

An aural analysis of bel canto:

Traditions and interpretations

as preserved through selected sound recordings

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1 Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Origins of bel canto

The principal aim of the thesis is to examine aurally aspects of bel canto operatic style and traditions. In this sense bel canto refers to a style of singing in which the melodic line is ornamented and varied. The thesis aims to describe how the traditional techniques of improvisation and ornamentation of the melodic line have been preserved for future generations.

Bel canto was popular in Italy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It had its origins in the seventeenth century in the castrati, a virtuoso class of opera singers who had considerable influence on the development of opera. As they had intense musical education, many became the main teachers of the florid and elaborate style of singing identified with bel canto, and tended to be authors of singing treatises.

The early operas were only performed briefly after they were written, and much less frequently since the end of the era and the demise of the castrati circa 1860. Consequently, the only means of passing on bel canto traditions was through performance, teaching and media reviews. Press reviews provide an opportunity to trace major performances of many operas long after their early productions, because they have been published frequently during the last two centuries.

An example of a writer of such press reviews is Leanne Langley, a journalist for *Periodica Musica* which reviews Italian opera and the English press. She outlines musical highlights and events of London's opera history in the period 1836-1856. At this time, there was a proliferation of opera writers who wrote reviews in the press. At least sixteen journals reviewed current opera productions of the period in London and wrote something of relevance to the subject of Italian opera, but little about bel canto tradition and techniques.¹ Langley writes that most periodicals in nineteenth century Britain were not concerned with opera, which was treated less than would be expected. Opera going remained a society occasion, a pleasure for the few. Operatic affairs and trends were reviewed more than individual works, and many magazines adopted a light-hearted approach to opera.²

¹ Leanne Langley. 'Italian Opera and the English Press' in *Periodica Musica*. Vol.VI. (1990). p. 3.

² Leanne Langley. *op. cit*, p. 4.

Author attribution for columns in the press is more difficult, as reviewers were often unnamed. Many London papers encouraged a pool of freelance writers moving about among them, as common practice. Only four of fifteen musical or professional writers classed music journalism as their chief occupation: George Hogarth (1783-1870), Edward Holmes (1788-1859), Henry Fothergill Chorley (1808-1872) and James William Davison (1813-1885).³ Hogarth and Holmes both had opera writings appearing in several musical journals, while Chorley and Davison, though the most conspicuous, were not necessarily the most articulate of London's early Victorian musical writers. Davison served on *The Times* (1846-1879) and Chorley maintained an almost exclusive connection with the *Athenaeum* from 1834-1868.

Regarding the critical content of their material, clearly a central topic in all English writing about opera was 'singing'.⁴ Audiences were drawn by the singers of Italian opera, not the music. Langley comments that the term 'writing on opera' as opposed to 'opera criticism', was more appropriate to describe these journalists.⁵ The focus of these articles tended to be on executive skill, power, ensemble, dramatic expression, passion and staging, rather than on analytical discussions or description of the vocal techniques used. Writers measured the achievements of the performance in light of artistic aims rather than isolated musical techniques. Langley maintains that this was the way of journalism in the nineteenth century and the way contemporary English listeners of this era responded to Italian opera.⁶

An influential voice for 35 years, Chorley was well-connected with the press. His weekly contributions carried strong opinions on the performance of opera in the Bellini and Donizetti era and he did not miss (as far as he was aware) any new work or first performance which took place in London.⁷ His reviews provided evidence of some critical comment, but contained very little specific detail about the use of bel canto techniques. From Chorley, we read of the year 1835:

Only by reference to some sympathies can the merit of Bellini, and the reason for his popularity, be judged aright. It is true that ... certain passages in *Norma* ... prove that he could be distinct and forcible; and, by his force, bind his singers, as well as be obliged to them, in his gentleness. Then, that Bellini

³ Leanne Langley. *op cit.*, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 10.

⁷ Henry Fothergill Chorley. *Thirty Years' recollections*. Vols. 1 and 2. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862. Vol. 1. p. 78.

could be originally [lively] ... remains to prove. He might, if life had been spared to him, have arrived at a greater versatility than his early efforts promised. ⁸

The warbling of the flute of the prelude to 'Casta Diva', Norma's favourite song, could not well be poorer, nor further apart from any idea of such support to the vocal prayer of the Druid Priestess to her Goddess, as the hearer naturally expects in our days. ⁹

... Bellini was picturesque ... [his genius] included appreciation of truth, no less than instinct for beauty. And for this, I fancy, he will be long set apart from the superficial and ephemeral ... ¹⁰

In the above extract, Chorley refers to the time following the first performance of *I Puritani* in January 1835. Subsequently, Bellini wrote to his publisher at Milan, giving an interesting illustration of his own character, and taking a strong stance about his power of musical writing. Bellini said 'he did not care to produce [music] hastily', nor 'to be paid exorbitantly', but that 'he sought to enrich his alphabet of expression ... in proportion as he was successful, [as] he had within him, the material of which a real artist is made' ¹¹

Despite Chorley's work, there was a dearth of writers describing the art of bel canto itself. The Kings Theatre (later known as Her Majesty's Theatre) and the Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden Theatre, provided performances of Italian opera, but limited reviews in the press focussed on the operatic production as a whole. Only a few reports made reference to bel canto techniques, as illustrated in *The Times*:

Hitherto the weight of *L'Elisir* has rested on the part of Nemorino, and his 'Una furtiva lagrima' ... has somewhat thrown into the shade the haughty beauty, Adina. With the present version and with Mademoiselle Jenny Lind as her representative, Adina rises into new importance in the second act ... Mademoiselle Lind made such a display of vocalisation that she took her audience completely by surprise. Up to this point she had reserved her power, but here the most striking peculiarities of her singing –

⁸ Henry Fothergill Chorley, p. 100.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 101.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 101-102.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 102.

the inimitable shake, the charming pianissimo, the feats of execution – were all concentrated in one focus.¹²

And from The Royal Italian Opera, *The Times* reports:

The Theatre opened last night with the always popular *Norma* ... it was in *Norma* that the superb voice of Madame Vilda first won the sympathies of an English audience ... her reputation, according to unanimous opinion, was mainly due to her success in Bellini's opera and Donizetti's *Lucretia Borgia*.¹³

Many reports often denigrated inferior parts of the opera or its performance and its singers. As can be seen from Chorley's words above, they were frank in their criticisms. Rarely were the techniques of bel canto discussed. The reviewer from Her Majesty's Theatre made some attempt to comment on Lind's techniques, but the other report gave no specific detail of bel canto aspects:

Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835), Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) and Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868) were the chief exponents of nineteenth century bel canto opera. Both Donizetti and Bellini arias were predominant on the concert platform of the era (1818-1848).¹⁴ Apart from the full scale opera productions, most singers also gave recitals of famous and popular arias from the operas.

Despite media interest in Italian opera, the bel canto tradition appeared to decline towards the end of the nineteenth century as is reflected by Osborne, who has made it clear that, although the more popular operas were still being performed at the turn of the nineteenth century, they were performed less and less.¹⁵

¹² Review: Her Majesty's Theatre. *The Times*. (Friday June 9 1848.), p. 6. Issue 1985, col. C.

¹³ Review: The Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden. *The Times*. (Wednesday 3 April 1867), p. 9. Issue 25775. Col F.

¹⁴The era 1818 to 1848 spans the period in which Donizetti composed operas: his first opera being *Enrico de Borgogna*, 14 November 1818, his last finished opera being *Catarina Cornaro* 1844. His death in 1848 marked an end to operatic works of this genre.

¹⁵ Charles Osborne. *The Bel Canto Operas of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini*. Amadeus Press: Portland, Oregon, 1996. p. 2.

Osborne's book, *The Bel Canto Operas of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini*, was dedicated to 'Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngé, beloved twentieth century keepers of the bel canto flame.'¹⁶ That he felt it necessary to credit Sutherland and Bonyngé in this way provokes interesting questions. One such question might be 'was the bel canto flame or tradition in danger of extinction and in need of nurturing and protection during the twentieth century?' Many would agree with this statement. Indeed, it is a relevant observation which underlies the fact that many bel canto operas had not been performed very much from the end of the nineteenth century until the 1950s. However, many other singers and conductors besides Sutherland and Bonyngé were responsible for passing on the bel canto tradition. In addition, sound recordings as well as live performances contributed significantly as a medium of transmission and preservation.

With the advent of sound recordings about 1902, a renewed interest in opera was developed. Changes in culture at this time made sound recordings much more accessible for ordinary people. The period 1900-1920 was one of austerity. Although there were still many theatres in the world giving operatic performances, people living at this time, particularly during World War I, stayed at home in their parlours to listen to sound recordings of opera on the newly invented gramophones. Enrico Caruso (1873-1921) made the first recordings in 1902 under Gaisberg, and these were sought after for parlour listening. Other singers followed. Dame Nellie Melba (1861-1931) recognized the possibilities of the gramophone, but, unlike Caruso, would have nothing to do with it for a long time. Ultimately she allowed her recordings to be published from 1904. In a letter to the journal *The Musical Times*,¹⁷ Melba wrote:

Sir ... It has been a pleasure to note almost everywhere a quickening of musical appreciation. Today there are gratifying signs that the British audience begins to hear as well as listen; ... Yet, mainly, so it seems to me, the secret of this new interest is to be found in the astonishing enlargement of the audience for music accomplished by the gramophone and broadcasting. Although I believe I was the first prima donna to make a gramophone record and the first to broadcast, I have, while recognising the possibilities of these devices, never accepted either of them uncritically, and I am well aware of the flaws ... But just as I have followed the gradual perfecting of the gramophone, so I think we may look forward to improvements in wireless. Broadcasting and the gramophone are certainly the two most eloquent missionaries to the musical heathen in our midst.

Yours &c. 5 Chesham Place, SW1 March 1 1926

Nellie Melba

¹⁶ Charles Osborne. *op. cit.* Frontispiece.

¹⁷ Nellie Melba. Letter to the Editor in *The Musical Times*. (1 March 1926), p. 259.

Thereafter, with the Gramophone and Typewriter Co. London, recordings boomed. The gramophone has preserved the great voices of this generation and their vocal techniques. However, significant historical events from 1900-1950 acted as inhibiting factors in the staging of the operas. These were World War I, the Spanish influenza pandemic, the Depression of the 1930s and World War II. During this period there were fewer operas performed¹⁸ and less money available to promote and stage them, and to encourage new singers to pursue an operatic career.

Post-World War II, many opera houses destroyed during the war were rebuilt. Bel canto opera was seen as a manifestation of intense interest in historical repertoire with a global trend towards historically informed performances. Subsequently, more affluence and the development of improved sound recording technology have allowed the general public greater access, not only to live performances, but also to quality sound recordings. Charles Rosen has commented that historically informed performance practices have depended largely on the recording industry, because high quality performances can be recorded with truer accuracy and quality of sound in the studio than in a live performance.¹⁹

Preservation of music by recordings is invaluable. Homage is paid to the composer by providing authenticity to his writings and by recreating the circumstances of the early performances. A venue can be used to recreate aesthetically the correct location and traditions of the era. Two examples of this are Maria Callas' performance of *Norma* in the open-air Greek Theatre at Epidaurus, in August 1960²⁰, and Montserrat Caballé's performance of *Norma* in 1974 at an open-air Roman Amphitheatre at Orange, near Avignon, Southern France.²¹ These unique surroundings provided a noble and realistic setting. Invaluable recordings of such events preserve the traditions of bel canto and allow aural appreciation of the performance to be available to those who have not been present.

As a result, Bellini and Donizetti can be considered as having created serious bel canto operas worthy of recording, and these recordings have contributed to the reinstatement of Bellini and Donizetti as important operatic composers. Today sound recordings are a fundamental method of preserving music and transmitting singing styles aurally to the general public.

¹⁸ A review of the archives of the New York Metropolitan Opera would support this statement. See 6.5. Appendix E.

¹⁹ Charles Rosen. *Critical Entertainments*, Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 2000. ch. 12.

²⁰ From our special correspondent. *The Times*. (August 29 1960), p. 12. Issue 54862. Col. E.

²¹ Stefan Zucker in *Bel Canto Society Newsletter*. (Tuesday 15 May 2007), p. 1.

Despite research on bel canto operas in general, book reviews and limited press reviews on the use of bel canto techniques, there appears to be no detailed, comparative aural analysis of bel canto techniques, and it is this gap that the thesis attempts to address. An aural analysis, the focus of this study, will close this gap in documented knowledge about bel canto.

In summary, the thesis provides an aural appreciation of selected recordings which have been chosen as representative examples of typical embellishments of the bel canto genre. The study focuses on selected bel canto arias from the operas *Norma*, by Vincenzo Bellini, and *L'Elisir d'Amore* by Gaetano Donizetti. Singers are chosen for comparison and evaluation from the period of the first sound recordings circa 1902 (Enrico Caruso) to the end of the twentieth century. This is a valuable and significant contribution to a study of opera which provides in-depth knowledge, understanding and an appreciation of bel canto style and traditions as perceived aurally through sound recordings. A relevant observation from the aural analysis indicates that the development of the recording industry in the twentieth century has enabled recordings to be an important means of preservation. They are invaluable in determining that bel canto operas are not lost to history nor relegated to dusty shelves in archives.

1.2 Methodology

This study approaches the topic in a different way from that usually undertaken, in the sense that these case studies have been researched aurally. The research methodology addresses the physical limitations caused by the writer's disability, and differs from more traditional methods of research of focussing on contemporary critiques on the subject. The writer's physical limitations, a result of a severe accident, present a lack of mobility, eye control and oral communication. Extensive reading and research of the literature, of focussing on contemporary critiques on the subject, reviews and other resources is difficult, and needs reliance on third parties to read aloud selected texts: a slow process.

The situation provided the incentive to use handwriting for communication and aural observations. Listening to music, committing long passages to memory and selecting relevant texts has been possible and has determined the style of writing. Written documentation of aural observations has provided a much better means of evaluating the selected works. From an aural perspective it is vital for the writer to have accurate aural pitch, that is, a sense of perfect pitch and a good ear for listening to and identifying sounds, rhythms and ornamentations. Aural observations of 'Casta Diva' from Bellini's *Norma* and 'Una furtiva lagrima' from Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amoré* have been mapped out against the written score.

The first bel canto recordings, made by Enrico Caruso and by other singers from his era up to the end of World War II, provide a unique medium for comparison with styles of the post 1950 period. The old 78rpm recordings are useful. Indeed, when they are re-mastered digitally their sound is clearer, less scratchy and more comparable with recordings made with new digital technologies. The research methodology combines primary source aural material, principally sound recordings and scores, with secondary source material in the form of historical reviews, books and articles from journals.

Two groups of case studies are presented. The first group consists of six recorded examples of 'Casta Diva' and the second of four recorded examples of 'Una furtiva lagrima' made between 1902 and 2000. Each sung by different singers, the case studies explore the bel canto variations and embellishments of each selected aria.

