larger effort to create a seamless, engaging melodic flow:

Musical Example 4.2 Donizetti, *Anna Bolena*, final scene

nozze. Il Re m'a_spet_ - ta... è ac_ ce - so, in_ fio_ ra - - to l'al -

¹²³ William Ashbrook, *Donizetti* (London: Cassell, 1965), 370.

¹²⁴ Ardoin, 67.

Recitative in the 18th century, as noted, was by no means devoid of sentiment. The key difference was that, in the earlier operas, the composer provided the general frame and it was the singer's role to bring the line to emotional life, as the narrative demanded. In contrast, the Romantic emotion came embedded in the music through an elaborated melodic line. Too much interpretive freedom could pose the risk of destroying the coherence of the musical phrase. Maria Callas again highlighted what this meant for the singer. "With the exception of certain moments that are more important than others and must be highlighted," she advised, "keep to the rhythm, you will have more breath, and the effect you make will be lovelier."¹²⁵

Donizetti's career extended a full decade beyond that of Bellini and overlapped with the early operas of Verdi. Going beyond the practices of Bellini, Donizetti mixed his recitatives organically with short but memorable *ariosi*, which were meant to help avoid the risk of monotony by providing additional musical variety. Listeners, Donizetti seemed to suggest, had limited tolerance for any extended gap between melodies. The task of crafting a melody for a text intended for recitative, however, was a challenging one for composers. Melodies were easier to compose when a verse was highly regular in form. Librettists in the 19th century, however, continued the earlier practice of using freely combined lines of 7 and 11 syllables. These lines were typically not written to accommodate lyrical writing and it was thus left to the composer, as Philip Gossett explains, "to render these irregular recitative verses into verses appropriate for a regular musical period, with balanced phrases."¹²⁶ To achieve the desired musical result, Gossett observes, "the composer was forced to push and prod recalcitrant material."¹²⁷ Only then could the text align with an appropriately affective melody. Words were occasionally repeated—an

¹²⁵ Ibid., 116.

¹²⁶ Gossett, *Divas and Scholars*, 45.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

unthinkable idea in the 18th century practice—and by treating texts in this manner and expanding the role of melody, Donizetti was able to invest the recitative with greater expressive power.

Donizetti also used recitatives as an effective technique to present specific dramatic moments—for instance, a death scene—for which the lyrical form of an aria or duet would have been a dramatic misfit. For instance, in *Dom Sébastien*, a long forgotten opera, Donizetti concludes the last scene with a free recitative similar to the one that Verdi employed at the end of *Simon Boccanegra*. An earlier and weaker opera, *Marino Faliero*, also ends with a dramatic recitative, punctuated by the fall of an executioner's axe. Bellini would have handled a similar situation through a big aria or duet.¹²⁸

Building on the opera reforms of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti put the recitative to new uses and increased the role of the orchestra in them. The orchestra, however, remained in complete subordination to the vocal line in terms of moving the opera along as a drama. Thus, the early Italian Romantic composers, despite their musical innovations, had not yet followed Mozart's lead in turning the orchestra into an integral element of the *action*. Musical elements that threatened to take attention away from the singer were considered undesirable; the drama was moved along by vocal means only. There is abundant historic evidence that Donizetti, as early as 1820, expressed serious discontent with the seeming rigidity of Italian operatic conventions (e.g., number of arias, seemingly mandatory death scenes).¹²⁹ It was not Donizetti, however, but his direct heir, Giuseppe Verdi, who managed to rise above the conventions in ways that increased the function of the opera orchestra to a rough equality with the status of the singers.

¹²⁸ Winton Dean, "Donizetti's Serious operas," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 100 (1973-1974): 132, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/766179> (accessed February 5, 2011).

¹²⁹ Ashbrook, Donizetti, 42.

Verdi's Reform

Giuseppe Verdi was a composer of titanic creative will and sense of dramatic action, unprecedented in Italy in the generations since Monteverdi. The often-crude gestures of his early style were gradually replaced by a greater facility in maintaining a continuously flowing drama, even as he followed the Romantic practice of infusing the opera with melodies. Verdi fully shared the Romantic belief that music was more psychologically revealing than language¹³⁰, but he also realized that too much melodic lyricism could easily come at the expense of the dramatic flow. Purely lyrical numbers could be highly melodic because traditionally they were meant to embody static introspections. The trouble came as the pace of action in recitatives, the traditional carrier of the plot, was also slowed down by melodic lyricism. What was needed was a way to keep the complexity of the drama. Verdi's genius was to elevate the role of the orchestra and use it as an independent dramatic component. No longer did it merely support and augment the vocal line. It became an equal dramatic tool. With it, Verdi managed to transform the "inspired unreason" of Romantic recitative into a dramatic entity capable of handling most subtle psychological portrayals.

As early as 1859—before even the mid-point of Verdi's 55-year career as opera composer—Abramo Basevi was able to isolate and describe five basic vocal textures that appeared in Verdi's operas. In combination, they infused the genre with a heightened continuity of dramatic action. Basevi defined the five textures—which were, of course, not kept distinct but flowed organically into each other—as follows: *recitativo semplice*, *recitativo obbligato*, *parlante armonico*, *parlante melodico*, and *parlante misto*. In combination they supplemented the purely lyrical numbers. The first two of these were carried forward from earlier 19th century

¹³⁰ Sandra Corse, *Opera and the Uses of Language: Mozart, Verdi, and Britten* (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987), 69.

practice. As for the latter three categories, they were later precisely defined by Robert Moreen. As Moreen explains, “in *parlante armonico*, the voice fits its speech rhythms into the harmonic rhythm and regular phrase lengths provided by the orchestra, but does not itself have a melody.” On the other hand, “in *parlante melodico* the voice doubles the orchestral melody at the third, sixth or octave.” *Parlante misto* is a combined version of the other two types of *parlante*. In contrast, the aria, as Moreen noted, “the melodic organization is carried on entirely by the voice.”¹³¹

Like most typologies, Basevi’s categories are useful so long as we do not expect to put each Verdi recitative cleanly into a single category. Practice did not always reflect theory. Many times it is difficult if not artificial to distinguish between the different types of *recitativo* and *parlante*. Not only did the *parlante* types blend together but, as Basevi also pointed out, “*recitativo obbligato* is sometimes so melodically ornamented by the orchestra that it almost approaches a *parlante*.”¹³²

This expanded spectrum of vocal writing evolved as a consequence of the desire of composers to break away from the old-fashioned, purely rhetorical approach in which the music was set line by line with short rests in between. Characteristic features of Basevi’s various categories can be readily found in both Bellini and Donizetti. But, as Kerman points out in his important book *Opera as Drama*, pre-Verdi examples of *parlante* were combined with “slick” orchestral motives, arranged “inconspicuously into standard regular patterns.” Even when the solo line or the dialogue moved forward, the accompaniment seemed to remain insensitive to the subtleties of the drama.¹³³ It was Verdi who truly blended the various forms and practices into a musical continuum. In doing so, he transformed the functions of recitative and, in consequence,

¹³¹ Moreen, 29.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Kerman, 115.

of *scena*, turning the recitative into a flexible dramatic device equal and occasionally even more powerful than the aria.

This innovative work did not come easily or quickly for Verdi, who is remembered for lavishing far more time on his operas than did his Romantic predecessors. Verdi's early struggles with recitative—his struggles with keeping it musically engaging—were typical of those experienced by other composers from the first half of the 19th century:

Who would be that composer who could set to music, without drying up, one hundred lines of recitative verse as they are in this third act?¹³⁴

In the ensuing years--from the time of *Ernani* to the time after *Rigoletto*'s premiere in 1851--Verdi raised the Italian opera recitative to an entirely new plane of dramatic substance. *Rigoletto* is the first Italian opera in which *recitativo, parlante*, and lyrical writing are organically interwoven so as to synchronize the flow of the music with the flow of the drama.