The singers chosen include early twentieth century sopranos, such as Celestina Boninsegna and Rosa Ponselle, and post-World War II sopranos such as Dame Joan Sutherland, Maria Callas, Montserrat Caballé and Elena Souliotis. In addition, early twentieth century tenors such as Enrico Caruso and Beniamino Gigli, and post-World War II tenors such as Luciano Pavarotti and Thomas Edmonds are considered. The justification for this selection of singers is based on their era, recordings extant for the chosen arias and prominence in the operatic world as well-known exponents of bel canto. These singers have acquired the techniques of ornamentation and variation at the core of bel canto and have had a far-reaching impact on the performance of bel canto opera, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century.

Chapter one outlines the aims, methodology and historical perspectives underpinning the study. Chapter two describes briefly historical uses of the term bel canto and major characteristics of bel canto opera. Chapters three and four are case studies of the selected arias while chapter five presents the conclusion.

The discussion is based on selected criteria central to the aural case studies in order to provide a framework within which the distinctive features of each singer's performance are best discussed. It is noted how the performance establishes a balance between dramatic tension and bel canto techniques, indicating a singer's strengths and weaknesses. Interpretations of the composers' scores demonstrate ornamentations, how they enhance or detract from the expression of the lyrics, and the extent to which the singer adds his or her own elements of bel canto technique. Variations to the melodic line

demonstrate technical fluency, and the ways trills, arabesques, sequences, arpeggios and cadenzas enhance the performance are noted. The singer's demonstration of phrasing, articulation and breath control, use of *messa di voce* and *mezza voce*, are examined, as well as the dramatic effect in the cadenza. Finally, a comparison of performances is made, discussing how each singer achieves the demands of the selected aria, highlighting the similarities and differences in performance.

The study, therefore, focuses on the aural perspective of the selected sound recordings. In effect, the flame of nineteenth century *bel canto* traditions has been kept alive, not only by twentieth century singers transmitting it to successive generations by live performances, but also by its preservation through sound recordings. Moreover, the preservation by recording of live performances, whether they be in an opera house or studio, is critical if future generations are to understand and learn the characteristics of the *bel canto* style.

2 Chapter Two - Bel Canto

2.1 Historical uses of the term bel canto

In order to focus on elements of bel canto tradition and technique, it is first necessary to define the term. Literally meaning 'beautiful singing',²² the term was used generally to describe a type of opera popular in Italy in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, elements of the style of bel canto can be traced back to the 1600s in the era of Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), the first great master of the Italian tradition²³ and the precursor of modern opera.²⁴

In the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries, the bel canto tradition was associated with the rise of a virtuoso class of opera singers, the castrati. The castrati had brilliance, flexibility, beauty of tone, skill in the arts of ornamentation, and generally were the teachers of the elaborate and florid style of singing. As there were limited books written on voice production until the eighteenth century, the castrati were the most important conduits in the development of bel canto style.²⁵

Notable teachers at this time were Giulio Caccini (c.1545-1618) and Pier Francesco Tosi (1646-1732). Caccini, a radical musician, singer and composer, and Tosi wrote instruction manuals outlining their views on the principles of vocal techniques. Their treatises were authoritative guides to the form of embellishments and style of their own era.²⁶ Caccini provided examples from his own compositions to illustrate how articulation and ornamentation with graded dynamics could heighten the expressiveness of the song. Caccini also wrote his first opera *Euridice* published 1601, performed 1602, but it is not considered to have all the musical and dramatic genius of Monteverdi.²⁷

²² James Stark. *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. p. xix.

²³ David Kimbell. *Italian Opera*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. p. 62. Monteverdi is acclaimed for his first opera, *La Favola d' Orfeo*, first performed 1607.

²⁴ Alex Harman and Wilfred Mellers. *Man and His Music*. London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1962.

²⁵ Philip A. Duey. Cited in James Stark. *op. cit.*, p. xviii.

²⁶ Giulio Caccini. *Le Nuove Musiche ad una voce sola. (A Book of Songs)*. 1602, and Pier Francesco Tosi. *Opinioni de' cantori antiche e moderni*. 1723. Transl. John Ernest Gilliard, 1742, as *Observations of the Florid Song*. Gilliard was a composer and oboist.

²⁷ Alex Harman and Wilfred Mellers. *op. cit.*, p. 373.

Although the style was prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Philip Duey maintains that the connotation 'beautiful singing' applied to bel canto did not come into general use until the mid to late nineteenth century.²⁸ According to Duey this application was in reaction to Richard Wagner's declamatory style that obliged the Italians to defend their style of singing, which many felt had fallen into decline.²⁹

Manuel del Populo Vicente Rodriguez Garcia (1775-1832) and his son Manuel P. R. Garcia II (1805-1906) were eminent teachers of this era. Manuel del Populo Garcia had a tendency towards bel canto with crowd-pleasing ornamentation, fused with Andalusian elements. His son, Manuel Garcia II, in a departure from the traditional ways of his father, wrote an instruction manual to base his teaching on the vocal-cord theory.³⁰ Both father and son followed traditions from the teachings of celebrated castrati, although Garcia II's methods had a more scientific approach.³¹ In his manual *Hints on Singing*, Garcia II defines bel canto.³² Garcia outlines three styles of singing, one of which is *canto fiorito* or florid style, in which ornaments abound, as well as roulades, arpeggios and rapid passages. Modern investigation has borne out much of Garcia's theories. His books are serious detailed contemporary records of bel canto style and its aesthetics.

Historically speaking, bel canto had different meanings for different people,³³ and has been used in a variety of contexts. Besides Caccini's definition of 'beautiful singing', as referring to 'beauty and purity of

²⁸ Philip A. Duey. *Bel Canto in its Golden Age: a study of its teaching concepts*.

New York: King's Crown Press, 1951. Cited in James Stark, *op. cit.*, p. xviii,

p. 11 and p. 154. Duey suggests 1860 as the starting date of the use of the term, and this date is also accepted by

Owen Jander and Ellen T. Harris. 'Bel Canto' in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

Stanley Sadie, ed. London: MacMillan, 2001, Vol. 3. p. 161.

²⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 7-10.

³⁰ Lucie Manén. *Bel Canto. The teaching of the Classical Italian Song-Schools, its decline and restoration*.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. p. 8. Garcia's manual, *The Traité*, was written in 1847. The revised 6th edition was written in 1872 and translated by Donald V. Paschke, 1984.

³¹ James Stark. *op. cit.*, pp 3-5. Garcia belonged to the old Italian school of singing, but he also belonged to a generation of scientific minds. He developed by his own observations a theory of the way a singer uses the vocal cords to create bel canto style of singing, and the part played by the laryngeal muscles which he viewed by looking at his own with a laryngoscope.

³² Manuel Garcia II. *Hints on Singing*. London: Ascherberg, Hopwood and Crew 1894. p. 75.

³³ James Stark. *op. cit.*, p. xix.

vocal tone in its highest degree',³⁴ some, including Giulio Silva, understood it to mean the florid vocal ornamentation of the melodic line.³⁵ James Stark provides more detail in his description of bel canto as a 'reference to the cantabile style of Venetian and Roman operas and cantatas of the 1630s and 1640s'.³⁶

Bel canto in this sense is more than 'beautiful singing' and describes a technique of ornamentation and variation.³⁷ More specifically, it implies the notation of two melodic lines, one simple and the other ornamental, and the decoration and performance conventions applied to each vocal line. This operatic style emphasised the beauty of the human voice, often at the expense of the drama.³⁸ It was a form of improvisation in which the soloist indulged during the execution of a piece. The expressiveness of the melody became more important.³⁹

George Frederick Handel (1685-1759) followed the traditions of the day. He visited Italy (1707-1710) and learnt at first hand the Italian style of opera.⁴⁰ He engaged castrati to sing soprano and contralto roles in his operas composed in London and performed in Covent Garden in the 1730s. Handel's melodic lines provided room for free improvisation and decoration or ornamentation. The appoggiatura leaning on a dissonant note was important in Handel's time but became more so for Bellini and Donizetti. Rodolfo Celletti claimed also that bel canto was associated with Handel as the supreme exponent of the art in the early eighteenth century, overshadowing Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in the late eighteenth century.⁴¹

The link between Handel and the nineteenth-century was surely Mozart. Mozart, too, went to Italy and wrote for Italian singers, so it is not unrealistic to presume that his cadenzas, both vocal and instrumental, would have some florid interpretation and the improvisation for which he is renowned.

³⁴ Giulio Caccini. *op. cit.* Cited in James Stark. *op. cit.*, p. xix.

³⁵ Cited in James Stark. *op. cit.*, p. xix. Giulio Silva wrote *The Beginnings of the Art of Bel Canto*. JSTOR: *Musical Quarterly*, vol. 8. no. 1. pp. 53-68. Oxford University Press, 1922. p. 60.

³⁶ Francis Rogers. 'Letter to the Editor.' *Musical Times*. 85.1212. (1944); p. 60.

³⁷ James Stark. *op. cit.*, p. xii.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. xii.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Alex Harman and Wilfred Mellers. *op. cit.*, pp. 464-465.

⁴¹ James Stark. *op. cit.*, p. xix.

Maria Callas in her 1971-72 Juilliard master classes asserted that Mozart 'should be performed with a bel canto approach and a necessity of bel canto is a full, sustained tone and good legato..... as though he were Verdi.'⁴²

In 1841, Carlo Ritorni referred to the 'precious inheritance of Italian bel canto' as the 'glorious faculty of the Italian genius.'⁴³ Another definition is from Eduard Hanslick, the anti-Wagnerian critic, who declared that singing was the art of expressing human emotions in song. He said also: 'While our budding opera singers soon lose their way in dramatic expression, the Italians develop first of all the independent beauty of the voice, the well-rounded technique of singing. Above all they like a beautiful tone.'⁴⁴ Again this does not define explicitly what the technique really meant.

Celletti, who dates the decline of bel canto from the end of the reign of the castrati, claims that Rossini (1792-1868) was the last composer of the bel canto style,⁴⁵ whereas Silva maintains that Bellini represents bel canto in full bloom with his works of purest bel canto.⁴⁶ In 1860 Rossini told Wagner that the castrati had vanished, remarking that, 'if those who address the great true traditions disappear without leaving disciples ... their art vanishes, dies.'⁴⁷ Celletti referred to bel canto as a type of technique displaying virtuosity, smoothness and tenderness of vocal sound and the art of improvisation, with rare stylised voices.⁴⁸ This sets it apart from other styles of singing.

Lucie Manén (1987) expands the literal definition of bel canto, using it 'to describe the particular art of voice-production by which the distinctive timbres of the classical Italian school of singing can be achieved'.⁴⁹ Manén approaches her definition from the point of view of the physiological (laryngeal)

⁴² Will Crutchfield. 'The Bel Canto Connection.' *Opera News*. 62.1. (1997): 30.

⁴³ Carlo Ritorni. *Ammaestramenti alla composizione d'ogni poema e d'ogni opera appartenente alla musica*. Milan: 1841. pp. 64 -66. Cited in Simon Maguire. *Vincenzo Bellini and the Aesthetics of Early Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera*. New York & London: Gqaqarland Publishing, 1989. p. 153.

⁴⁴ Simon Maguire. *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁴⁵ Rodolfo Celletti. *A History of Bel Canto*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. Cited in James Stark, *op. cit.*, p. xix. Also Philip A. Duey. *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Giulio Silva. *op. cit.*, p.68.

⁴⁷ Stefan Zucker. "End of an Era". *Opera News*. 45.12 (1981): 17-18.

⁴⁸ Rodolfo Celletti. *A History of bel canto*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. p. 9.

⁴⁹ Lucie Manén, *Bel Canto. The teaching of the Classical Italian Song-Schools, its decline and restoration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. p.17.

mechanism needed by a singer to produce the timbre of bel canto.⁵⁰ Manén's contribution was minimal by comparison with Garcia's, and she does not include in her definition what those timbres are.⁵¹

The varying descriptions above show that it is difficult to establish an exact definition of bel canto. Duey believes that the instruction manuals of the nineteenth century clearly delineated the teaching methods and definition of bel canto, that is, 'twin ideals of beautiful tone and florid line'.⁵² Duey also comments that 'neither musical nor general dictionaries saw fit to attempt [a] definition until after 1900'.⁵³

A final definition comes from Stark, who concludes that the term bel canto is used for a variety of historical periods, and that its concept focuses on styles with many different meanings based on the type of techniques.⁵⁴ As Jander maintains, the term is best limited to its nineteenth-century use as a style of singing that emphasises beauty of tone in the delivery of highly florid music.⁵⁵

The present writer does not subscribe to any one of these distinct definitions, but approaches the term broadly to incorporate many of the features mentioned above, defining bel canto as a significant singing technique which allows the performer to decorate the notation of two melodic lines (simple and ornamented) according to performance conventions. This is empirical and easily recognised aurally. In the thesis the term is applied more specifically to the florid style of bel canto in the Italian operas of Bellini and Donizetti in the nineteenth century.

2.2 Major characteristics of bel canto opera

In summary, the chief characteristics of bel canto are mastery of fluent, agile and well phrased singing in every timbre and register, with good breath control, in both scale passages and also in the ornamentation that is found in arias, especially the *ex tempore* ornamentation and variation found in the

⁵⁰ James Stark. *op. cit.* pp. 3-6. This was because the entire glottis was partially obscured by the epiglottis, and the laryngoscope was limited accordingly.

⁵¹ Philip A Duey. *op. cit.* p. 24.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 155.

⁵³ *Ibid.* Cited in 'Bel canto'. Oxford Music Online <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>> (21 November 2008).

⁵⁴ James Stark. *op. cit.*, p. xix.

⁵⁵ Owen Jander and Ellen T. Harris. *op. cit.*, p. 161.

da capo aria form. Precise intonation, clarity of tone and enunciation and the ability to take high notes without strain are important characteristics. The term is also associated with legato style, messa di voce, portamento, tempo rubato and delicate vocal extensions.

In the nineteenth century, bel canto was essentially an art for the solo singer and overcame the importance previously given to instrumental virtuosity, which had developed at about the same time. The voice was now perceived as an instrument, being supported by the orchestral instruments accompanying it.⁵⁶ Another characteristic was the development of a greater range in the voice, a range previously only accorded to the instrumentalist. This range developed to three octaves, and the coloratura skill became an essential part of the mastery of bel canto.

Other characteristics of bel canto are the intricate phrases of Italian opera, and the projection of the voice into the finest clarity of expression and emotion shown in the power, effectiveness and brilliance of classical Italian singing. It is important to note that it was vocal flexibility and not vocal force that was a main requirement for bel canto. Furthermore, some composers wrote out in full what they intended for various embellishments, while others left it to the singer's discretion and skill. A composer's collaboration with the singer was in keeping with the practice at the time of tailoring the music to specific performers, such as Bellini did for Giuditta Pasta and Giovanni Battista Rubini. Improvised decoration of the melodic line was a requirement for the interpretation of true bel canto.

By the end of the nineteenth century it was becoming increasingly difficult for singers to maintain interest in bel canto singing when, influenced by Wagner, the verismo and declamatory styles were being propagated and bel canto was no longer seen as contemporary. The great music-dramas of Wagner were a delight for those convinced that the Italian bel canto style was unable to express German sentiments.⁵⁷ The interpreters of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti were the last pupils of the masters of bel canto, or the art of singing, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁸ Moreover, the vocal masterpieces of Bellini and Donizetti are good examples of true bel canto style when performed with florid and embellished melodic lines.