Verdi's newfound skills allowed him to use recitatives more freely and to extend their length without fear of disappointing an audience that expected only melodies and arias. Verdi revealed his embrace of recitatives—evident enough, of course, from his operas alone—in various letters. He commented on the overall length of his recitatives in a letter dated September 9, 1853:

As for recitatives, if the moment is interesting, they can even be a little long. I have composed some very long ones, for example the soliloquy in the duet of the first act of *Macbeth* and the other soliloquy in the duet of the first act of *Rigoletto*.¹³⁵

In a letter dated November 6, 1857, he noted how well crafted recitative could overcome the limits constraining arias:

¹³⁴ Letter to Brenna of 15 November 1843, quoted in Moreen, 274.

¹³⁵ Moreen, 274.

Since this scene is energetic and important, I would like it to be well rendered. Perhaps the meter and the rhyme impede you? If that is so, put this passage into *versi sciolti*. I prefer a good recitative to mediocre stanzas of lyric verse.¹³⁶

The soliloquy from *Rigoletto* to which Verdi refers in the first of these letters appears in the monologue *scena, Pari Siamo* (“We are alike”) that follows Rigoletto’s duet with the assassin Sparafucile. It is a creation of a dramatic genius. The next chapter explores and “decodes” it, using it as an illustration of how the detailed interpretive analysis of a Romantic recitative, considered in the context of the opera as a whole, can provide valuable clues for a musically and dramatically effective performance. This soliloquy is also useful in highlighting some of the key features, mentioned here, that distinguish Italian Romantic recitatives from 18th century ones. In Romantic recitatives, as explained above, both singers and conductors need to perform the score exactly as written to a degree not obtained or even desired in the case of 18th century recitatives. Questions about optional ornamentation have largely disappeared, and far less flexibility exists with respect to rests, note values, and meter. What the conductor must dwell upon instead are questions related in the music itself and its dramatic roles, and to the ways that music and voice can best function together to maintain the flow of drama.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

DECODING A RECITATIVE:

PARI SIAMO FROM *RIGOLETTO* BY GIUSEPPE VERDI

Accompanied recitatives of the 18th century, as we have seen, were mainly monologues, destined to set up a psychological situation that preceded an important aria. It was Verdi who transformed the recitative into something more than just a preparatory dramatic gesture or carrier of the plot. He recognized that the structural freedom that this particular operatic idiom allowed was in fact well suited for portraying complex psychological situations when an aria would lower the dramatic tension. So flexible was the recitative in Verdi's hands that it could function well in roles for which earlier composers used only arias. As evidence we can point to *Rigoletto*, in which the main character has no real aria in the entire first act. Instead, the center of his presentation is a complex dramatic recitative, or *scena*.

The recitatives in a Verdian *scena* differ significantly from even the subtlest of all 18th century *accompagnati* in the way in which the music reaches an unprecedented dramatic independence. It is important to point out, however, that this independence was not achieved, as in Bellini and Donizetti, only through a more lyrical, melodic vocal writing. It was achieved mainly through the orchestra, through Verdi's use of recurring motives, tonal references and particular textures. In combination, these compositional elements created dramatic tension that had no real analogue in earlier operas. What early Romantic operas were lacking was what might be termed a binding element; that is, a compositional technique to interconnect and inter-relate the various developments of the story line.

In *Rigoletto*, the chief binding element, as shown below, is the technique of musical reminiscence. In various ways Verdi's music links a given scene or development backward to earlier scenes and, on occasion, gives premonitions of developments to come. This dramaturgical discovery, to be sure, was not Verdi's invention; in earlier operas, recurring themes had often appeared (for instance in the overused, clichéd *delirio* scenes typified by Donizetti's *Lucia*). Verdi's contribution was to use more subtle, sophisticated references, thus avoiding the poetic sentimentality of earlier Romantics. Often he used recurring keys and motives, which behave almost like "musical ghosts"--appearing unexpectedly in the music to create a particular atmosphere. This chapter examines Verdi's use of these compositional techniques, showing how, in an important recitative, they present and help resolve interpretive questions while integrating the recitative into the opera, thus sustaining its dramatic continuity.

Pari Siamo, like most similar recitative scenes in Verdi's operas after 1850, is a psychological meditation on a previous event in the story, a narrative role traditionally filled in operas by an aria. The Verdian recitative is, overall, a subtle and effective technique for looking backward in the plot, which is to say it performs a role not typical for earlier *accompagnati*. For the recitative to succeed fully, however, the singer must connect it properly to the material that precedes it. That task--achieving a meaningful dramatic transition from one number in the opera to another--can be a considerable challenge. The atmosphere of *Pari Siamo*, for example, is a continuation of the preceding duet between Rigoletto and the assassin Sparafucile. Verdi even indicates in the score: "Rigoletto (looking after Sparafucile)." How should the singer, then, handle this transition?

One singer who handled it masterfully was the great Italian baritone Tito Gobbi, perhaps the greatest Rigoletto of the 20th century. He once described his struggle with the preceding duet, revealing in the process how he understood and approached the beginning of *Pari Siamo*:

I remember the revelation about this duet imparted to me in Stockholm in 1947 by the great conductor, Antonio Guarnieri. The excellent Sparafucile, Cesare Siepi, and I were at our first rehearsal and thought we were doing pretty well when, at the end of this duet, we were overwhelmed by a storm of abuse and invective from the conductor. What did we think we were? . . . This duet must be sung *pianissimo*, with a tone of mystery, and a sense of fear on the part of Rigoletto. The double basses play a beautiful melody at this moment and our voices, he informed us, must be barely audible.¹³⁷

As his recordings of the opera display clearly, Gobbi carried this sense of fear into the first phrase of the monologue's recitative, which he almost whispered with an incomparable *mezza voce*. Many baritones begin the recitative much louder—too loud—likely because this is Rigoletto's first solo scene in the opera and offers the singer a tempting opportunity to display his voice. This lack of understanding of the dramatic connections in the music results in an obvious break in continuity and distortion of Verdi's nuanced character portrayal.

The challenge of this recitative finds parallels in many of Verdi's operas. A singer's first challenge when preparing a recitative is to understand how it connects to the dramatic meaning of the music that precedes it. Perhaps the second step is to understand how the dramatic intention of the recitative's text affects the choice of tempo.

The Tempo

Tempo markings of the 18th century *accompagnato* were used to instruct instrumentalists on both the character and speed of the music. The singer, meanwhile, followed the natural pace of speech taking into account the sentiment of the moment. As we observed in Chapter 4, Bellini

¹³⁷ Tito Gobbi, *His World of Italian Opera* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1984), 91.

and Donizetti introduced a more sentimental approach to recitative, aimed at expanding the emotional boundaries of the conventional quick declamation. As a result, tempo markings became the way to link the concept of speed to the dramatic meaning of the sung verse. Verdi built upon this tradition. His tempi reflect directly the emotional nature of different lines in the text. Verdi commented on this issue in a letter from 1844 in which he responded to a conductor's inquiry about tempo indications in *Ernani*:

The tempos are all assigned in the score as clearly as possible. If you simply pay attention to the dramatic situation and the text, it will be difficult to mistake the tempo. I advise you only that I do not like slow tempos; it is better to err on the fast side than to be too slow.¹³⁸

Roberta Marvin, in her article on Verdi's tempo indications, observes how the composer changed many of his earlier tempo markings to prevent conductors from performing his music too slowly. For example, in Ulrica's famous *invocazione* in *Un ballo in maschera*, the original *Adagio* was replaced by *Andante sostenuto*, a marking that better reflects the harmonic rhythm of the composition. Marvin also points out that Verdi rarely indicated a specific tempo in his initial manuscripts. Most indications were added later, during rehearsals. The tempos that Verdi inserted in his drafts were typically generic indications for *Allegro*, *Andante* and *Adagio*. As Marvin explains further, "they appear most often in instrumental passages where the lack of textual clue may well account for their presence."¹³⁹

In general, the performer must take into consideration three basic points related to Verdi's tempo in recitatives, even when a specific indication does not appear. First, the tempo, as a rule, should always reflect the dramatic situation in the text. Second, Verdi's music, like all Italian opera, has a natural flowing quality and should not be taken too slowly. And third, the

¹³⁸ Roberta M. Marvin, "Aspects of Tempo in Verdi's Early and Middle-Period Italian Operas," in *Verdi's Middle Period 1849-1859: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 396.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 400.

tempo must reflect the harmonic rhythm of the music. As discussed in chapter 3, slower harmonic rhythm calls for a faster tempo, while a faster harmonic rhythm demands a slower pace.

Interpretively, the tempo reflects not only the character of the recitative, but also the structure of the *scena*. When compared to an 18th century *accompagnato*, Verdi's recitatives in *scena* do not simply set the text line by line. Instead, they are organized in larger blocks of music, usually defined by a change of tempo and, most often, by a change of key (Table 5.1). The overall design of a Verdian *scena* thus more closely resembles a sonata development section than an earlier *accompagnato*. On the other hand—and as observed in the case of Mozart in chapter 3—tempo changes in Verdi's recitatives indicate a new mood or topic.

Verdi's use of tempi and tempi changes can be seen in Rigoletto's monologue scene. The text is presented in sections identified by tempo (and dominant emotion); the key indicates the tonal center for each section:

Table 5.1 Text, Tempo and Keys of *Pari Siamo*

<i>Fear → Adagio / F-major</i>	
<i>Pari siamo!... Io la lingua, egli ha il pugnale. Uomo son io che ride, ci quel che spegne! Quel vecchio maledivami...</i>	We are two of a kind!... My weapon is my tongue, his is a dagger; I am a man of laughter, he strikes the fatal blow! The old man cursed me ...
<i>Anger → Allegro / D-flat major</i>	
<i>O uomini! o natura! Vil scellerato mi faceste voi!... O rabbia! esser difforme, esser buffone!</i>	O mankind! O nature! It was you who made me evil and corrupt! I rage at my monstrous form, my cap and bells!
<i>Self-pity → Adagio / G-flat major</i>	
<i>Non dover, non poter altro che ridere! Il retaggio d'ogni uom m'è tolto ... il pianto!..</i>	To be permitted nothing but to laugh! I'm denied that common human right, to weep!..
<i>Sarcasm → Moderato / B-flat major</i>	
<i>Questo padrone mio, Giovin, giocondo, sì possente, bello, Sonnecchiando mi dice: Fa' ch'io rida, buffone! Forzarmi deggio e farlo!</i>	My master, young, carefree, so powerful, so handsome, half-dozing, says: "Fool, make me laugh!" And I must contrive to do it!
<i>Hatred → Allegro / E-major</i>	
<i>Oh dannazione!... Odio a voi, cortigiani schernitori! Quanta in mordervi ho gioia! Se iniquo son, per cagion vostra è solo...</i>	Oh, damnation! My hate upon you, sneering courtiers! How I enjoy snapping at your heels! If I am wicked, the fault is yours alone...
<i>Tender affection → Andante / E-major</i>	
<i>Ma in altr'uomo qui mi cangio... Quel vecchio maledivami!...</i>	But here I become another person! The old man cursed me!...
<i>Rejection → Allegro / f-minor</i>	
<i>Tal pensiero Perché conturba ognor la mente mia? Mi coglierà sventura?... Ah no, è follia!</i>	Why should this thought still prey so on my mind? Will some disaster befall me? Ah no, this is folly!

As Kerman argues in his book *Opera as Drama*, one of the basic characteristics of the Romantic style is its emotional immediacy.¹⁴⁰ In Verdi's recitatives in particular, the emotions in the text are always clearly stated. Even when a tempo indication is missing in the score, the text defines the psychological situation in every new section. Yet, the text and the tempo markings present a static sequence of thoughts. It is up to the performers to make plain the dramatic motivations behind them, which in turn requires a full awareness of the subtleties of the music. This challenge did not arise in the 18th century *accompagnato*, which was simpler and much shorter and which propelled the libretto's narrative line quite quickly. In contrast, the elaborated complexity of a longer monologue scene like *Pari Siamo* cannot be fully understood without looking for layers of meaning that go deeper than the obvious emotions expressed by the text. In Verdi, one of those layers of meaning is hidden in the way the composer uses specific keys and relates them to other situations in the opera.

Tonal Dramaturgy

Pari Siamo begins in F-major, the key that dominates the Rigoletto – Sparafucile duet. The first noticeable change of mood comes in the first *Allegro* section (“*O uomini! O natura,*” measure 15 – 25), in which the solo line enters at the end of a full measure of string tremolo. The relevant interpretive question is: What particular thought might have caused the jester's sudden protest against all mankind and nature?

¹⁴⁰ Kerman, 121.

Looking closer at Verdi's choice of key reveals the answer.¹⁴¹ D-flat major is the same key in which Monterone puts his curse on Rigoletto, after the jester has mocked his honor in front of the courtiers. Reduced here to a single chord, the obsessive memory of the curse suddenly triggers Rigoletto's outcry. His anger reveals a remorse for what has been done: "*O uomini! O natura! Vil scellerato mi faceste voi!*" ("O mankind! O nature! T'was you who made me evil and corrupt!"). As the music desperately tries to escape from D-flat, it arrives to the next section, *Adagio* (26 – 29) – "*Non dover, non poter altro che ridere!*" ("To be permitted nothing, but to laugh") – in which the "curse of D-flat" resolves into a G-flat chord.

Measure 26 of *Pari Siamo* is the gloomiest, most mysterious part of the recitative. Verdi's orchestra often tells us secrets that the characters do not yet know. The curse of D-flat major, in the larger context of the opera, also resolves dramatically into G-flat major in the last scene of the opera: the strings establish this particular tonality when Sparafucile hands the sack with Gilda's dead body to Rigoletto. At that moment the jester still believes that the actual victim of his vengeance has been the Duke, not his own daughter. In *Pari Siamo* the G-flat arrives as a string chord in *pianissimo*, like a ghostly whisper from a dark future. The conductor should approach it with utmost care, while urging the string players to start as soft as possible, *sul tasto*, with no accent or too much vibrato.

Later, in the last scene over the dead body, Rigoletto, in G-flat major, will rejoice before realizing that it was not the Duke whom Sparafucile murdered. And his monstrous ecstasy will then take the music from G-flat to B-flat major, a key that becomes a symbol of the hatred's fulfillment. In *Pari Siamo*, the G-flat of the *Adagio* also modulates to B-flat major in the ensuing

¹⁴¹ For a detailed discussion on Verdi's use of keys in *Rigoletto*, see David Lawton, "Tonal Structure and Dramatic Action in *Rigoletto*," in *Verdi*, ed. Istituto di Studi Verdiani (Parma: Istituto di Studi Verdiani, 1982), 1559-1581.

Moderato –a sarcastic *pizzicato* section. It is in this section when we hear, for the first time in the opera, the jester describing his master. But the text itself is a simple narrative and the direct emotional expression that it implies is, exactly like the tempo, moderate. Rigoletto’s outburst “How I hate ye, race of vile and fawning courtiers!” does not come until the next section, *Allegro*. But it is the B-flat major in *Moderato* and its peculiar relationship with the last scene of the opera that reveals Rigoletto’s spiteful sarcasm and portrays him as victim of an arrogant and vicious master. In short, Verdi’s subtle musical hints uncover hidden psychological nuances beyond the reach of words. Italian opera before him hardly dreamed of such possibilities.