⁵⁶ Rodolfo Celletti. *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Philip A. Duey. *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 11.

In the twentieth century it has been possible for teachers to maintain traditions by handing down bel canto vocal techniques through their own example to successive generations of pupils, and through listening to sound recordings. However, the majority of singers today are not utilising bel canto techniques, using only their natural talent to sing, adopting a single voice timbre with a much greater sound level, and unaware of the timbres they could use.⁵⁹ Lucie Manén believes that the different vocal techniques taught in the twentieth century do not teach a singer how to deal with passages of ornamentation and variation.⁶⁰

This view is substantiated by the fact that from the 1950s styles of singing changed radically. One must agree with Manén's statement above. Many aspiring singers decide to seek the rewards of a popular style of singing. Modern day singers are not learning bel canto techniques, with fewer people being interested in classical opera which requires vigorous and expensive vocal training. Fortuitously at the same time as the advent of new styles of singing, the great divas of the last half of the twentieth century were also rising to fame and were specialising in the styles of various eras of operatic singing, particularly bel canto. Their recordings and performances have ensured that the art of bel canto has not been lost.

The vocal artistry of singers, whose performances either live or in studio have been captured on sound recordings, is more than sufficient evidence that dedicated listening to sound recordings has given opportunities for the traditions of bel canto to be passed on to the next generation, keeping the bel canto flame well and truly alive. The bel canto tradition, as defined in this chapter, will be analysed and described from aural observations. The following case studies explore two types of voice, namely soprano and tenor, from a number of sound recordings of selected works of Bellini and Donizetti.

⁵⁹ Lucie Manén. *op. cit.*, p. 69. The *Bel Canto* schools trained their singers to sing in all vocal timbres.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 9.

3 Chapter Three

3.1 *Norma*: Case Study One

3.1.1. Introduction

Vincenzo Bellini once noted that 'If I were shipwrecked, I would leave all my other operas and try to save *Norma*.'⁶¹ Indeed, *Norma* is Bellini's masterpiece, the ninth of eleven Bellini operas and the one to command the most lasting respect. It premiered at La Scala, Milan, 26 December, 1831. *Norma* is considered one of the climaxes of the bel canto tradition and plays a key role in the bel canto repertoire. The character is also viewed as one of the greatest heroines in nineteenth century romantic opera,⁶² and it is one of the most demanding and challenging roles written for the soprano voice.⁶³

This chapter aims to provide a detailed aural analysis of bel canto aspects of an excerpt from the opera performed by six singers. Existing recordings of these singers, from as early as 1904, have enabled the opera *Norma* and its bel canto features to be heard by many generations of singers. There are several excellent recordings of Bellini's *Norma*. Recordings in both the original key of G major and the more common key of F major are confined to a small school of singers who have specialised in the style.

Bellini was a supreme Romantic, and the selected cavatina, 'Casta Diva', is a typical bel canto aria, which develops a mysterious power, 'a magic beyond the understanding of words.'⁶⁴ Its performance requires outstanding technical skill, pure legato singing, great breath control and support allied with a considerable florid agility. The singer must have outstanding command of recitative and fioriture, and be sensitive to Bellini's distinctive melodic lines.⁶⁵ There are difficult long phrases or arabesques which need agile and flexible singing. To convey the style of Italian Opera as perceived by Bellini, a proper balance between the bel canto aspects and the dramatic tension of the narrative is required. The

⁶¹ Vincenzo Bellini. Cited in Charles Osborne. *The Bel Canto Operas of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini*.

London: Methuen, 1994. p. 341.

⁶² Norma Major. *Joan Sutherland*. London: MacDonald, Queen Anne Press, 1987. p. 96.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ David Kimbell. *op. cit.*, p. 532.

⁶⁵ Norma Major. *op. cit.*, p. 96.

importance of skill in singing bel canto ornamentations in this role is crucial, and the undeniable power of *Norma* illustrates the extent of Bellini's achievements.

3.1.2. Scores

In any consideration of this excerpt, it should be remembered that the authority of an autograph score of this work was unavailable to the writer. The autograph score was written in G major, but Bellini transposed it down a tone from G major to F major for Giuditta Pasta, for whom he created the opera,⁶⁶ and this is the key it is usually sung in today. However, Dame Joan Sutherland sang it in 1960 and 1963 in the original G major. It is well documented that Bellini himself made many revisions, and different copies of the score have different notations.⁶⁷ This suggests that to some extent Bellini considered it a work in progress.

A number of scores have been consulted and are listed below, together with the key in which 'Casta Diva' is scored. However, there is a need for caution in interpreting Bellini's scores. Many poorly edited editions exist for his operas, and *Norma* is no exception. Raffaello Monterosso has carefully compared the autograph score of Bellini's *Norma* with the full score published by Ricordi in 1915, and found many discrepancies between the two.⁶⁸ Ricordi's piano vocal score differs in many important ways, which are not necessarily careless mistakes. Ricordi, it appears, received the score in parts in 1832 from Bellini, rather than the complete work. Bellini then further reduced the work for vocal and piano. Variants of the score feature incomplete texts and faulty dynamic and articulation markings. Any discrepancies in the vocal score will be noted in later parts of this case study.

The following scores have been consulted:

- Rockstro - London - 1848 - G major. Vocal score revised from the orchestral score by W.S Rockstro. Public domain. Never re-printed.

⁶⁶ Pasta was not only Bellini's friend but also a musical adviser who exerted much influence on him.

⁶⁷ Simon Maguire and Elizabeth Forbes. "Norma" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Stanley Sadie, ed. London: MacMillan, 2001. Grove Music online <<http://www.grovemusic.com>> OUP, 2007.

⁶⁸ Raffaello Monterosso. "Per un'edizione di *Norma*." Scritti in onore di Luigi Ranga: Milan, Naples, 1973. pp. 415-510. Charles S. Brauner, cited in "Textual Problems in Bellini's *Norma* and *Beatrice di Tenda*." *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. University of California Press, 2007. Vol. 29, no. 1. p. 99.

- Ricordi - Milan - F major (earliest Milan publication). Circa 1832-1833. Later published 1915.
- Boosey and Sons - The Royal Edition, first published in 1848, London - G major. 1875. Reprinted 1943. Public domain. The same version published as Kalmus vocal score - Belwin Mills Publishing - G major.
- Novello and Co, Ewer and Co., ed. A. Sullivan (1842-1900) and J. Pitman (1816-1886) London, New York, - G major. 1871. London; - F major. 1927. Public domain.
- G. Schirmer - New York and London - F Major. 1915. Public domain.

For the purpose of this study references from the Novello vocal score in F major are used to provide examples for all singers. In addition, the Rockstro score in G major is used for references for Boninsegna and Sutherland, both scores in the public domain. Computer set transcriptions with annotations and facsimiles are used to provide examples relevant to the text of the aria and discussions of bel canto aspects.

3.1.3. Singers

It is the present writer's opinion that only a few singers have been able to sing the role of Norma with outstanding bel canto techniques and dramatic qualities. Six of the more famous twentieth century recorded interpretations of this role are analysed: Celestina Boninsegna (1904), Rosa Ponselle (1928/29), Maria Callas, (1954 and 1960), Dame Joan Sutherland, (1960, 1963 and 1978), Elena Souliotis (1965) and Montserrat Caballé (1973).

It should be noted that the availability of recordings by outstanding bel canto singers from 1904 to the present time, as well as the place the selection of 'Casta Diva' from *Norma* holds in the opera world, is of prime importance in selecting this aria. Its initial success and subsequent popularity is well documented. Even more importantly, this excerpt demonstrates the art of bel canto sung in traditional style, detail and florid melodic lines. The example chosen is 'Casta Diva' in F major from Act one, scene four of Bellini's opera *Norma*, and follows the recitative 'Sediziose voci' which is in E flat major.

3.2 CASTA DIVA Act One, scene four, *Norma*

3.2.1. Opera Synopsis

In order to place the selection in the context of the opera, the story needs to be outlined. Norma is the story of the Druid priestess Norma, at the time of the Roman occupation of Gaul. An opera in two acts, the libretto was written by Felice Romani from the story of Norma, *Ossia l'infanticidio*, a verse tragedy by Alexandre Soumet.⁶⁹

Act one is set in Roman Gaul. Norma, the Druid priestess, and Pollione, the Roman proconsul, have been secretly in love. Pollione has grown tired of the ageing Norma and fallen in love with Adalgisa, a young temple virgin. Adalgisa, on agreeing to flee to Rome with Pollione, tells Norma of her love for him and Norma curses Pollione for his treachery.

In Act two, Norma attempts to kill her children but relents and gives them to Adalgisa, but when Pollione comes to take Adalgisa from the temple, Norma denounces him and the Druids seize him. After Norma confesses to breaking her vows in the same way as Adalgisa, a funeral pyre is lit and both Norma and Pollione die on it together.

Norma's celebrated hymn 'Casta Diva' is found near the end of Act one scene four. After the procession of the Druids, Oreveso, the high priest, and the priests file into the grove; they await the arrival of Norma, a Druid priestess. In the chorus, '*Norma viene: le cinge la chioma*', they evoke her appearance. After Norma arrives, surrounded by her priestesses, with her hair wreathed in mistletoe and a golden sickle in her hand, she advances to the Druidic stone. The recitative '*Sediziose voci*' follows. Norma criticizes the Druids' warlike chants; the time is not yet ripe to rise against the Romans, who will be defeated at the appointed hour. Norma cuts a branch of mistletoe from the oak tree in the centre of the grove, comes forward and raises her arms to heaven.

In the aria following, 'Casta Diva', Norma prays to the Moon, personified as the chaste goddess. She prays for peace, adjuring her to aid her votaries in destroying the Romans and asking that there be

⁶⁹ Simon Maguire and Elizabeth Forbes. "Bellini" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Stanley Sadie, ed. London: MacMillan, 2001. Vol. 3. p. 203.

peace for the present. When the moment arrives to shed the Romans' blood, she, Norma, will lead the revolt. The Druids demand that the first victim should be Pollione. The cantabile prayer accompanies the rituals associated with the cutting of the mistletoe and the worship of the Moon.⁷⁰

3.2.2. 'Casta Diva', Norma's aria from *Norma*⁷¹

Casta Diva, che inargenti	O pure Goddess, who silver
queste sacre antiche piante,	These sacred ancient plants,
a noi volgi il bel sembiante	Turn thy beautiful semblance on us
senza nube e senza vel	Unclouded and unveiled...
Tempra, o Diva,	Temper, O Goddess,
tempra tu de' cori ardenti	The brave zeal
tempra ancora lo zelo audace,	Of the ardent spirits,
spargi in terra quella pace	Scatter on the earth the peace
che regnar tu fai nel ciel...	Thou make reign in the sky
Fine al rito: e il sacro bosco	Complete the rite: and the sacred wood
Sia disgombro dai profani.	Be clear of the laity.
Quando il Nume irato e fosco,	When the irate and gloomy God
Chiegga il sangue dei Romani,	Asks for the Roman's blood
Dal Druidico delubro	My voice will thunder
La mia voce tuonerà.	From the Druidic temple.
Cadrà; punirlo io posso.	He will fall; I can punish him
Ma, punirlo, il cor non sa.	But my heart is unable to do so.
Ah! bello a me ritorna	Ah! Return to me beautiful
Del fido amor primiero;	In your first true love;
E contro il mondo intiero...	I'll protect you
Difesa a te sarò.	Against the entire world.
Ah! bello a me ritorna	Ah! Return to me beautiful
Del raggio tuo sereno;	With your serene ray;
E vita nel tuo seno,	I'll have life, sky

⁷⁰ David Kimbell. *op. cit.*, p. 518.

⁷¹ Stefano Olcese. Translation. <http://www.aria-database.com/translations.norma04_casta.txt> (9 February 2010)

E patria e cielo avrò.	And homeland in your heart.
Ah, riedi ancora qual eri allora,	Ah, return again as you were then,
Quando il cor ti diedi allora,	When I gave you my heart then,
Ah, riedi a me.	Ah, come back to me.

Many operas have similar scenarios to *Norma's* 'Casta Diva', where the plot involves an act of pleading through prayer, between a mortal and a God or immortal being, and also between two mortals. For example, in *Orfeo and Eurydice* (Monteverdi), Orpheus pleads to be allowed into the underworld by gaining special permission to cross the River Styx, in order to rescue Eurydice. Another instance is found in *Tannhauser* (Act Two, scene four) when Elisabeth, her voice rising in prayer, pleads for the life of Tannhauser, in the hope that pardon may not be denied him. She reminds the indignant company of nobles of their Christian obligation to show mercy, and an angel from heaven descends at God's command to intercede for Tannhauser, who pleads for redemption through Jesus Christ.

Among all the arias in *Norma*, 'Casta Diva', an aria of invocation, provides a very good example of ornamentation and variation techniques in bel canto opera along with the dramatic emphasis. Stanza one introduces the reverent peaceful melody with simple ornamentations. While Norma sings the arabesque phrases between stanzas one and two, the chorus murmurs underneath. Delicate fioriture or melismata, a very distinctive feature of 'Casta Diva', decorate the interlude before the second stanza of the aria, which has been compared justifiably to the nocturnes of Chopin (1810-1849).⁷²

Both Chopin's and Bellini's melodies have a similar shape and style, and require the performer to produce a beautiful sound. Bellini's passages in 'Casta Diva' resemble those of Chopin, who, being Bellini's friend, had learned so much from his style. Like those of Bellini, Chopin's lyrical passages require the pianist to produce a beautiful tone, at the same time embellishing or varying the original theme. However, an immediate criticism of the view that bel canto is a beautiful sound is that it is not exclusively a distinctive feature of only bel canto opera. It should be the objective of all opera and pianoforte music of this era. The difference is that, in addition, to classify the melody as bel canto style the vocal line or melodic line in the piano music should be elaborated with grace notes, a cadenza and other ornamentation.

⁷² Charles Osborne. *The Bel Canto Operas of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini*. London: Methuen, 1994. p. 339.

The lyrical approach is seen in these examples, bars 32-34 and 37-38 of 'Casta Diva'.

Ex. 3.1 Bars 32-34 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'



Ex. 3.2 Bars 37-38 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'



In example 3.1 each figure in the melismata imitates the previous one without variation, rising in sequence by a third and then falling by a third. Bar 36 is the same as bar 32, but bar 37 is varied from bar 33 with a cascade of descending sequential chromatic scales (Ex. 3.2). Comparatively speaking, Bellini's melismata identify with similar variations in Chopin's nocturnes. These allow the performer to build up the tension through the melodic curves to reach the highest expression. In both Bellini's and Chopin's lyrical melodies the bel canto elements of ornamentation and variation are present, and both have been designed with the bel canto aesthetic in mind.

A significant aspect of this aria is the cadenza. It would be expected that the cadenza at the end of stanza two would be unaccompanied, and that the singers would improvise in the Italian tradition. The cadenza has smooth bel canto phrases, and the vocal climax comes with the long-held high note. A novelty of Bellini's climax is his treatment of dissonance which strengthens tension as it finds its resolution. The accompaniment against the long tied note in bars 55-56 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score) is dissonant but finally resolves.