The next two sections, *Allegro* (measures 41 – 51) and *Andante* (measures 52 – 61), present the most clear emotional contrast in the entire scene: the hatred of the jester in opposition to the affection of the father. Surprisingly enough, the contrast here is achieved through the musical texture only, while the main tonal center remains the same, E-major. This is a masterful dramatic invention: In only 17 measures Verdi reveals the true drama of the character: behind the love of the father there is fear of being unable to protect his daughter from the vicious hands of the courtiers. At this point we know nothing of a daughter yet—Rigoletto is careful in not disclosing his best kept secret—but the music reveals her image in an affectionate *Andante* in E-major, Gilda’s signature key in the opera. In addition, Verdi chooses E-major for expressing Rigoletto’s hatred for the courtiers: “For if I am vile, ‘tis your vice I owe it.” It is also their vice that he fears. And what hides behind the fear that causes his hatred is the key of E-major, subtly invoking the image of the beloved daughter.

The tonal center of the ensuing *Allegro* is F-minor. Earlier in the opera, F-minor revealed Monterone’s tragedy: the dishonor that the courtiers caused to his family. Martin Chusid, in his article *Rigoletto and Monterone: A Study in Musical Dramaturgy*, observes in detail how Verdi

links musically the two characters in Act I in order to uncover Rigoletto's dark omen.¹⁴² The text implies a rejection of the dark premonitions, but it is also the F-minor that now exposes Rigoletto's fears of sharing Monterone's fate. The presence of F-minor becomes dramatically more complex when the cellos and basses remind us again of the assassin Sparafucile by playing the motive that opens the scene of the preceding duet. It is the shared fate of Monterone that will lead Rigoletto to the assassin.

Why is it important to always look for more in Verdi's *recitativo* and not simply follow the indications that are already clearly visible in the score? Tito Gobbi's answer to this question was simple: "Ninety per cent of singers may sing their arias well and with some success, but I would say that only ten per cent sing the recitatives with real dramatic sense and plastic expression to enhance the story."¹⁴³ In every 19th century Italian aria the voice dominates the stage, while the music is rarely ambiguous. By contrast, Verdi's recitatives present a subtle balance between what is clearly stated in the music and what is not so obvious. Dramatic points are easily missed in a superficial interpretation. It is in his recitatives from *Rigoletto* onward where Verdi shows his mastery in building a complex psychological portrait. It was precisely to achieve this portrait that Verdi composed Rigoletto's monologue *Pari Siamo* rather than using a necessarily more superficial aria.

From a purely technical, conducting standpoint, Verdi's recitatives are not as difficult to accompany as the much freer and quicker declamation of an 18th century *accompagnato*. In contrast, they rely more on orchestral motives and therefore demand a certain level of rhythmical precision and a steadier pulse from the singer. It is, accordingly, the interpretive task that presents the main challenge. A sensitive opera conductor must be able to control the degree of

¹⁴² Martin Chusid, "Rigoletto and Monterone: A Study in Musical Dramaturgy," in *Verdi*, ed. Instituto di Studi Verdiani (Parma: Instituto di Studi Verdiani, 1982), 1544-1558.

¹⁴³ Gobbi, 86.

tension that the orchestra adds to the dramatic content. To achieve this goal, one must understand of the types of orchestral texture that Verdi uses in his recitatives.

Types of Orchestral Texture in Verdi's Recitatives

When working on an extended recitative by Verdi it becomes rather obvious that in the freely mixed *recitativo* and *parlante* sections of *scena*, the orchestral texture can be less conventional than it is in the case of purely lyrical numbers that emphasize only the voice. Orchestral writing in Italian opera recitatives until the time of Donizetti—as noted earlier—was important but relatively formulaic. Its role was limited to providing harmonic support for the voice and occasionally creating a particular atmosphere. With Verdi, different orchestral textures assume different dramatic roles. As surveyed in the last chapter, these textures can be closely identified with the type of vocal writing. Once again, *Pari Siamo* presents a good example of Verdi's innovations in linking different types of vocal writing in recitatives to the orchestral texture.

In *recitativo semplice* the voice appears with no or very little accompaniment. The role of the orchestra is usually reduced to rhetorically placed chords, which emphasize dramatically important words in the text. The soloist has the freedom to shape the vocal line, while the orchestra plays a subordinate role.

In *recitativo obbligato* the solo line is frequently energized by measures of string tremolo, combined occasionally with short orchestral motives or harmonic sequences. Verdi most often uses those techniques in moments of heightened emotion. The subtle interaction between orchestral textures and soloist demands the presence of a defined, albeit flexible, metrical pulse.

A type of writing that falls between the categories of *semplice* and *obbligato* is when the solo line appears with regularly organized harmonic sequences, most often chords in half or whole notes in the accompaniment. Verdi occasionally adds the indication *col canto* in the orchestral parts to remind the conductor to share his leading responsibilities with those of the singer.

Parlante armonico is characterized by more elaborated orchestral texture and phrases of regular length. The distinction between *recitativo obbligato* and *parlante armonico* is not always clear, but as the orchestra becomes more active, its dramatic role increases significantly and the conductor naturally assumes the lead. In all forms of *parlante*, the solo line is more dependent on the regular pulse of the accompaniment.

Parlante melodico is a category that appears in recitatives more rarely. In it the voice either doubles the orchestral melody or imitates it in short *arioso*-like phrases. The expression of the solo line must be coordinated with the melody in the orchestra.

Conducting Verdi's Recitative

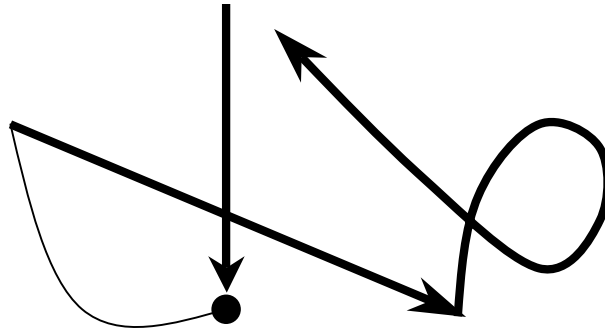
The first six measures of *Pari Siamo* present a good example of *recitativo semplice* with a free, largely unaccompanied, vocal line. The two orchestral chords in measures 3 and 5 put a dramatic emphasis on two important clashing words: Sparafucile's dagger, "*il pugnale*" and the jester's laughter. However, the second chord that comes at the end of word "*ride*" ("The man I am who laughs") has a larger dramatic meaning. It is represented by E-major and an accented quarter note, which interrupts Rigoletto's thought. It is as if the apparition of E-major – Gilda's key – brings the fear in Rigoletto's mind and the next phrase after the short chord is usually sung hushed, almost whispered. Both times the verb *ridere* appears in the recitative—the second time

being in measure 26 with the G-flat—the orchestra creates dramatic tension, intentionally opposed to the meaning of the word.

When Verdi gives freedom to the singer to shape the solo line the conductor has to assume the role of passive accompanist. In the first two measures the solo line is unaccompanied and the conductor should mark the first beats only with a downward motion from the wrist. It is better to do that in the tempo of the vocal line, since slow *semplice* recitatives usually have a relatively steady rhythm. The chord in the 3rd measure, as well as the solo line, has a big accent and the soloist might slightly extend the half note on “*pugnale*.” After showing the first beat of the chord with an energetic downward motion, the hand stops at the conducting surface without making a rebound, as if holding the sound of a fermata. A fast, energetic cutoff of the 1st type is given with the left hand only, as if cutting a fermata, immediately after the soloist sings the second note of the measure. After that the wrist of the right hand is lifted to mark directly the next empty measure.