Bellini is reputed to have made eight versions of 'Casta Diva' with continual revisions.⁷³ He would also have intended that the very important element in dramatic vocal music, expressiveness, would be conveyed by the artistry of the performer. As Bellini himself said, 'the music drama must make people

⁷³ Simon Maguire and Elizabeth Forbes. "Norma." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O903486> (April 20, 2010).

weep, shudder with terror and die, through singing'.⁷⁴ Consequently, Bellini would have expected the singer to bring the text and music to life through the enunciation of the text, additional vocal embellishments and a well modulated range of tones. In 'Casta Diva', Bellini displays luxurious sound and unfolding sonorities, despite his supposed lack of orchestral imagination.⁷⁵

Recordings in this study are confined to a small school of singers who specialized in the bel canto style. Although each of the six singers follows the score,⁷⁶ the various examples are intended to illustrate bel canto style variations, and document differences in each singer's interpretation annotated from recordings. It must be acknowledged that some recordings may display the weaknesses or bad habits of the singer and therefore have a reverse effect. A good teacher would be a necessary adjunct to ensure that the best bel canto features and individual interpretations are handed on to successive singers. Despite some shortcomings in this aspect of the recordings, each singer has made a major contribution to the transmission and preservation of the bel canto style. The expressive nature of bel canto characteristics can be understood and learnt by analysis of the techniques of ornamentation and variation used in this aria, through listening to recordings.

⁷⁴ Vincenzo Bellini. *Epistolario*. ed. L. Cambi. Verona, 1943. Cited in David Kimbell. *op. cit.*, p. 400.

⁷⁵ David Kimbell. *op. cit.*, p. 478.

⁷⁶ The full vocal score of the aria 'Casta Diva' is found in 6.2: Appendix B.

3.3 CELESTINA BONINSEGNA (Recorded 1904)

3.3.1. Introduction

In 1901, The Chilean newspaper, *El Mercurio*, noted that Boninsegna sang 'with great sentiment, inspiration, profoundly felt artistry, and with a beautiful voice'.⁷⁷ These qualities are clearly evident in this recording, and the writer believes the newspaper was justified in its opinion in that Boninsegna sings with command of bel canto style.⁷⁸

Celestina Boninsegna (1877-1947), born in Reggio, Emilia, Italy, had a successful career, which began in late 1896. A dramatic soprano, she made a number of appearances at opera theatres in Italy which established her career. In 1901 she conducted a successful tour to South America, and in November 1903 at Modena she gave her first performance of *Norma*. In early 1904 she sang her fifth and last performance of *Norma* at Trieste. There is no evidence that she sang any more Bellini or that she sang any Donizetti. After this, she made her debut at the New York Metropolitan Opera House in December 1906 in *Aida*; along with *Il Trovatore* (Verdi) it became her most performed role. Subsequent years saw her performing in South and North America, Spain, London, Italy and Russia. She sang over one thousand performances over a career that spanned a period of twenty-five years, her official farewell being in November 1921.

The aural analysis of Boninsegna's recording of 'Casta Diva' is made from an old 78rpm sound recording. It must be remembered that this was one of the earliest soprano recordings ever made, and therefore the quality is not comparable in the same sense as LP recordings in the early post-World War II years, nor with modern digital recordings. It must also be remembered that this was one of the earliest soprano recordings ever made. Boninsegna's recording was most likely made on a wax-coated Zinc Disc, invented by Emile Berliner. for the phonograph recorded for the Gramophone and Typewriter Co in 1904. These were primitive sound recordings in terms of modern day achievements, because the sound was collected by a horn and piped to a diaphragm which vibrated the cutting stylus. As a result, the frequency range and response were poor. They were metallic sounding and scratchy and did not always capture the true sound, as the singer had to almost put his or her face in the horn to sing.

⁷⁷ *El Mercurio*, Chilean newspaper: 8 September 1901.

⁷⁸ Celestina Boninsegna. *Norma*. Performed 1904. 78rpm. Recording made by Fred and Will Gaisberg, Milano. Reissued as LP recorded disc. London: Saga, 1972. Refer to Audio CD, track 1.

Some 78 recordings have since been digitally re-mastered, but this recording has been reproduced on LP. Despite its shortcomings, Boninsegna's voice shows confident performance skills and a clear articulation of nineteenth century bel canto traditions. In this recording she appears to sing in the pitch of F# major, but as this is unlikely, the case study is based on the greater probability that she sang in G major.⁷⁹ She is accompanied on piano, but omits the interludes with the chorus and Oroveso between stanzas one and two. This also means that the melismata (arabesques), part of the interlude sung by Norma, are excluded as well. Without the orchestral accompaniment the performance is disadvantaged in presentation and appeal.

3.3.2. Performance and dramatic events

Despite the orchestral disadvantages described above, Boninsegna produces many of the classic bel canto techniques. Boninsegna has a dramatic, unrestrained soprano voice and uses a considerable range of dynamics, from pianissimo to fortissimo, creating moments of drama, tension and contrasts. She appears to reach the high notes with ease.

This passage highlights her strengths and stylistic insight. Her strengths are a good balance of bel canto techniques and precise pitch on high notes - a brilliant top register controlled easily and confidently. At the beginning of the aria, Boninsegna relies totally on the natural increase in tension provided by simply following Bellini's melodic line, with its change in harmony from the tonic G major in bars 16-19 (See 6.2: Appendix C: Score) to the supertonic minor in bars 20-23 (See 6.2: Appendix C: Score). She shows her performance flair in her elaboration of the melodic line in stanza two and the cadenza.

While generally she is not overly dramatic in this aria, the addition of a variation at the pre-cadenza point as shown in bar 54 (Ex. 3.4) demonstrates the flexibility of her voice, creates tension and adds interest to the cadenza ending. However, her lack of breath control is evident, possibly caused by a need to sing louder for the recording process. She breathes in places that suggest she is bracing herself for difficult or loud passages to follow. This effect will be discussed under section 3.3.4.

3.3.3. Realisation of Bellini's style

The tranquil nature of the aria invokes a prayer to a chaste goddess. A fifteen bar introduction by the solo flute, with orchestra, (marked *assai espressivo*) sets the mood and tonality for the aria. Boninsegna

⁷⁹ It is likely that the primitive recording process of 1904 has caused this impression.

develops this feeling by following Bellini's written notation in the first stanza, calmly calling upon the deity by invoking a feeling of gentle tranquillity. Boninsegna sings in the higher key of G major, the original key, presumably as she can manage the high notes well. She does not always sing the exact notation in the score, but shows some originality in added variations. The turns in bars 18 and 43 (See 6.3: Appendix C: Score) are sung as written. Appoggiaturas in bars 24 and 25 in stanza one (See 6.3: Appendix C: Score) and in bars 49 and 50 in stanza two (See 6.3: Appendix C: Score) are also sung exactly as written. What is most pertinent is that Boninsegna uses Bellini's written ornaments without alteration. She creates tension by means of crescendo, diminuendo and several effective pauses, as well as a wide range of dynamic shading from pianissimo to fortissimo. The performance works well for her to a limited extent, at first somewhat restrained, as in bar 29: words: *'(Sem)-bian-te Sen-za nu-be e senza vel'* sung as written (Ex. 3.3).

As previously mentioned, the arabesques in the passage bars 31-40 (Exs. 3.1. and 3.2.) are omitted. From an aural perspective, the listener can hear, regrettably, that the omission of these melismata detracts from the meaning and interpretation of the prayer. The melismata provide emphasis to the qualities of the goddess, her radiance and heavenly light, as she is entreated to shed her silvery (heavenly) light on the assembled company, *'senza nube'* (unclouded) and *'senza vel'* (soaring to heaven). The omission prevents elements of florid ornamentation characteristic of true bel canto from emerging at this point, and accordingly removes the opportunity for an increase in dramatic tension. The performance is therefore less satisfying. However, the most plausible explanation for this is that the chorus has been omitted simply because it was impossible to record it with Berliner's apparatus.

In stanza two, bar 54, words: *'(re-)gnar, re-gnar tu fai nel ciel'* (Ex. 3.4), Boninsegna dramatically enhances the composer's ideas, with the music suggesting the meaning of the words, reinforcing Bellini's close relationship between text and music, namely, *'regnar'* suggesting 'elevation', a high point of control, as in royalty, 'reigning'. This is evident in her interpretation. She shows the capabilities of her voice, adding her own insight by varying Bellini's original sequential bars of the first stanza, as shown in bar 29 in the corresponding bar in stanza two, that is, bar 54 (Ex. 3.4). This is discussed in section 3.3.4., (ex.3.3 and 3.4). In this stanza she displays examples of florid interpretation in bel canto style with flair and innovation. This improvisation is effective, as it attracts the listener's interest in the repeated passage. Despite the general tendency in bel canto arias not to over-elaborate the bars leading to the cadenza, the variation is unrestrained and flows with technical competency. The cadenza

itself also illustrates improvisation and creates a high level of expression which relates to the climactic point. It has been varied from the written score and will be discussed below.

3.3.4. Elements of bel canto

Boninsegna's tone is sweet, clear and pure and her expression has clarity and beauty. She has a brilliant top register reaching c''' and d''' precise in pitch but lacks power at this level. In stanza one, Boninsegna sings in a more reserved style following the score, and, using emotion to highlight expression in stanza two, she elaborates the melodic line more freely with bel canto characteristics. This is an acceptable practice in bel canto terms, and enables each stanza to have individual interpretation. In this way she maintains interest and momentum, and without it, the performance would be mundane.

The following transcribed excerpts are intended to demonstrate elements of bel canto techniques used by Boninsegna. These emerge in a comparison of bars 29-30 (Ex.3.3) stanza one, and bars 54-55 stanza two, identical in the original score, with Boninsegna's version (Ex. 3. 4).

Ex. 3.3 Bars 29-30 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Stanza one

(sem-) bian - te, sen - za nu - be, e sen - za vel.

In example 3.3, the first syllable of 'sen-(za)' falls on the notes f'# and g'', the high point of the first half of the bar and also on c'# and d'' the high point of the second half. This gives effective emphasis to the word 'sen-za' (without). In Boninsegna's bar 54 (Ex. 3.4) there are the several notational variations from the score and additional expressive pauses.

Ex. 3.4 Bars 54-55 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Stanza two Boninsegna's version

(re-) gnar , re - gnar tu fai tu - fai nel ciel. tu

Bar 54 (Ex. 3.4) is significant and provides insight into the bel canto tradition. These are expressive words in the context of the aria. The intervallic rise in bar 54 is related to the words and is effective in expressing their meaning. One particular feature is the use of her upper tessitura, with two leaps, one of

a major 6th, d² to b² ('*re-gnar*'), and the other a minor 10th, a¹ to c³ ('*tu fai*'), on which she pauses. In this way she illustrates the ability of her voice to project the meaning of the Italian words with greater expressive effect as discussed in section 3.3.3. The word '*(re-)gnar*' falls on high b² (reign), a high note representing power or ruling. The c³ falls on '*fai*' (make), emphasising the goddess' power, and she adds her own ornamentations as a descending dominant 7th in bel canto style.

In addition, Boninsegna changes the original notation in bar 54 on the first crotchet in beat 2, (b²), the last quaver of beat 3 (c³) and first semiquavers of beat 4 (the dominant 7th: c³, a², f²# and d²), finishing the phrase with a mordent on c³ natural. This phrase is sung more slowly than previously; *rallentando* and pauses are used with even greater sensitivity. It should also be noted that this occurs prior to the cadenza, bar 56 (Ex. 3.9) and leads to the final climactic point. Rosen has commented that a given cadenza should be slow and expressive, and to be effective requires that the previous phrases be executed almost entirely without added ornaments.⁸⁰ This appears to be the case in the way the majority of singers considered here perform this bar. Boninsegna, however, adds embellishments in bar 54 (Ex. 3.4). This feature could be likened to a dressmaker adding more lace on to an already lacy dress. However, here it is effective because Boninsegna is still able to be expressive in the cadenza that follows.

Another important element is breath control. By examining this aspect it can be seen that her control is good in some parts, for example in bars 26-27 (Ex. 3.6), yet in several bars, such as the opening, bars 16-17 and bar 20, she breaks the legato by shortening a note. However, in bar 28, she snatches a noticeable breath. In bar 29 (Ex. 3.6) she takes many breaths because she sings the sequences much more slowly and consequently needs more breath. Her changes in phrasing are shown by altered slurs. Her breathing places are quite evident, but rather frequent and at times cause a jerky legato. However, the slow pace (*rallentando*) is effective in creating emotion. Ex 3.5 shows the original score, bars 26-30, for comparison with Boninsegna's version.

⁸⁰ Charles Rosen. *The Romantic Generation*. London: Harper Collins, 1996. p. 622.

Ex. 3.5 Bars 26-30 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'

vol - gi, a noi vol - gi bel sem - bian - - - - -
 - - - - - te,il bel sem - bian - te sen - za nu - be e sen - za vel.

The following example illustrates the breathing taken by Boninsegna in this passage.

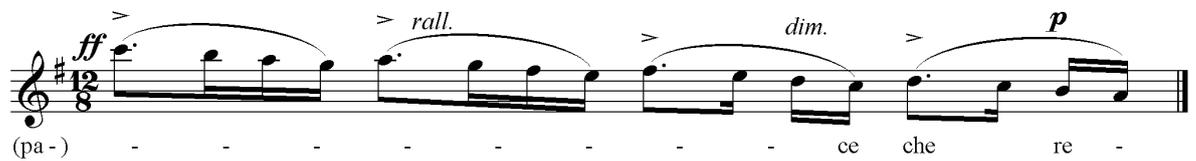
Ex. 3.6 Bars 26-30 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Boninsegna's breathing marks

vol-gi, a noi vol-gi bel sem - bian - - - - - te,il bel sem -
 - bian - te sen - za nu - be e sen - za vel.

In bar 28 (Ex. 3.6), the breath is taken after the syllable '-te' but she stays on the vowel a little too long for that recording technique, and her voice almost disappears for a moment. This disrupts the natural flow of the phrase. There is a comma in the text where the breath should be taken, after '-te' and before 'il', to allow a more flowing legato into bar 29. Her long notes are well pitched and articulated as written, such as the high b's in bar 27 (Ex.3.6). They are often cut short, particularly in bar 54 (Ex. 3.4) where she rises to a high c". This is also the case as well in the repeated b" notes near the end of each verse as shown in bar 27 (Ex. 3.6) and bar 52 which is identical to bar 27.

Messa di voce, an important feature of bel canto technique, is used in bars 27 and 52 (the last b") leading into bars 28 and 53 (Exs. 3.6 and 3.7), effecting a very controlled diminuendo emphasizing the text. In bar 28, it expresses the word meaning 'semblance' or 'appearance', '(sem-) bian-te'. There is a gradual decrease in volume and speed over the phrase (Ex. 3.6) and this gives heightened expression.