The first beat of measure five is marked from the wrist only, after which the hand should stop. In accordance with Musin’s advice, when an accented chord comes after numerous rests the hand should stop at the beat that precedes the preparation for the chord. In this case, the chord comes on the third beat. The preparation therefore will be the second beat and the hand must thus stop after the first. This can be graphically represented as follows:

Figure 5.1



As seen from Figure 5.1, the quick rebound, always suggested by Musin after a short chord, flows naturally into the marking movement for the fourth beat. The orchestra is not playing in the following measure and the hand simply marks only the first beat with a downward motion from the wrist.

Measures 7 to 11 present a short orchestral interlude that comes after the words “*Uomo son io che ride, ci quel che spegne!*” (“The man I am who laughs, he, the one who kills”). We observed a similar compositional technique in Bellini’s recitative from *Il Pirata*, but there the orchestra was mostly contributing to the general mood by capturing the emotion of the character; in other words, it did not contribute significantly to the psychological action. This is not the case in Verdi. Those four and a half measures are the connective tissue in the music between the above quoted words and Rigoletto’s brooding utterance “*Quel vecchio maledivami*” (“The old man cursed me”). And again, if not interpreted with a deeper insight, the repetitive chromatic sequences with rests in between become a dull orchestral filling with no dramatic purpose. What did Verdi have in mind? One can only guess, but the clues are many. In his article *Verdi and the Musical Figure of Death*, Frits Noske observes in great detail how Verdi, often in his operas, uses this particular rhythm of four equal short notes and a slightly longer one as a symbol, a

premonition of death.¹⁴⁴ The examples are many, and the string accompaniment in the following excerpt of the final scene of *Rigoletto* is no exception (Musical Example 5.1). This is the moment, in which the jester realizes that the victim of his *veddetta* has not been the Duke:

Musical Example 5.1 Verdi, *Rigoletto*, Act 3

Rigoletto (taglia il sacco)

Chi è mai, chi è quin sua ve - ce?.. Io tre - mo...

Viol. *p*

V-la *p*

Vc. *p*

Cb. *p*

Moderato ♩ = 100

In measures 7 – 10 of *Pari Siamo* Verdi has used what Noske isolates as a typical motive – or *topos*, as he calls it – of repeated notes, conveying the same symbolic interpretation. The *topos* appears exactly four times and is stripped of any feeling of tonal center or melodic line. What the listener perceives as the motive’s main element is its rhythm. In addition, it is introduced after the word “*spegne*” (the Italian verb *spegnere* here is translated as *to kill* and refers to Rigoletto’s description of Sparafucile). As one can observe, a short orchestral interlude in Verdi can reveal ideas not even mentioned in the text. Such dramatic complexity has no earlier analogue in opera.

¹⁴⁴ Frits R. Noske, "Verdi and the Musical Figure of Death," in *Atti Del III Congresso Internazionale Di Studi Verdiani: Il Teatro e La Musica Di Giuseppe Verdi 3*, (1974), 349.

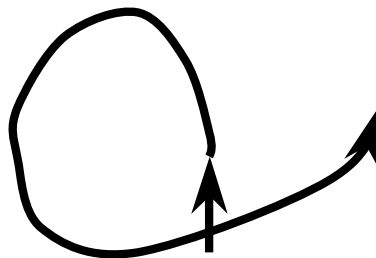
For the effect of this motive to come through and carry the impact Verdi had in mind, the conductor must take into consideration several things. First, the rhythm can come through clearly only if measures 7 to 11 are conducted with a strict pulse. Second, although the tempo is marked *Adagio*, the energy of the rhythm is lost if the tempo is too slow. As Verdi has advised a fellow conductor, “it is better to err on the fast side than to be too slow.” A tempo of ♩ = 60 is perfectly justified given the dramatic purposes of this section. Third, the longer note in this type of motive, as Noske observes, is not only longest but also stressed. At the same time – and fourth – the longer note will be more effective if this stress is kept slight and fades out into the second beat. (The second type of Musin’s cutoffs is very appropriate here: the conductor shows a more emphatic second beat, which signals the stop of the sound.) Finally, the slurs in the music indicate the bowing of the string section (all notes in one bow), but the short notes must be well articulated.

The rests in measures 11 are properly marked with linear motions in the previous tempo. At the end of measure 11 Rigoletto enters with the signature *Maledizione* motive, a motive that has already appeared at the beginning of the duet with Sparafucile. As Cormac Newark observes in his article on Rigoletto published in *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, the motive appears in the music “to represent Rigoletto’s brooding personality as much as the curse itself.”¹⁴⁵ The conductor should mark only the first beat of measure 12 and then let the singer shape this slow, ominous phrase. The orchestral chord in measure 13 should be shown with an inverted beat that will, first, help avoid the unnecessary accent and, second, help achieve good ensemble coordination without the need of emphatic preparation for the chord. Here is how this can be

¹⁴⁵ Cormac Newark, “*Ch’Hai Di Nuovo, Buffon? Or what’s New with Rigoletto*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, ed. Scott L. Balthazar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 200. See also Joseph Kerman, “Verdi’s Use of Recurring Themes,” in Harold S. Powers (ed.), *Studies in Music History: Essays for Oliver Strunk* (Princeton University Press, 1968), 494 – 510.

performed technically: After marking the first beat of measure 12, the hand stops at the conducting surface and is gently lifted around the second half of the measure. Then, before the last eighth note of the solo line, it starts going down with a floating motion. At the very moment after Rigoletto sings the last eighth note of measure 12, the hand is already close to the conducting surface and simply “lifts” the next beat, thus showing the chord entrance. Exactly the same technique can be used for the chord in the next measure. The conductor can choose whether to mark the beats in measure 13 or not and this decision also depends on the degree of freedom that the soloist would prefer. After showing the entrance of the chord in measure 14 with an inverted beat, the hand simply continues the motion up, which flows into a gentle cutoff of the first type, intended to show a fading sound (Figure 5.2). Since the chord occupies the first two beats of the measure, the cutoff, as Musin advises, is performed in the direction of the third beat.

Figure 5.2



After the cutoff the hand must completely stop: Verdi has indicated a *fermata* on the following half rest. If the conductor wishes, the cutoff can be performed with the left hand only.

The next section – *Allegro* (measures 15 – 24) – is an example of a typical *recitativo obbligato*. As in the example from Bellini’s *Il Pirata* in Chapter 4, Verdi in this section of *Rigoletto* often switches the main focus in the music from the soloist to the orchestra. The more complex musical texture requires a steadier rhythmical delivery from the singer and the conductor should mark the beats of the tremolo with linear motions in the tempo of the solo line. The change of harmony in measure 17 requires an active upbeat. Measure 20 needs to be approached with care. The C-flat on “*rabia*” is usually held longer and the conductor can mark the entire measure with faster anticipated motions. The hand stops after the 3rd beat to give an active preparation for the next measure immediately after Rigoletto sings “*esser.*” In that way, the last sixteenth note in the solo part of measure 20 (“*DIF- for- me*”) will be easily coordinated with the conductor. Measures 22 and 23 are conducted in the exactly same manner as measures 20 and 21.

Measures 24 and 25 present a free solo line without accompaniment, which leads to the *Adagio* section in m. 26. Callas’ advice, quoted in Chapter 3, should be remembered here: always think the tempo change as if it occurs one measure before the actual change. The conductor must let the singer shape the line freely; the rests in measure 24 are marked with linear motions from the wrist, and in measure 25 it is sufficient to mark the first beat only.

The first chord of the *Adagio* section has been discussed earlier in the chapter, but in order to achieve a soft, unaccented attack in the strings, the best technical way to show the entrance of the chord is, again, through an inverted beat, with no emphatic preparation. It is the same technique suggested above for the *Maledizione* motive. Verdi indicates *legato* markings above the solo line in this section and the length of the phrases in combination with the slower tempo implies an *arioso*-like delivery with a steadier rhythm. As a result, the passive beat

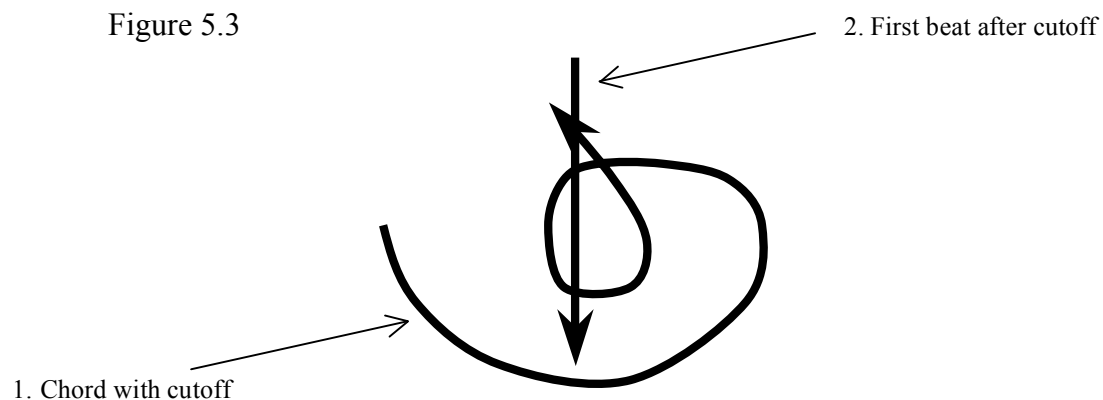
marking can be replaced with a more active, subtle gesture. The B-flat chord in measure 28 can be marked with a downward motion on the first beat only. The right hand stops at the conducting surface right after the downward motion for the first beat and the left hand performs a gentle cutoff of the first type in the direction of the 3rd beat. The strings can be previously warned to fade out the sound. The next phrase (measure 29) is dramatically expressive and the singer should be given the necessary amount of freedom. The best way to approach this measure is to mark the first two beats in tempo, then show the entrance of the chord on the third beat and stop the hand. The preparation for the next measure is given with the expressive eighth note in the solo line at the end of measure 29. This eighth note is usually sung *tenuto* and will give enough time to the conductor for a precise upbeat for the following *Moderato*.

The *Moderato* section from measure 30 to measure 37 is a classical example of *parlante armonico*: the orchestra has a simple thematic material and the declamation of the solo part is interwoven with the regular phrase lengths of the instrumental accompaniment. This section does not present any specific technical difficulties for the conductor. The pulse of *parlante* is usually steadier than the one of *recitativo semplice* and *obbligato* and the conductor simply needs to keep a steady, clear beat.

Rigoletto's sarcasm when describing his relationship with the Duke in measures 38 – 40 is presented with no accompaniment and a free solo line. Measures 38 and 39 only need to be marked, and towards the end of the G-flat on “*deggio*” in measure 39, which is usually sung with a short *fermata*, the conductor needs to give an active upbeat for the D-flat tremolo in the first violins in measure 40. The first 3 beats of measure 40 are then marked with anticipated, quicker motions from the wrist and the hand stops after the third beat. The upbeat for the *tutti*

entrance in *Allegro* is given from this position right after the soloist attacks the second D-flat of measure 40, the eighth note of “*dannazione*.”

The regular phrase lengths in *Allegro* (measures 41 – 49) suggest a *parlante armonico* texture with a steady pulse. The conductor should let the singer shape his line *con tutta forza* in measures 49 – 50 by only marking the first beats. After marking the first beat on measure 50 the hand is lifted –as Musin suggests- and waits at the top, before showing an active first beat in measure 51 that will serve as preparation for the heavy *tutti* chords on the second, third, and fourth beat. This measure is traditionally conducted slower than the preceding *Allegro*. Verdi marks accents on every beat and the strings use three equal down bows. A short *caesura* is necessary before the solo flute entrance in the first measure of the *Andante*, in order to give enough time to the *tutti* sound to resonate without stifling the *pianissimo* of the flute. Technically this can be achieved in the following way: After the first beat of measure 51 all three chords can be shown with three equal rounded gestures to the right, imitating the down bows of the strings. The conductor should not worry about the clarity of the beat pattern at this moment, since the entire orchestra is playing and nobody practically counts rests. Then, the last chord is cut off in the following way:



This cutoff will secure the necessary time for reverberation of the last *tutti* chord as well as the necessary *caesura* before the flute entrance. The first beat after the cutoff indicates the solo entrance of the flute and it does not need to be too active; a gentle downward motion of the hand after the energetic cutoff, as shown in the figure above, will suffice.

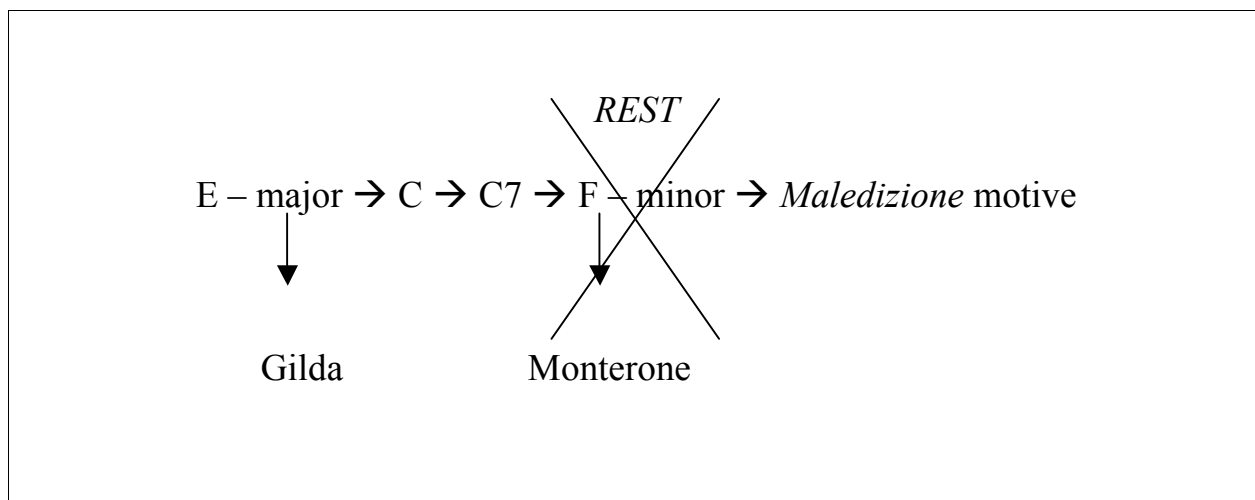
The *Andante* section (measures 52 -57) is a very brief *arioso*, in which the solo line imitates the short flute melody. The only concern for the conductor should be to keep the flowing quality of the music, since the expressive melody usually tempts conductors to go slower than needed, creating difficulties for the singer.

Rigoletto's tender revelation is cut short by a long rest in measure 58. This emphatic rest, like almost every important musical gesture in Verdi, has a dramatic explanation. It is therefore essential to understand what precedes it. The E-major of the tender *ariso* shifts towards C-major, which sounds just before the rest, and, with the very last eighth note of measure 57 becomes a dominant seventh chord. So, from E-major, Gilda's key, through one single chord, Verdi could have taken the music to F-minor, the key of Monterone's fate. But he doesn't. And this is what makes the rest so dramatically powerful. It is not what Verdi's music tells us, but what it hides from us that gives it a deep dramatic meaning. It all happens in Rigoletto's head, where the thought of F-minor, of sharing Monterone's fate is too painful to bear. It is crawling into his mind, but he stops it. And this is why Verdi interrupts the orchestra. It is this internal struggle that introduces the last *Allegro* section with the words "*Tal pensiero, perché conturba ognor la mente mia?*" ("That thought, why does it trouble always my mind?").