Ex. 3.7 Bar 53 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'

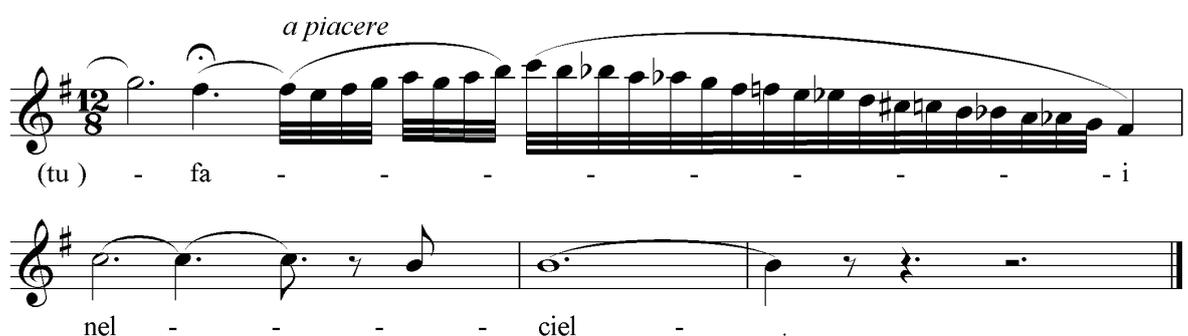


Likewise in bar 53 (Ex. 3.7), 'pa-ce', (peace), she vocalises over the syllable 'pa-', from 'pace (peace). She displays her competency in managing the control of high notes at the top of her voice (c'').

Some vibrato is evident. Generally, vibrato adds life and enriches the tone. However, she uses too much vibrato, and although she sings accurately, the vibrato is somewhat exaggerated, and does not add quality to the tone. This is more likely a result of the primitive recording techniques of one hundred years ago. If the recording is played back at a slower speed (making G into F# as mentioned earlier), then the recording has slowed the vibrato and made it very audible. Boninsegna uses vibrato to affirm her high notes, such as in bar 54 (Ex. 3.4) as well as in the cadenza.

The cadenza at the end of the second stanza utilises most of her tessitura, from f# to d'', while variations in the form of different notation and lengths of notes, including high d'', are added. The two bars, 56 and 57 in the cadenza, have a few additional notes added which demonstrate her wide tessitura, flexibility of voice and her own ornamentations. The phrases are much shorter and do not display a real understanding of the florid nature of bel canto, as Bellini's preference for expressive decoration induces him to lengthen melodic lines.⁸¹ Example 3.8 shows Bellini's long florid lines in the cadenza and can be compared with Boninsegna's version in Ex. 3.9.

Ex. 3.8 Bars 56-59 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'



⁸¹ Charles Rosen. *op. cit.*, p. 621.

Ex. 3.9 Bars 56-58 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Cadenza - Boninsegna's version

The image shows a musical score for a vocal cadenza. It consists of two staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 12/8 time. The first staff has lyrics: "ah si. ah - - ah - - - si". The second staff has lyrics: "tu - fa - i nel - - - - - ciel.". The score includes various musical ornaments such as trills and grace notes, and dynamic markings like "rall." and "a tempo".

Boninsegna manages the intricacies of Bellini's cadenza with ease by changing some notes in the cadenza in bars 56 and 57 (Ex. 3.9), thus reducing the long florid line. She has lengthy pauses of approximately two beats each on several notes. She vocalises on the first syllable of 'fa-i' (make). One particular feature is the omission of Bellini's two inverted turns, as well as the chromatic descending passage. However, an ordinary turn is substituted, a descending G major dominant seventh followed by another turn. In bar 56 (Ex. 3.9) she follows the first turn with a high c^{'''}, ascends to d^{'''}, then, using a G major dominant seventh followed by another turn, she descends to f[#], the leading note, taking a breath here, thus delaying the resolution. The partially chromatic rising scale in the last two bars expresses rising up in the sky, emphasising 'reign', pausing on f[#], the leading note again, thus withholding the resolution to finish on a long g^{''} as shown in bars 56-58 (Ex. 3.9) displaying messa di voce.

Bellini generally delays the resolution of his cadenzas in his operas, so Boninsegna's interpretation fits well with Bellini's style. Whether he would approve of the added ornamentations in bar 56 as shown in Ex. 3.9 is a moot point. Boninsegna executes the cadenza by taking several breaths. She does not add trills to enhance her performance in the cadenza, in contrast to Sutherland, who jumps a perfect octave from f[#], the leading note, to f^{##} to begin the trill (Sutherland's version is the only other in the original key).

3.3.5. Comparison of performances

Section 3.3.4 has discussed the aural analysis of the characteristics of the aria 'Casta Diva' as performed on the recording by Boninsegna, with the view to identifying the features of bel canto extant in the early 1900s. A number of specific questions arise, most notably whether it is fair to compare this performance with recordings made on modern equipment. Of course, the quality of this recording is

poorer, but despite this, the bel canto style can still be recognised. Another consideration turns on the use of orchestral accompaniment and the extent to which this enhances more recent recorded performances. The piano accompaniment featured on Boninsegna's recording provides a much thinner texture than does an orchestra. Nor is the piano able to create drama and tension in the same way as would an orchestra.

Regardless of the standard of this recording, an analysis of Boninsegna's rendition in no way contradicts the impression that she was a star performer of her time. Her performance, while being hampered by lack of orchestral accompaniment, is nevertheless credible. Regardless of orchestral or piano accompaniment, there is no doubt that she has a commanding voice with a true pitch, skilful interpretation and technically strong fioriture, even if somewhat limited by the absence of modern accompaniment.

Boninsegna had great talent which was lavishly praised in her own time and her recordings are still admired today. Together with Sutherland, she is the only singer who attains a high c''' in the cadenza. In addition, Boninsegna attains high d''. The similarities in the ending of Boninsegna's cadenza when compared with those of Ponselle, Callas and Souliotis, suggest that her recordings helped to shape later singers.

In summary, Boninsegna makes less impact on the listener, and her perceived weakness in breathing control makes this recording a less valuable model of bel canto style and technique. Nevertheless, this recording highlights the status of Bellini's opera at the turn of the century, in the infancy of recording history. While it may seem to disadvantage the performer, the scratchy strident nature of the recording does not prevent the listener from appreciating the bel canto style. Her cadenza is interesting compared with other singers who sing this excerpt, and would serve as a model of bel canto innovation. She was one of the first women to be recorded, and consequently the most intrinsic value of this recording is to give a clear reflection of the nature of bel canto in the early twentieth century.

3.4 ROSA PONSELLE (Performed 1928-29)

3.4.1. Introduction

No less a figure than Luciano Pavarotti asserted that Rosa Ponselle is one of the most celebrated of all Normas.⁸² Pavarotti continued, 'whenever young singers ask whom they should pattern their singing after, I always respond, "Make a sincere study of the recordings of Rosa Ponselle."' ⁸³ Monserrat Caballé added, 'My favourite singer? Rosa Ponselle! I devour every recording I can find of her singing'.⁸⁴ Elizabeth Schwarzkopf commented, 'the first records my future husband played to me were by Rosa Ponselle: to teach you the meaning of bel canto.'⁸⁵

Rosa Ponselle was born in Meriden, Connecticut, USA, in 1897 and died in USA in 1981. She made her debut on 18 November 1918. Influenced by Caruso, Ponselle belonged to the generation which rediscovered bel canto after World War I. Her voice has richness and depth, with all registers integrated smoothly. With exemplary legato singing she shows feeling, drama, and unusual flexibility in song. Her dynamics are extreme, ranging from a powerful fortissimo to a fine pianissimo, and her emotions are expressed musically and meaningfully. 1929 saw her Covent Garden debut as Norma and she gave her last performance in the role in 1937. Notwithstanding her 22 other operatic roles, she is most celebrated in the role of Norma which she can sing with authority, without any sense of strain and with unbroken purity.

Ponselle's recording of *Norma* is evaluated aurally. It is imbued with bel canto techniques and qualities that give a strong indication of the continued transmission and preservation of bel canto technique. This recording would have originally been made on a 78rpm disc, and benefits from an electrical recording process, as opposed to the acoustic process used to capture Boninsegna's performance. The result is that the quality of Ponselle's recording is clearer. This case study analyses the performance of Ponselle

⁸² Luciano Pavarotti. <<http://www.rosaponselle.com/critique.html>.> (27 December 2007).

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Monserrat Caballé. <<http://www.rosaponselle.com/critique.html>.> (27 December 2007).

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Schwarzkopf. <<http://www.rosaponselle.com/critique.html>.> (27 December 2007).

recorded in the New York Metropolitan Opera House.⁸⁶ It is an abridged version of 'Casta Diva', most likely in concert, not staged. After the melismata ending in bar 38 (Ex.3.2), she moves directly to bar 40 entering on the third beat, high *f*'. She ends with the cadenza, omitting most of stanza two. The question arises as to why she omitted a section in the middle of the aria, and undoubtedly the omission of these lines affects its overall musical flow. It can be surmised that Ponselle wanted to maintain the flow of the meaning of the text, and in this regard no essential sense of the textual structure is lost, although it is less descriptive.

An examination of 'Casta Diva' reveals that bars 36-38 (Ex. 3.2.), the text being '*senza nube e senza vel*, (unclouded and unveiled), are followed immediately with bar 55, '*tu fai nel ciel*', meaning 'You shine (lit. 'make reign') in the sky' and this text fits together. Ponselle omits the lines from '*Tempra, o Diva*' to '*regnar, tu fai, tu fai nel ciel*'. (See chapter 3.2.2 for the full text of the aria). This omission detracts from the ardent plea to the goddess to spread peace on earth. The text at this point is a critical part of the prayer, so its omission leaves the text less expressive, with weakened intent, less entreating and more abrupt. Possibly Ponselle wanted to shorten the performance (or perhaps it was the musical director), but not wanting to exclude the magnificent melismata, she made the transition as smooth as possible from bar 38 (Ex. 3.2) without losing the overall sense of the text. This exclusion is debatable, as, although it leads directly into the cadenza, there is a lack of closure. The first part of stanza two is needed to make a more satisfying lead into the cadenza climax and resolution.

3.4.2. Performance and dramatic events

Ponselle has a powerful voice particularly in her rich lower register, which she utilises to dramatise the role, rather than over embellish the aria with bel canto elements. She is not innovative, as evidenced by the lack of additional ornaments to the score and a restrained cadenza. In stanza one, bars 16-19 and 20-23 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score), she creates simple tension by tonal variations. As bars 39-54 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score) are omitted in stanza two there is no further build up of tension until the cadenza. The most dramatic part of her performance occurs in the last two bars, bars 57-59, (Ex. 3.19), when her powerful voice climbs to *f*' with a well controlled crescendo. The melismata interludes create tension, each one ending with a large diminuendo. It is clear that she only displays bel canto features

⁸⁶ *Ponselle as Norma and other famous heroines*, Victoria -1507 (Performed and recorded Dec 1928 and Jan 1929). New York, USA: RCA, 1970. Refer to audio CD, track 2.

embedded in the score, such as turns and grace notes, melismata and sequences. By using only her own vocal means of differentiation of tone production, Ponselle increases the drama and tension.

3.4.3. Realisation of Bellini's style

A feature of the bel canto style is the embellishment of the melodic line. However, as Ponselle does not use any additional ornamentation in 'Casta Diva', she uses other bel canto techniques in her interpretation. Carefully following Bellini's score, Ponselle interprets his arabesques and sequences (Ex. 3.15 and 3.16) with refinement and precision, displaying excellent skill in using messa di voce related to the text, with a range of dynamics from pianissimo to fortissimo and vice versa. Her excellent breathing and quality of pitch allow her to produce high notes without vibrato; her pitch is clear and true with accurate intonation and diction of words. Her interpretations of the text are applied through the emotions she injects into each word, and a number of illustrations related to the text will be discussed in section 3.4.4.

Ponselle uses almost fully the upper part of her tessitura, e' to b'' flat in this aria, notwithstanding her ability to range from c' to c'''. Her weakness can be perceived as lack of courage to explore the possibilities of the tessitura of her voice, by improvising in imaginative bel canto ornamentation in the repeated phrases and sequences. Conceivably, her top register is her weakness, as she refrains from extending it in the cadenza. She avoids problematic high c''s in *Norma* preferring to transpose them down, particularly as she sings in the lower key of F major. She could have negotiated these with ease and accuracy but limits herself to b'' flat, her highest note. It has been suggested by James A. Drake that Ponselle had a fear of high c''s although 'Casta Diva' does not have any high c''s in the F major version.⁸⁷ Drake implied that Ponselle often transposed passages down a tone to allow her to reach the high registers more effectively. The cadenza lacks adornment; she sings little beyond what is written in the score apart from the final two bars.

This recording has sufficient quality to highlight the way the singer can use bel canto techniques without adding additional elaborate ornamentation. Expressiveness is achieved by messa di voce, crescendo, diminuendo, rallentando and rubato. Portamento is used in bars 18, 22, 22-26 and 57-58 to good effect.

⁸⁷ Vicki Kondelik. Book Reviewer. James A. Drake, *Rosa Ponselle: A Centenary Biography*.

Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1997. <<http://www.operajaponica.org/review/books/ponselledrake.htm>>

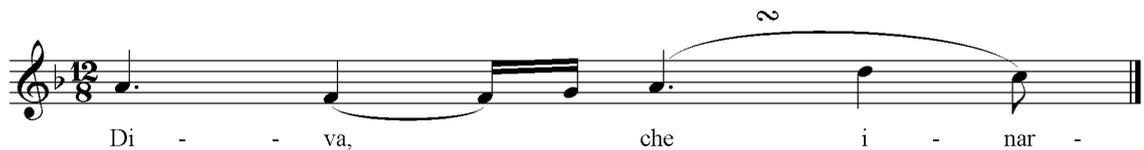
(19 January 2010).

3.4.4. Elements of bel canto

Despite the flexibility of her powerful voice, Ponselle refrains from taking that step into the realm of elaborate bel canto techniques. This lack of innovation is substantiated in a subsequent aria. *'Ah! bello a me ritorna'*.⁸⁸ Ponselle does not add her own embellishments, choosing to adhere to those marked by Bellini in the score.⁸⁹

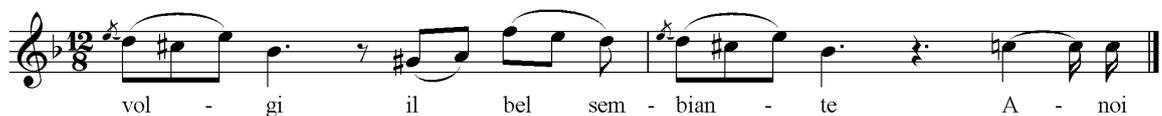
The following transcribed excerpts illustrate examples of the way Ponselle uses Bellini's score to add expressiveness to the melodic line. In Ex. 3.10, bar 18, a turn, used with portamento on the word '*che*' (who or thy), emphasises the moon deity, to whom the prayer is offered, and adds a regal dimension.

Ex. 3.10 Bar 18 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'



In bars 24-25, Ex 3.11, the appoggiatura, e" to d" is found twice, the first in its simplest form on the first beat. In bar 25, first beat it is repeated as in bar 24. This is not just simple dissonance, but prolonged dissonance, repeated for emphasis. On beat four in bar 24 a repetition of e"- d" complements the melody. The momentary suspense of these dissonances reinforces the expressive value of the appoggiatura, enabling Ponselle to exhibit in this regard well-shaped emotion and focused intensity.

Ex. 3.11 Bars 24-25 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'



⁸⁸ After the recitative which follows '*Casta Diva*', in the aria '*Ah! bello a me ritorna*' she follows the simpler version of Schirmer's score exactly, but omits Schirmer's suggested *obbligato* in bars 15, 16 and 18 (as noted in Schirmer's score). Interestingly in the scores of Boosey and Sons, Novello and Sullivan and Pitman, this passage is written partly in full using ideas suggested by Schirmer, but based on the simpler version from Schirmer.

⁸⁹ Refer to Chapter Three, section 3.2.2. Introduction to *Norma* for the full text of '*Casta Diva*'.

The appoggiaturas on the strong beat of bars 24 and 25 (Ex. 3.11) are used emphatically, and with portamento, in order to highlight the words ‘*volgi*’ (turn) and ‘*sem-bian-te*’ (semblance). These words are also sung with emphasis in bars 26-29 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score).

Sustained notes are a feature of bel canto style. Bars 26-29 embrace the word ‘*sem-bian-te*’, with the syllable ‘*bian-*’ sung on the long high a”s of bar 27 (Ex.3.12) This bar is a highlight of Ponselle’s performance, building up to a dramatic climactic point near the end of stanza one.

Ex. 3.12 Bar 27 Novello Vocal Score ‘Casta Diva’

f *sempre cresc. sino al*

(sem-) bian - - - - -

The long sustained high a” s in bar 27 (Ex. 3.12) are each articulated at the beginning of the long note and with one breath for the whole phrase. They have a finished style and are carried over without further articulation into bar 28, vocalised with heightened intensity before ending the word on ‘*-te*’ part way through the third sequence. The sequences in bar 28 (Ex. 3.13), embrace the second and third syllables of ‘*sem-bian-te*’.

Ex. 3.13 Bar 28 Novello Vocal Score ‘Casta Diva’

ff

(sem) bia - - - - - n - te, il bel - sem -

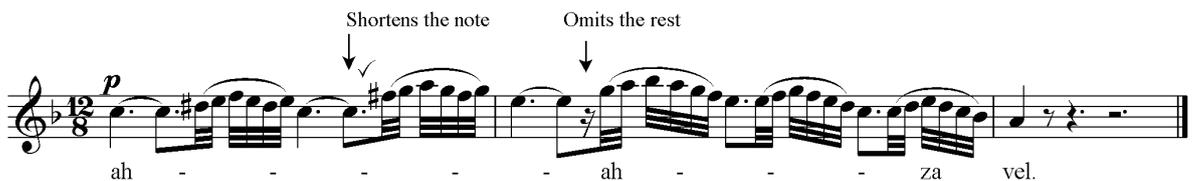
In bar 28, Ponselle takes one breath after the first three notes of the third sequence and *rallentando* as she descends on the 4th sequence (Ex. 3.14). The slurring of the scored version is an editorial error, and not practical in terms of execution. Ponselle’s changed slurring is shown in Ex. 3.14 (as shown in the Ricordi score 1992). This is a more suitable place for the breath. Consequently, it allows the last phrase in the sequence to flow naturally into the next bar where another breath is taken after ‘*sem-bian-te*’, although Ponselle’s ‘*-te*’ is less than clear.

Ex. 3.14 Bar 28 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Ponselle's version



One specific feature is Ponselle's sustained notes produced by well-controlled breathing, with smooth exemplary legato. Her breathing is so smooth that it is difficult to isolate every breath. She can hold her breath longer and follow through the phrase without needing an intermediate breath. This action allows her articulation to be clear and her phrasing musical in the arabesques or melismata. For example, in bars 32-34 (Ex. 3.15), she takes only one breath within these three bars. She does not breathe at the semiquaver rest in bar 33 but rather she shortens the tied dotted quaver c" in bar 32 to take the breath before the f"#. It is interesting to note that this semiquaver rest is not in the Ricordi score. The editorial slur on the last sequence in bar 33 is impractical and the '-za' is indistinguishable as she vocalises. Breathing is a very distinct feature of this performance.

Ex. 3.15 Bars 32-34 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'



The melismata ornamentations from the score demonstrate the need for technical fluency, particularly in breathing which is a very important part of conveying the bel canto style and technicalities. As this is one of her great strengths, it is conceivable that she could have added ornamentations of her own with ease, but she chooses not to do so.

The arabesques illustrate Bellini's simple but effective sequential writing. Ponselle's melismatic singing is legatissimo and idealises the woman priestess, a chaste being. With the omission of stanza two, Ponselle has the opportunity to display Bellini's fioriture well in the arabesque section bars 30-38 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score). Every note has expressive potential, but Bellini would surely condone any alteration of these graceful curves if the singer had insisted on adding any more embellishments in order to display her vocal capabilities. Ponselle's florid singing expresses the special purity of character of this role and displays excellent control. Consequently, she does not add any further decoration. Her highest note (b" flat) has a convincingly effortless pitch. Several melismata are sung to one word. At the beginning of each melismatic phrase the consonant is not articulated as normally sung, but rather the

vowel sound is re-articulated. This is unusual and it is difficult to isolate exactly what consonant or vowel is used.

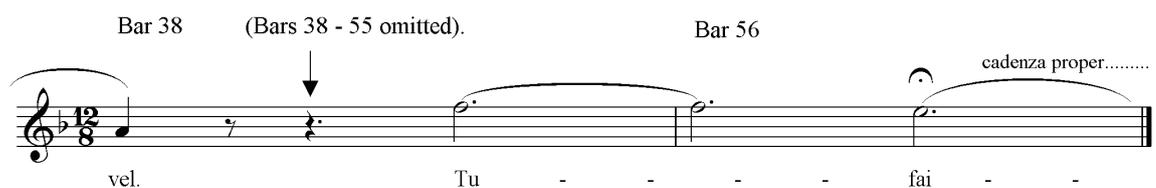
Ex. 3.16 Bars 37-38 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' showing Ponselle's breathing



A comparison of bar 37 (Ex. 3.16) with bar 33 (Ex.3.15) shows Bellini's variation in the second set of melismata. The last group of demi-semi-quavers in bars 33 and 37 (Ex. 3.15 and 3.16) is underlain with the last syllable of 'sen-za'. In bar 33, 'sen-za' is sung as descending sequential arabesques. Thereafter, in bar 37 it is sung in descending chromatic scale sequences, being followed by 'vel' on the first strong beat of the next bar. Ponselle starts each arabesque forte, with one breath taken for each and with a long sustainable diminuendo. Although this is distinct, the word of the text is not used. The syllable '-za', is not articulated clearly, being scored in the middle of the last melismata. Rather, the phrases are vocalised over the vowel 'ah', and '-za' would be better articulated on the last b' flat. She inserts 'vel' at the end in isolation to rhyme with the chorus.

Ponselle moves directly from bar 38 to bar 55 (Ex. 3.17).

Ex. 3.17 Bars 38 and 55 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' showing Ponselle's transfer over the omitted section



The importance of and significance of the relationship between the text and melody is most pertinent at this point. The word 'tu' (thou) is sung on the high f' of bar 55, with the long note held in emphasis into bar 56. Similarly the word 'ciel' (sky or heaven) falls on the last note of the cadenza as she reaches high f' in bar 58 (Ex. 3.19) with the preceding notes rising to this point in emphasis of the meaning of the word 'ciel' (You reign in the sky). However, to focus on the text and maintain the intensity and connection of this transference, Ponselle increases her tone level higher.

The cadenza lacks embellishment and does not show much originality; Ponselle includes one additional

element of bel canto, dramatic expression, found in the last two bars of the aria, bars 56-58 (Ex. 3.19) as can be seen in a comparison of examples 3.18 and 3.19.

Ex. 3.18 Bars 56-59 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Vocal Score

a piacere

(tu-) fa - - - - - i
nel - nel ciel - - -

Ex. 3.19 Bars 56-59 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Cadenza Ponselle's version

(tu) fa - - - - - i
mezzo voce

crescendo tu fa - i nel - ciel. - - -

In bar 57 (Ex. 3.19), the original notation is changed, as Ponselle ascends from c'' to f' in clear pure notes. It can be observed that, after an even descending chromatic passage as written, which illustrates the full range of her tessitura, followed by the scale passage ascending (c'' d'' e'' f' f'), she ends on f' with portamento. She concludes with an extended messa di voce on the final two notes, rather than as written on the score, b' flat a'. She takes a breath after d'' but avoids rising to high c''' from f'. This cadenza is hardly striking, but at least it is somewhat different from the score. Although Bellini wrote the cadenza in full (Ex. 3.18), he would have expected the singer to embellish it further. It should be remembered that her weakness is reaching the high c'''s. Notably, Callas, the most famous of all Normas, also performed the cadenza in almost exactly the same way (see section 3.5, Ex. 3.31).

Ponselle does not use trills in this aria to enhance her performance. Had she added a trill in the cadenza, she would have created suspense and drama more effectively. The most conventional and suitable place to insert a trill would be spontaneously in the closing notes of the cadenza. However, she avoids this, preferring to have a long pause on high e", the leading note. This is the most discordant note in the scale and the least likely for a pause. However, here Ponselle uses it to good effect as if it were a suspended seventh, creating much tension and drama before resolving on to high f", the tonic, on the word '*ciel*'. There is no accompaniment at this point to conflict with the seventh; it is used as an anticipatory note to which the word '*nel*' applies (in the). This is in contrast to well sustained trills she has sung imaginatively in other works, such as in the cabaletta '*Tutto sprezzo*' in Act 1 of Verdi's *Ernani*.

Whilst the whole range of her voice is not utilised, a dramatic effect is gained in the intense descending chromatic scale from a long high b" flat to e' (Ex. 3.19). But what is most pertinent is that, without an interesting trill, the impact is lost and the conclusion is less interesting. Ponselle uses messa di voce on the last two bars of the cadenza effectively. In the descending chromatic passage she sustains a fine diminuendo, and contrastingly in the next bar she uses crescendo through the phrase as well as on the final note. This establishes some final drama in the cadenza and suggests that the most intense part of the melodic climax is held back until the last three notes for a striking effect.

3.4.5. Comparison of performances

The discussion to this point has aimed to examine the bel canto characteristics of this recording, with the desire to estimate its value in the preservation of bel canto traditions from the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Rosa Ponselle certainly meets the demands of this aria. Her voice is powerful and dramatic and she uses this to advantage in expressing the text. However, she limits her expression to what is written in the score and chooses not to further embellish it. Apart from in the cadenza, her intention has not been to recreate some possible bel canto embellishments of which Bellini might have approved. Nevertheless, Ponselle communicates warmth and depth of tone with perfection of technique.

The recording illustrates how a singer can use her interpretations of the text to portray bel canto traditions of expressiveness, without recourse to added embellishments. Compared with other performers discussed in the case study, it is debatable whether Ponselle was truly the 'Queen of

Queens'. It is likely that advocates and supporters of both Callas and Sutherland would oppose this perception. They would contend that most likely Ponselle was the 'Queen' of her own era, which on the basis of what has been discussed seems reasonable.

The examination of the various elements of Ponselle's performance confirms that bel canto effects are evident in her recording. Her recordings importantly provide a good resource for the preservation and handing on of bel canto techniques to future generations.

3.5 MARIA CALLAS (1954 and 1960)

She sang like a vivid flame attracting the attention of the whole world, and she had a strange magic which was all her own.⁹⁰

3.5.1. Introduction

Born Maria Anna Cecilia Sophia Kalogeropoulos in 1923 in New York, Maria Callas died in Paris 1977. She made her professional debut in 1941 in Athens singing *Tosca*. Her first performance of *Norma* was in Florence in 1948, with 1952 her first *Norma* in London. She performed the role of Norma eighty-nine times throughout her subsequent career from 1948-1965⁹¹ and this role is considered her greatest triumph.⁹² Two recordings of live performances of Maria Callas in the role of Norma are evaluated, her first performance in 1954 at La Scala, Milan, Italy,⁹³ and the second also at La Scala in 1960.⁹⁴ In the same year, she performed *Norma* at the Theatre at Epidaurus in Greece, and *The Times* (London) reported thus:

August 1960 will surely go down as a landmark in the annals of Greek artistic history. In the first place, the performances of *Norma*, given in the open-air theatre at Epidaurus, brought Maria Callas home for the first time as a great international diva to sing Norma with the Greek national opera in which she began her career.

(...) Musically the most memorable thing about her performance was the justly famous 'Casta diva'.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Tito Gobbi. *The art of Maria Callas*. <<http://www.lyciacollins.50megs.com/Callas/intro.htm>>

(2 April 2007). Gobbi was one of the greatest baritones of the twentieth century.

⁹¹ Maria Callas. <<http://www.geocities.com/piersgaveston/callas.htm>>

(2 July 2007).

⁹² Desmond Shawen-Taylor. "Callas Maria". *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Stanley Sadie, ed. London: MacMillan, 2001. Vol. 4. p. 837.

⁹³ Maria Callas. *Norma*. Performed 1954. Conductor Tullio Serafin. Orchestra and Chorus of Teatro alla Scala Milan. (previously released material on LP, reissued on CDs, remastered). C EMI 5 56721 2. Cassette tape. Refer to audio CD, track 3.

⁹⁴ Maria Callas. *Norma*. Performed 1960 at La Scala. *La Divina*, Performed 1960 at La Scala. USA: EMI classics, 1992. 0777 7 54702. LP. Milan: Columbia, 1961. Refer to audio CD, track 4.

⁹⁵ From our special Correspondent. "Madame Callas sings Norma in the Theatre at Epidaurus".

The Times. August 29, 1960: 12. Issue 54862; col. E.

The intensity which Callas injected into this performance combined magnificently with the unique setting.

Callas' recordings were originally 33^{1/3} LP records made soon after World War II. The 78rpm record had declined by the 1950s, Columbia having introduced 33^{1/3} LP technology in 1948. LPs played for much longer so a complete opera could be recorded on a smaller number of discs, each with six tracks. Several developments were subsequently made to enhance the sound quality. In 1957, the first high-definition electrostatic panel loudspeaker was produced, which was regarded as a break-through in high fidelity performance.⁹⁶ In 1958 the first commercial stereo LP records were released. These were two channel records which had much more audible sound quality.⁹⁷ They had less hum and distortion, unlike 78 rpm records which were renowned for crackling and roughness of sound.

Callas made a total of seven recordings of 'Casta Diva' and four others of various parts of *Norma*. Lowe claims the 1954 recording at La Scala is her most beautiful in its melodic line.⁹⁸ It is doubtful whether anyone would disagree with this claim. Callas was in her prime, and her sensuous performance was dramatic and imbued with passion. The 1960 LP recording of 'Casta Diva' has remained prominent amongst her discography. An aural analysis of both recordings provides interesting comparisons.