Rigoletto's fears are awakened, only to prepare dramatically the appearance of the *Maledizione* motive in measure 58. It is the same motive that we have already observed in measures 12–14. However, there is one important difference that can be easily missed. The

eighth notes in the dotted rhythm of the two previous “*Quel vecchio maledivami!*” – one in the duet with Sparafucile, the other, in the above mentioned measures of *Pari Siamo* – have now become sixteenth notes, giving the *Maledizione* motive the same level of urgency with which it appeared at the very beginning of the Prelude to the opera. It is the first time in Act I when Rigoletto finally realizes the form that the curse might take. The motive is not a vague musical reminiscence anymore; it becomes a direct expression of the jester’s fears. Here is how Verdi achieves this musically:

Table 5.2 The “hidden” F-minor, measures 55 - 60



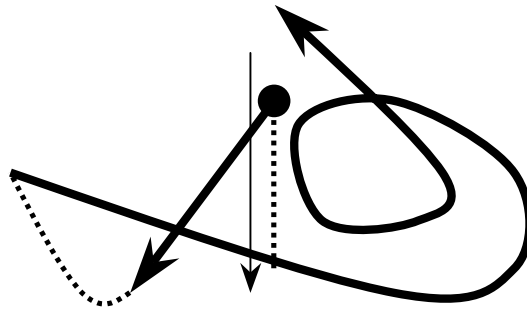
How can all this be translated into conducting technique? The *Maledizione* motive is conducted as before (see measures 11–14). The only difference is that the cutoff after in measure 61 should be given a little earlier: Verdi indicates quarter note instead of a half note (compare to measure 14).

The last section, *Allegro* (measures 62–68) is another example of *recitativo obbligato* with a more irregular musical structure than the one already observed in *parlante*. It is interesting to observe how the more overwhelmed Rigoletto becomes, the more erratic his phrases tend to be, which results in a type of writing closer to the 18th century *accompagnato*.

The upbeat for the *Allegro* in measure 62 is given at the exact moment when the singer attacks the first of the two eighth notes at the end of measure 61. In measures 62 and 63 the conductor needs to give an emphatic first beat that serves as preparation for the short motive in cellos and basses. Third and fourth beat of measure 62 can be simply marked. A keen ear is kept on the singer, allowing him to shape his phrase, while the *tremolo* chord is sustained by the upper strings. Measure 64 is prepared with an active upbeat. A cutoff of the half note unison on F is needed at the end of this measure and it is performed in the same way as the cutoff shown in the figure above for the last chord of measure 51. Measure 65 is marked with a downward motion of the hand only. The last three measures present a challenge, since the vocal line is freely mixed with short chords and a variation of the “death motive” from measure 7 right after Rigoletto sings “*Mi coglierà sventura?*” (“Will misfortune strike me?”).

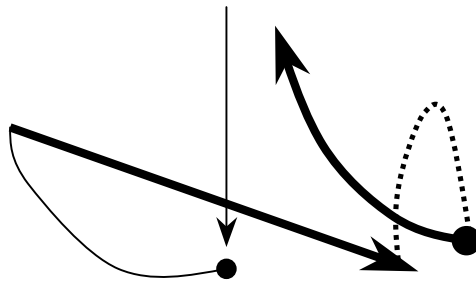
After marking the first beat of measure 66 with a downward motion from the wrist, the hand is gently lifted and stops its motion. From this position it gives a strong, accented second beat that serves as preparation for the “death motive” (Figure 5.4) The cutoff at the end of the measure is executed as the cutoff in measure 64 (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.4



After the cutoff, the hand marks the next first beat immediately and stops at the level of the conducting surface, as shown on Figure 5.5. To show the chord on the third beat, the same technique as the one explained earlier in relation to measure 5 is applied and then repeated for measure 68. In measure 68, however, the hand, after making a quick rebound on the third beat for the short chord, must stop and be prepared to give the upbeat for the ensuing *Allegro vivo*.

Figure 5.5



The technical methods from Musin's treatise are a necessary conducting tool for the successful presentation of any recitative. But as we have already observed, Verdi's recitative presents a substantial interpretive challenge, for which definitive set of rules cannot be formulated. The interpretation, instead, needs to consider the unprecedented complexity of

Verdi's personages, which, as Tito Gobbi describes, "grow and develop and are not just sketched *alla brava* and defined in one scene."¹⁴⁶ Gobbi was one of the greatest Italian baritones of all times and his profound understanding of Verdi's style was revealed in depth in his book *Tito Gobbi on His World of Italian Opera*. A final quote from it can serve as an important summary for the ideas developed in this chapter. Gobbi's inspired words reveal an interpretive approach that can also become an impulse for further thoughts on the unique dramatic power of Verdi's operatic style:

Verdi's recitatives are extremely expressive, from the early operas onwards, for he soon realized the necessity of ennobling the musical content of this element. . . . Verdi has imagined, described and sung everything. It is for the performer only to shed light of devoted interpretation upon those treasures entrusted to him. All the aspects of *Rigoletto* are real and believable. Look only for the human reason, following the thoughts which change and develop in his mind; live and suffer with him during the immense tragedy – and you will make your audience extend their power to live and suffer too.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Gobbi, 145.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

This study has considered the special problems that conductors and singers confront when presenting Italian opera recitatives from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By its nature the study is not of a type that reaches a conclusion that is readily summarized. Instead, its aim is to offer some comments, make reference to historical practices, describe performance options, and, in general, to help conductors understand the peculiarities of opera recitatives. Still, a number of concluding comments might usefully draw the material together and identify broader implications.

An overriding point of emphasis is that recitatives deserve careful attention. In arias the voice is supreme and the orchestra's supporting role is carefully prescribed. Of course attention must be paid to the character that the singer portrays and to the emotional content of the music. But the range of relevant considerations and interpretive options is relatively narrow. The case of the recitative is quite different. Performances, as a result, more often fall short of standards implicit in the drama and the music.

Perhaps the most immediate pitfall of singers in the case of 18th century recitatives is to follow notation too strictly. While notation is certainly more than suggestive, it requires performers to step forward and play a leading interpretive role. In contrast, recitatives from the Romantic era require somewhat stricter compliance with composer's musical indications. 18th century recitatives play key roles in moving the drama along, while preserving the absolute supremacy of the text. As Romantic impulses gained ascendancy, the music itself gained independent power. Early Romantic composers infused their recitatives with lyrical expression, but it was Verdi who mixed music and voice so successfully in recitatives that they could serve a

much larger array of dramatic functions. In his hands the recitative could compete with, and at times supplant, the aria in presenting emotionally dramatic situations.

Conductors and performers, as they study and prepare scores, need to be alert to the evolving forms and functions of recitatives in 18th and 19 century Italian operas. Musical notation can have different meanings at different times and in the hands of different performers. It is essential to recognize these differences and to look deeper into the score for interpretive clues.

The Italian opera recitative reaches its dramatic culmination in Verdi's late operas. No further development of any dramatic value can be traced in the operas of Puccini, Cilea, Mascagni, Giordano and Leoncavallo, the five most well known composers of the *Verismo* movement. The term *recitativo* disappears as post-Verdi generation of Italian opera composers start using the term *col canto*, which, translated literally, means "with the voice" and usually suggests a freer vocal line that approaches a *recitativo* or, if the orchestra is more active, *parlante* type of writing, of which, for instance, Musetta's prayer from the forth act of Puccini's *La Bohème* presents a typical example.