While Callas often sang *Norma* in the original G major key, as she had done in some performances like Sutherland, these versions are in F major, a tone lower. The higher key is very demanding, as *Norma* has several passages which require a high c'' (d'' if a tone higher). So that these notes do not become difficult to attain, Callas sometimes opted for the lower key, which meant 'Casta Diva's' highest note was b'' flat. The cabaletta '*Ah bello a me ritorna*' which follows 'Casta Diva' concludes with a high c'' (d'' if sung in G major) on the word '*cie-(lo)*' and this would influence her choice of key as well.⁹⁹ In the finale of Act one, the melody rises on the word '*ah!*' to high c'' (key C major) (d'' if transposed to D major).¹⁰⁰ In Act Two, there are several instances of a high c'' in the duet 'Ah! perché' between Norma and

⁹⁶ Jonathan Kettle. "100 Years of Audio Sound Story." In the *BBC Music Magazine*. London: BBC, December 1999.

p. 47.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

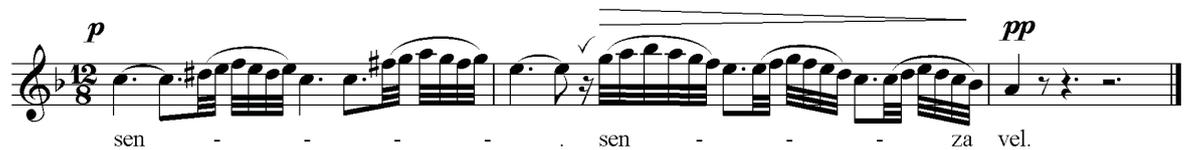
⁹⁸ David A. Lowe. ed. *Callas as they saw her*. London: Robson, 1987. p. 239.

⁹⁹ Novello, Ewer and Co. Vocal Score. *Norma*. p. 58.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 96.

Another example, the arabesques, is a point in the aria at which she creates quiet passages with a controlled diminuendo, from piano to pianissimo, bars 32-34 (Ex. 3.21).

Ex. 3.21 Bars 32-34 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Callas 1954 version



Each melisma shown in the example 3.21 above begins softly, and has a slight swell as the musical arch curves upwards before falling. *Messa voce* occurs near the end in the second half of bar 33 (Ex. 3.21). Her voice maintains a long diminuendo to the last syllable '-za' (of 'senza') and this has the effect of providing emphasis through the word 'senza' (without). The diminuendo transports the prayer to an ethereal plane, a powerful moment. After the first syllable, the remaining notes are vocalised. The vocalisation is a difficult technique to achieve and contributes to the dramatic tension. However, the text underlay of the syllable '-za' (from 'senza') is inaccurate and indistinct. The end of this word would be more effective if it were sung on the last demisemiquaver of bar 33.

It is difficult to identify weaknesses in Callas' performance. She shapes her melodies well and sings the long and extremely demanding phrases of 'Casta Diva' with elegant control and refinement. One weakness that can be identified is her occasional inability to hold a long note steady on true pitch. This is not vibrato, which, by comparison, is oscillation of vocal tone to give richer quality to the sound.

After 1958 her voice began to decline, and this is evident to some degree in the 1960 recording. Eventually, she was unable to sing the role of Norma, and in 1965 at the Paris Opera, she performed Norma for the last time. She had lost the homogeneous quality of her voice, and became unable to hold smoothly the pitch of long notes in the high register. Stefan Zucker conversed with Giulietta Simionato, an opera diva who had sung with Callas often, about this wobble or tremulous sound.¹⁰² Simionato stated that Callas always had a wobble on a-natural and a-flat, and that one day Callas had asked her to explain why she thought she always wobbled on these two notes. Simionato replied that she thought Callas' diaphragm and vocal cords had received much trauma as a result of singing difficult works like

¹⁰² Stefan Zucker. Outtakes to the film *Opera Fanatic: Stefan and the Divas*. Filmed in Italy and La Scala, 1998. In *Bel Canto Society Newsletter*. New York. 16 August 2007. pp. 1-6.

Tosca and *Cavalleria* when she was young, aged 14. She inferred that Callas' diaphragm had lost its elasticity and the sound wobbled because it was not supported. This is evident to some degree in the 1960 recording. For example, some of her notes have a tremor and are out of tune in 'Casta Diva', particularly a"-natural such as in bar 27 and b" flat in bar 13 (Ex. 3.23).

3.5.3. Realisation of Bellini's style

Perhaps the most pertinent question is whether Callas realises Bellini's style. Callas is a master of bel canto techniques and her interpretation is strikingly dramatic, with lyric tenderness, smooth legato and portamento within a wide tessitura, ornamentation handled with ease and elegant style and expressive melismata. Examples in this section aim to illustrate how Callas preserved Bellini's intent in 'Casta Diva'. Simple grace notes are sung as written as shown in example 3.22, bar 24.

Ex. 3.22 Bar 24 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'



Apart from the simple grace notes, Callas does not add any additional ornamentation, preferring to follow Bellini's instructions while not exploring further what he might have intended to be added. Ornaments enhance the natural beauty and too many embellishments would destroy it. Callas achieves the expressive intent solely through her adherence to Bellini's score. The emphasis given to the scored appoggiaturas is a very important aspect and stylistic detail of the bel canto tradition. In addition, portamento is very much in evidence and gives a beautiful liquidity to the vocal line. Callas can sing with many colours, conveying the shades of emotion and tone that Bellini intended. Notably, bars 26-30 (Ex.3.23) and 32-38 (Exs. 3.28 and 3.29) give insight into how she has interpreted Bellini's style.

Ex. 3.23 Bars 26-30 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Callas version 1954

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 12/8. The lyrics are: "vol - gi, a noi vol - gi ah - - - - - il bel sem- bian - te sen - za nu - be e sen - za vel." The score includes various performance instructions: "accel" above the vocal line in bar 26, "f" above the vocal line in bar 27, "sempre cresc. sino al..." above the vocal line in bar 28, "rall" above the piano line in bars 27, 28, and 29, and "dimin." above the piano line in bar 29.

In bars 26-30 (Ex.3.23), Callas sings with great richness. In bar 26, she executes a crescendo, bar 27 sempre crescendo, bar 29 diminuendo and rallentando (as marked) and a further diminuendo at the end of bar 29. Skill in using diminuendo is her great asset as a bel canto technique and is used with great control and sensitivity to heighten the expression.

Bars 25-30 are the second part of stanza one. Callas rises with extraordinary effect from a simple beginning, and opposes the conventional ornamentation found in bars 16-23 with a larger moving contour (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score). The sudden acceleration at the end of bar 26 is breathtaking but creates a suspenseful lead into bar 27. In addition, she holds top a" in bar 27 (Ex. 3.23) in one sustained breath, tied as one long tie, for more than three dotted crotchets, without articulating each beat.¹⁰³ She holds the a" for almost the whole length of the bar, not articulating the beginning a" of each written tie, before moving on to b" flat in bar 28. This approach may have been taken to avoid her characteristic tremor on a-natural.

This tied note occurs again in bar 52 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score) in the same way. Again Callas does not articulate the a" notes separately, whereas other singers perform with repeated articulation. The syllable 'bian-' from 'sem-bian-te' is articulated on the first a" and her style creates a clear, unforced flow of sound. On the other hand, singers who articulate the a" separately are inclined to force the tone on 'bian-' which produces a different sound effect, a dramatic outburst. After bar 27 there is a slow controlled descent which creates a powerful climactic point.

Ex. 3.23 also illustrates the range of her voice in the sequences of 'Casta Diva'. In bar 28 she ranges from b" flat down to g', concluding the phrase in bar 30 on f" (Ex. 3.23). Her full range in 'Casta Diva' is

¹⁰³ Compare bar 27 with the original notation found in the vocal Score (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score, bar 27).

e' to b'' flat, e' being only found in the cadenza (Ex. 3.31). This range is extensive although she can sing higher notes. If she had sung this aria in the key of G major, as discussed above, Callas would have extended her range to the highest, and would have displayed a more exciting cadenza. Every beat in bar 29 starts with a melodic dissonance and continues until the final tonic note in bar 30 (Ex.3.23). On the other hand, in these performances she does show care in focusing on pitch and colour, especially in the upper register.

3.5.4. Elements of bel canto

It is important to note that Callas has the artistry to apply all her vocal resources to the interpretation of the words as well as the music. The following excerpts illustrate aspects of bel canto demonstrated by Callas. Callas uses her chest voice (*voce de petto*), or the lower register of her voice, in a number of sections of the aria particularly in bars 16-17 (Ex. 3.24), and in so doing, she is able to project intense meaning into the words and grace notes.

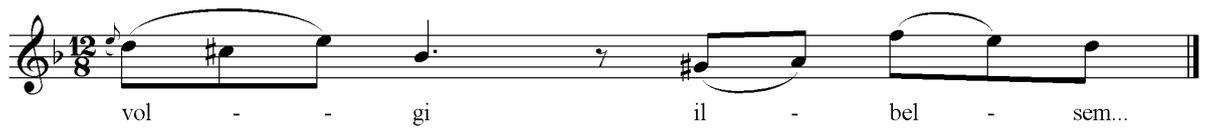
Ex. 3.24 Bars 16-17 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'

The musical score for 'Casta Diva' (bars 16-17) is presented in a single staff with a treble clef and a 12/8 time signature. The piece is marked *pp* (pianissimo). The melody consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a fermata over the word 'sta' in the first measure. The lyrics are: Ca - - - - sta Di - - - - va, ca - sta.

Chest voice is a very distinct vocal register, often unusual in a soprano. It is particularly necessary in the '*pasaggio*' (passage work), or in the joining together of the simple melody sufficiently so that the melody does not sound dry or plain. Rosa Ponselle also used chest voice effectively, but this is a more significant aspect for Callas, who has a fine quality which creates great emotion and passion. She handles the different registers with assurance, and has an easy ability to slip back and forwards from this voice to head voice, as is evidenced later in stanza one from bars 23-30 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score).

As discussed above, Callas does not include many additional bel canto ornamentations, but executes Bellini's embellishments well. In 'Casta Diva' the ornamentations are sometimes written out in full in the score, as in the turn, beat three in bar 16 (Ex. 3.24). In the 1954 version, bar 24 is sung as written with the grace note as shown in Ex. 3.22. By comparison, in the 1960 version she omits the appoggiatura as in Ex. 3.25 below

Ex. 3.25 Bar 24 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' 1960 Callas version

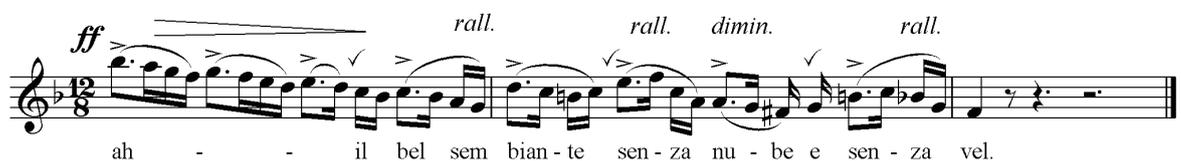


Callas appears to omit the grace note, but the note is crushed and short and almost inaudible, more like a true *acciaccatura* of the baroque era than a nineteenth century *appoggiatura*. This allows more emphasis to be placed on the word '*vol-gi*', (turn) (thy beautiful semblance upon us). It is possible that she slurs the note so much that the *appoggiatura* is indistinguishable. Nevertheless, the phrase is full of emotion, pleading for the goddess to avert the impending crisis.

While both versions are similarly performed, with this small difference, the 1960 version of bar 24, as shown in Ex. 3.25, is more dramatic and more controlled even without grace notes, although in bar 24 Callas is insecure on the word '*vol-gi*'. The same occurs in bar 25 on (*sem-*) '*bian-te*', but in bar 49 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score), identical notationally with bar 24, Callas omits the grace note again, but this time the note has less tremor on the word '*ter-ra*' in bar 49 and '*pa-ce*' in bar 50.

Callas' breathing is controlled and exemplary, and allows her to sing the long phrases with finesse. She does vary her style, as a comparison of the two recordings shows. In bars 28-29 (Ex. 3.26) she breathes differently in the 1954 version from the 1960 version. In the later version, she may have made the decision during the performance, because she may have felt she needed to have marginally shorter phrases. This could have been to conserve air as it was a slightly longer breath. A comparison of bars 28-30 of each recording shows variance in breathing. Callas also uses less *diminuendo* also in bar 29 in the 1954 version than in the 1960 version.

Ex. 3.26 Bars 28-30 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Callas 1954 recording – breathing



In the 1954 version, she breaks the third sequence after d", bar 28, omitting (over-riding) the word '*te*', and breathing before '*il*', which suits the text better although it disrupts the sequential pattern. Similarly in bar 29, she takes a breath before '*sen-za*'. In the 1960 version (Ex. 3.27) she breaks the sequence after d" bar 28, breathing before '*-te*', that is, splitting the word '*sem-bian-te*', and breathing again after f# ('*nube*') in bar 29 This is less effective in regards to the text (Ex. 3.26).

Ex. 3.27 Bars 28-30 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' 1960 version, showing breathing

ah - - - te il bel- sem - bian-te- Sen-za nu - be e sen - za vel.

There is little other difference in her breathing between the two performances. Neither adheres to the slurring as written in the vocal score, but this is not vital. Her meticulous approach to breathing is consistent with its importance in bel canto style. Without good control a singer would be unable to sustain the florid lines or phrases of bel canto as interpreted from the era of Bellini.

The 1954 recording shows a more flowing phrased sequential pattern in bar 28 and melody line in bar 29. On this one occasion, the breathing does not suit the text as well in both versions, as Callas appears to break the sense of the words. The break is miniscule, and only a critical listener would observe it as the phrase ends.

It is interesting to note how Bellini varies the melismata in bars 32-38 (Exs. 3.28 and 3.29). The melismata are sung accurately and with intensity by Callas. Note the dissonances in bar 32, c" to d"#, an augmented second resolved on to e", a major third, and c" to f"# augmented fourth, resolved on to g" a perfect fifth (Ex. 3.28). This is followed in bar 33 by descending sequential patterns, g" to e", a minor third, e" to c", a major third and c" to a" a minor third (Ex. 3.28). This provides the singer with the opportunity to give intense expression by floating from the dissonance to its resolution.

Ex. 3.28 Bars 32-34 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'

sen - - - - - za vel.

A comparison of bar 33 (Ex. 3.28) with bar 38 (Ex.3.29) shows Callas' skill and techniques.

Ex. 3.29 Bars 37-38 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'

molto dim.

sen - - - - - za vel.

Whereas bar 33 (Ex.3.28) is written in sequential scales patterns, bar 37 (Ex. 3.29) is written as descending sequential chromatic scales and is thus more exacting to sing. Callas has the artistry to do so and displays very agile chromatic flexibility because of the size of her voice.

In the concluding bars of the aria, it is generally expected that the singer will demonstrate elaborate bel canto style in the cadenza. Callas' versions, while handled masterfully, are disappointing in that she does not reach for the highest note in her *tessitura* nor add embellishment. This statement particularly refers to the bars leading to the cadenza. Traditionally unadorned, foreshadowing an expected embellishment in the cadenza proper, she takes these bars quite slowly and without embellishment, as Bellini scored, unlike Boninsegna, who adds more variation to the melody before the cadenza.