Much of this study has gone beyond interpretive issues and choices to consider the specific conducting techniques that conductors might best employ. The study began with a lengthy presentation of the conducting techniques recommended by a legendary Russian conducting teacher, Ilya Musin. Musin's text is one of the few conducting books that addresses recitative conducting directly. His teachings and this treatise in particular exerted considerable influence on more than a generation of Russian conductors. Musin's book on conducting, however, has never before been translated into English (or, except for a translation into

Bulgarian, into any other language). This study includes the chapter from his treatise dealing with recitative conducting as well as selected excerpts from other chapters in his book.

A careful study of Musin's techniques can help a conductor master the art of opera accompaniment, while carrying out the musical and dramatic visions of the composer. When that is done, recitatives take on the important roles that they can have in Italian operas, enhancing the quality of the overall performance and adding significantly to the musical experiences of audiences.

APPENDIX A

FULL SCORE OF *E SUSANNA NON VIEN* FROM
LE NOZZE DI FIGARO BY W. A. MOZART

Scena VIII

LA CONTESSA sola.

Nº 20 Recitativo ed Aria

Recitativo
Andante

Oboe I, II

Fagotto I, II

*Corno I, II
in D^o/C*

Violino I

Violino II

Viola I, II

LA CONTESSA
E Su-san - na non vien! so - no an-sio - sa di sa - per co-me il Con - te ac -

*Continuo
(Cembalo,
Violoncello)*

*Violoncello
e Basso*

4

V. I

V. II

Va.

La C.

Vc. e B.

col-se la pro-po-sta. Al-quan-to ar-di-to il pro-get-to mi par, e ad u-no spo-so si vi-

8

Allegretto

Andante

V. I

V. II

Va.

La C.

Vc. e B.

va-ce, e ge-lo-so! Ma che mal c'è? can-gian-do i miei ve-sti-ti con quel-li di Su-

f *f* *p*

12

V. I. *p* *fp* *fp*

V. II. *p* *fp* *fp*

Va. *p* *fp* *fp*

La C. *p* *sfp* *sfp*

san-na, ei suo i co'mie-i... al fa-vor del-la not-te... oh cie-lo, a qual u-mil sta-to fa-ta-le

Vc. e B. *p* *sfp* *sfp*

16

V. I. *f*

V. II. *f*

Va. *f*

La C. *f*

io son ri-dot-ta da un con-sor-te cru-del, che do-po a-ver-mi con un mi-sto in-au-di-to d'in-fe-del-

Vc. e B. *f*

APPENDIX B

FULL SCORE OF *PARI SIAMO* FROM

RIGOLETTO BY GIUSEPPE VERDI

1

Adagio
(guardando dietro a Sparafucile)

Recit.

RIGOLETTO

Pa-ri sia-mol. io la lingua, e-gli ha il pu-gna-le; l'uo-mo son io che ri-de,

Violini

Viola

Violoncelli

Contrabbassi

Tutte

Tutti

Tutti

Adagio

R. ei quel che spe-gnet!..

Viol. *pp*

V-le *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Cb. *pp*

11

15

Clar. in Sib *morendo*

Fag. *morendo*

R. Quel vec-chio ma-le - di - va - mi!.. O uo-mi-ni! o na -

Viol. *pp*

V-le *morendo* *pp*

Vc. *morendo* *pp*

Cb. *morendo* *pp*

Allegro ♩ = 120

17

R. *- tu - ra! vil scel - le - ra - to mi fa - ce - ste vo - il.. Oh*

Viol.

V-le

Vc.

Cb.

20

R. *rab - bia! es - ser dif - for - me! oh rab - bia! es - ser buf -*

Viol.

V-le

Vc.

Cb.

23

Musical score for measures 23-25. The vocal line (R.) is in bass clef with lyrics: "- fo - ne!.. Non do - ver, non po - ter al - tro che". The instrumental accompaniment includes Violin (Viol.), Viola (V-le), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.).

26

Musical score for measures 26-28. The tempo is marked "Adagio". The vocal line (R.) has lyrics: "ri - de - rel.. Il re - tag - gio d'o - gni uom mè tol - to... il pian -". The instrumental accompaniment includes Violin (Viol.), Viola (V-le), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.), all marked with *pp* (pianissimo).

30

Moderato

Clar. in Sib

R.

Viol.

V-le

Vc.

Cb.

I.

pp

-tol..

Questo pa-dro-ne

pizz.

pizz.

pizz.

Moderato

34

Clar. I. in Sib

R.

V-le

Vc.

Cb.

mi-o, gio-vin, gio-con-do, si pos-sen-te, bel-lo, son-ne-chian-do mi

37

Clar. I.
in Si

R.

di - ce: fa ch'io ri - da, buf - fo - ne... For - zar - mi deg - gio e far - lo! Oh, dan - na -

tutta forza

Viol. II.

V. le

Vc.

Cb.

Allegro ♩ = 120

Fl. *ff*

Ott. *ff*

Ob. *ff*

Clar. in Sib *ff*

Fag. *ff*

Corni in Fa *ff*

Corni in Do *ff*

Trbe in Do *ff*

Trbri *ff*

Cimb. *ff*

R. *con forza*
- zio - - - ne! O - dio a - vo - i, cor - ti - gia - ni - scher - ni -

Viol. *ff*

V-le *arco ff*

Vc. *arco ff*

Cb. *arco ff*

Allegro ♩ = 120

to-ri.. quan-tain mor-der-vi ho gio-ial.. Se i-ni-quo son,

R.
Viol.
V-le
Vc.
Cb.

The musical score for page 44 consists of five staves. The top staff is for the voice (R.), with lyrics: "to-ri.. quan-tain mor-der-vi ho gio-ial.. Se i-ni-quo son,". The voice line is in a bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. The accompaniment includes Violin (Viol.), Viola (V-le), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.). The Violin and Viola parts are in treble clef, while the Violoncello and Contrabasso parts are in bass clef. The key signature is one flat, and the time signature is 3/4. The score shows a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment with various instruments.

49

52

⑧ Andante $\text{♩} = 72$

Fl.

Ott.

Ob.

Clar.
in Sib

Fag.

in Fa
Corni
in Do

Tr^{be}
in Do

Tr^{bni}

Cimb.

R.

tutta forza

per ca-gion vo-stra è so - - lo...

Viol.

Vle

Vc.

Cb.

pp dolce

pp

pp

pp

pp

⑧ Andante $\text{♩} = 72$

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score, likely for a symphony or opera. It covers measures 49 to 52. The score is written for a large orchestra and a solo voice (R.). The instruments listed on the left are Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ott.), Clarinet in Si Basso (Clar. in Sib), Bassoon (Fag.), Horns in F and D (in Fa Corni in Do), Trumpets in D (Tr^{be} in Do), Trombones (Tr^{bni}), Cymbals (Cimb.), and Voice (R.). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The tempo is marked 'Andante' with a metronome marking of quarter note = 72. Measure 49 starts with a double bar line and a repeat sign. In measure 50, the woodwinds and strings enter with a rhythmic pattern. In measure 51, the voice enters with the lyrics 'per ca-gion vo-stra è so - - lo...'. In measure 52, the woodwinds and strings play a sustained chord, with dynamics marked 'pp' (pianissimo). The word 'pp dolce' is written above the woodwind staves in measure 52. The score ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

55

Fl.

R.

Ma - in al - tr'uo - mo qui mi can - gio! Quel vec - chio ma - le -

Viol.

V-le

Vc.

Cb.

pp

60

62

Clar. in Sib

Fag.

R.

- di - va - mi... Tal pen - ste - ro per - chè con - tur - ba o - gnor la men - te

Viol.

V-le

Vc.

Cb.

morendo

Allegro ♩ = 120

in Do

ppp

ppp

ppp

p

Allegro ♩ = 120

ru

R. mi-a?.. Mi coglierà sven-tu-ra?.. Ah no: è fol-li - -

Viol.

V.le

Vc.

Cb.

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