Ex. 3.30 Bars 56-59 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'

a piacere

(tu-) fa - - - - - i
nel - nel ciel - -

Ex. 3.31 Bars 56-59 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Callas' cadenza, 1954 version

Second version 1960 shows additional breath

The image shows two staves of musical notation for Callas' cadenza. The top staff is the 1954 version, starting with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 12/8 time signature. It features a melodic line with a descending chromatic scale from B-flat to E, followed by a rising scale to F. The lyrics are: (tu) fa - i fa - - - - - i. Above the staff, there are markings: 'no tie' with a downward arrow, and 'poco' with a checkmark above a note. The bottom staff is the 1960 version, which includes an additional breath mark (a checkmark) above a note. The lyrics are: ne - l ne - l ciel. - - - - - . Above the staff, there is a marking: '(1960 version only) lunga' with a checkmark above a note.

Callas' 1954 and 1960 versions of bars 56-59 (Ex. 3.31) are almost identical. One additional breath and longer pause occurs in the later version after the last pause on e". One possible reason for this is that she needed more breath to prolong the messa di voce and pause on the final f".

Her range in the cadenza is extensive. From b" flat she descends to e' (Ex. 3.31). In the cadenza, her voice is more gentle and mellow; her top notes are clearer and she sings more slowly, creating better legato in the lower register. At the beginning of the cadenza, bar 56, she sings the first note f" articulated individually, rather than tying it as is written in bar 55. Bellini's two turns are performed, followed by the descending chromatic scale glissando from b" flat to e', the leading note, and a" natural and a" flat in bar 56 (Ex. 3.31) in the descending passage in the cadenza. These two notes develop a tremor in both versions. Her dramatic diminuendo on the high b" flat is most expressive and ethereal, with good control and range of tone. Her climactic b" flats are almost perfect here and elsewhere in this aria.

Whereas Sutherland and Caballé add a trill in bar 57 (see section 3.6, Ex. 3.42 and section 3.7, Ex. 3.52), Callas rises from the e' to c" and upwards to f" with prolonged pauses on each note, and messa di voce on the last note in bar 58. However, Callas misses the opportunity to showcase trills, or add any other form of embellishment, which is generally traditional, as she did not embellish the lead in bars 53-55. Callas prefers to alter the last part of the cadenza to finish on an ascending, slow scale to top f", rather than descending to a' as written.

The words '*nel ciel*' in the final bars take on a new significance, as they enhance the secret of her magic — the words and sounds float effortlessly heavenwards in a manner consistent with the meaning of the words — and there is no trace of any of the former tremors in the note.

Callas' recordings are among the best of all opera recordings, and this recording is no exception. It has demonstrated her outstanding insight into the techniques of bel canto.

3.5.5. Comparison of performances

The discussion above from an aural perspective has pointed out aspects of bel canto in the recordings, which would make them a valuable means of learning and appreciating bel canto for future generations of sopranos. The dramatic and musical values in these performances make them interesting ones. As has been discussed, Callas sings with authority, combining purity, passion, grace and drama in her interpretation of the role. Both versions are slower and more refined than some of the other singers under discussion. She has a commanding tone, uses vibrato sparingly but with good dramatic effect, and a strong legato in the lower register, especially in the cadenza. Her 1960 performance reveals her voice has less quality than the 1954 performance. On reaching high b² flat, her voice becomes tight, metallic with strident tone and with some notes pinched. However, hers is a spiritually intense performance, one against which all other Normas will be measured.

Her recordings are popular and have been listened to by successive generations, as evidenced by the continual release of new versions. Callas herself said that every note and every phrase have a precise meaning.¹⁰⁴ Callas and her recordings have aided the revival of many bel canto operas besides *Norma*, some of which had been forgotten in the *verismo* boom of the late nineteenth century.

Katia Ricciarelli once remarked 'that sopranos who claim not to listen to Callas' recordings are not to be believed, as they all try to learn from them.'¹⁰⁵ She believes that Callas' performances are a model for many sopranos. An aural appreciation of Callas' two performances has demonstrated intense details of Italian bel canto style. Callas had spectacular agility, incisiveness and a rare extension of her voice, techniques which can be observed from her recordings. In conclusion, it should be remembered that

¹⁰⁴ Tito Gobbi. *The art of Maria Callas*. <<http://www.lyciacollins.50megs.com/Callas/intro.htm>>
(2 April 2007)

¹⁰⁵ David A. Lowe. ed. *op. cit.*, p.11

Callas aroused curiosity about forgotten works of Bellini and Donizetti, and that curiosity led to increased recordings as well as stage and concert performances.

3.6 DAME JOAN SUTHERLAND (Performed 1960, 1963 and 1978¹⁰⁶)

3.6.1. Introduction

Dame Joan Sutherland was born in Sydney, Australia, in 1926.¹⁰⁷ She made her debut in Australia in 1952 and in the United Kingdom in the same year at Covent Garden, where she first sang in *Norma* as Clotilde to Callas' role of Norma. It is interesting to note that Sutherland studied for several years in London with Clive Carey, a pupil of the great tenor Jean de Reszke. She added the title role of Norma to her repertoire in 1963 and performed this opera one hundred and eleven times. Sutherland loved *Norma* and said it was the high point of her whole repertoire, and it was certainly one of her greatest recordings.¹⁰⁸

The first recording is the aria 'Casta Diva' from *Norma*, both LP and CD, from *The Art of the Prima Donna*, recorded in 1960 with the Royal Opera House Chorus and Orchestra.¹⁰⁹ This two-disc set captures Sutherland's technique and tone in its prime. The second recording is her first full role of the entire opera, performed at Vancouver 17 October 1963, in partnership with Marilyn Horne, conducted by Richard Bonyngue, recorded on LP in 1963 and CD later. This is one of the great partnerships of bel canto opera on record and it is one of only two recordings of *Norma* by Sutherland.¹¹⁰ The third is the aria 'Casta Diva' from a program performed live at the Sydney Opera House in 1978,¹¹¹ when she returned to Australia especially to perform *Norma*. These recordings are of much higher quality than pre-World War II recordings. All were recorded on LP and converted to CD, and re-issued after the

¹⁰⁶ These are the dates of the three recordings analysed in this section. See footnotes 109,110 and 111.

¹⁰⁷ Norma Major and Alan Blyth. "Dame Joan Sutherland". in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* Stanley Sadie, ed. London: MacMillan. 2001. Vol. 24. pp.739-740.
< <http://www.grovemusic.com> (13 August 2006).

¹⁰⁸ Monica Attard. *Dame Joan Sutherland*. Sunday 27 March 2005.

[file:///D:/Sutherland/Dame Joan Sutherland Sunday Profile interview.htm](file:///D:/Sutherland/Dame%20Joan%20Sutherland%20Sunday%20Profile%20interview.htm). (18 March 2007)

¹⁰⁹ Joan Sutherland. *The Art of the Prima Donna*. 2 CDS. London: DECCA.414 451-2 and 414 452-2.

Norma was studio recorded 1960 and issued as LP 1960's. This set released on CD 1985. Refer to audio CD, track 5.

¹¹⁰ Joan Sutherland. *Norma: Casta Diva*. 3 CDS. London: DECCA. 425 488-2. 1984. Recorded live performance of the opera in 1963 in Vancouver on LP. It is less impressive than the other recordings. Refer to audio CD, track 6.

¹¹¹ Joan Sutherland. *The Best of Joan Sutherland: Live from the Sydney Opera House*. This excerpt recorded 1978 in live performance. On LP. Reissued CD. Sydney: Opera Australia, 2000. ABC 465 687-2. Digitally restored and remastered. Refer to audio CD, track 7.

development of this digital audio format technology invented by Philips and Sony in 1983. The selected recordings - studio recording in 1960, live performances in 1963 and 1978 - were made when she was aged 34, 37 and 52 years respectively.

Sutherland sings with authenticity of style and with a unique quality of voice: a voice of pure coloratura and bel canto style. She uses a number of embellishments and follows Bellini's score, displaying bel canto techniques such as messa di voce and additional ornamentation in the trill in the cadenza. By observing aurally from recordings the style and characteristics of her interpretation, insight into current understanding of bel canto traditions are gained. From the *Art of the Prima Donna*, Sutherland explores the style of a number of bel canto singers of the nineteenth century, such as Giuditta Pasta, Giulia Grisi, Henriette Sontag and Jenny Lind. The knowledge gained from studying the style of these singers has prepared Sutherland well for modern bel canto performances in the way Bellini intended.

In 1961, Bonyngne, in conversation with Rudolf Bing of the Metropolitan Opera New York, asserted that 'my wife's Norma will be very different from any others. My wife's Norma will be remembered.'¹¹² Bonyngne went on to insist that Sutherland sing the role of Norma in the way the composer intended with techniques of ornamentation and variation. Bonyngne believed the role of Norma was written for a voice like Amina in *La Sonnambula* and felt Sutherland's voice was suitable - neither light nor with a tendency to roar.¹¹³ He had researched bel canto style extensively and there is no doubt that he played a major part in developing her bel canto career.¹¹⁴ The aural analysis includes important aspects of bel canto style which Sutherland has reproduced faithfully in the Bellini tradition.

Sutherland's three performances are not identical. However, they are charged with emotion, with ornamented phrases, arpeggios, melismata and the unique cadenza, concluding with an effortless high, long note. The aria 'Casta Diva' was sung in 1960 in the original key of G major, without strain in the high notes, as was the 1963 version, but the 1978 version was in the key of F major.

¹¹² Russell Braddon. *Joan Sutherland*. Sydney: Collins, 1962. p. 165.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* p. 165. Bonyngne had strong opinions about bel canto style.

¹¹⁴ Lord Harewood. *Opera Note - Joan Sutherland*. Adelaide Festival of Arts, 6 March 1988, Adelaide Festival Theatre. pp. 4-5.

3.6.2. Performance and dramatic events

Sutherland sets the scene for a dramatic performance in the first few bars. At this point in the drama, Norma is troubled. She despises the Romans, criticises the Druids' war-like chants, and foretells the impending revolt against the Romans. Norma prays to the Moon, personified as the goddess for peace in the aria 'Casta Diva'.

The 1960 version is Sutherland's first major performance of 'Casta Diva'. This recording was a concert version devised as a tribute to prima donnas of past eras, who had sung the excerpts from bel canto operas. This one was dedicated to Giuditta Pasta, who, of course, was the soprano for whom Bellini wrote *Norma*.¹¹⁵ The sheer sound of Sutherland's voice is spellbinding. She sings it slowly and reverently, with messa di voce at the climactic points and true portamento coupled with messa di voce.

The 1963 version is sung in a similar way but more subdued. The chief differences are much smoother control and legato, less messa di voce and softer tone. The cadenza is noticeably different, and will be discussed in section 3.6.4. The 1978 performance incorporates most features of the first performance, including the magnificent trill from the 1963 performance in the cadenza (also discussed in 3.6.4). This performance is more mature, strong, clear and vibrant, with more subtle colour and expression. This subtlety is convincing - a wide range of nuance from pianissimo to fortissimo, so subtle that the listener needs to perceive it in relation to the words. This is an important factor in reproducing the bel canto style, that is, the combined effect of tonal variation and its relationship to the meaning of the words.

The following examples are chosen to illustrate Sutherland's strengths related to the techniques of bel canto singing. Her controlled tonal variations are an important feature. The words 'Casta Diva' are sung pianissimo, so purely that the listener immediately is rapt with attention. Bar 18 is phrased with a small rallentando. The turn on 'che' before 'i-nar-genti', is well balanced with the dynamics. It is not so overpowering that it conflicts with the more dramatic climax in bar 18. This may not create quite enough sense of drama expressed in vocal terms, but it does allow her to create tension with the slow increase of tone up to bar 23, 'anti-che pian-te'. (Ex. 3.32). The drama is strengthened in the score by the use of an augmented 5th and augmented 2nd between the soprano melody and the accompaniment (Ex. 3. 32).

¹¹⁵ Joan Sutherland. *The Art of the Prima Donna*. London: DECCA, 1960. Norma was one of Giuditta Pasta's most notable roles.

Ex. 3.32 Bars 22-23 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' showing augmented intervals

The augmented 2nd falls on the strong beat of bar 23, the melody note a# against g in the bass. This a# is an upward resolving appoggiatura to b' natural, the harmony note, and is a significant point of the climax. The dissonant note provides an expressive effect; the word, being '*pian-te*' (plants), is emphasised to give it more focus at this point. It would not be easy to pitch these notes against the accompaniment. Other augmented intervals between the melody and accompaniment, particularly tritones create similar effects of increased tension with the ornamentation, as in Bar 25 (Ex 3. 33).

Ex. 3.33 Bar 25 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' showing augmented intervals

Dramatic tension and release are features of bel canto. The difference between the performances of other sopranos singing these same bars in this role, is striking, in that Sutherland reinforces the tension by the way she sings this passage. It is a combination of many things, namely, tone, nuance, articulation, breathing and phrasing. It has a subtlety only apparent to the discerning musical ear. The average listener may not notice small differences, but a listener with perfect pitch can distinguish fine changes of tone, such as pianissimo and piano, crescendo and diminuendo and messa di voce, creating drama, tension and release of tension.

Sutherland's breathing is well-controlled and barely audible, and is one of her strengths related to her interpretation of bel canto as sung in 'Casta Diva'. The highlights of her performance are strong indicators of her skill in executing techniques of bel canto. A good balance between features of drama and tension release is displayed. By using well-controlled breathing, messa di voce and other forms of expressiveness according to the text, Sutherland ensures that her recordings will provide insight into the genre for future generations.

3.6.3. Realisation of Bellini's style

The dramatic plot of *Norma* is ideally suited to Sutherland's voice, which is neither light nor overbearing. She aims to capture Bellini's mood. Sandro Sequi has commented that her personality suits the role of Norma well, as she is able to sing with warmth and feeling towards the goddess, evoking her through the prayer, just as Bellini intended.¹¹⁶ Her performance is charged with emotion, and she ornaments 'Casta Diva', executing arabesques, trills and appoggiaturas with ease. Sutherland follows the score almost exactly as far as the cadenza, after which she departs from the written notation.

Examples of bel canto techniques are illustrated and discussed below. Sutherland's strengths are manifest in a rich, strong chest voice, the sustaining power of her breathing and outstanding legato. Although she has a powerful voice, with keen messa di voce she can support her voice and project the sound in such a controlled way that contrasting results can be created. Her breath comes from low down, is distributed evenly and seems effortless to a listener. Her vibrato, evident in the high b" in bar 27 (Ex. 3.34), but not excessively exaggerated, is used to enrich the tone, and gives warmth and colour to her voice with a wide range of dynamics combined with fine legatissimo, although there is an occasional tremor. (Refer also to Ex. 3.37).

¹¹⁶ Sandro Sequi. Cited in Brian Adams. *La Stupenda. A Biography of Joan Sutherland*. Hutchinson: Victoria, Australia, 1980. pp. 212-213. Sequi was the producer at Covent Garden for the 1961 performance. He thought *Norma* was Bellini's greatest work.

Sutherland's diction has small weaknesses from time to time, despite ardent language preparation. However, in the recitative preceding 'Casta Diva' ('sendiziosi voci'), her diction shows great clarity. She has great control of breathing and superb, unhurried legato, and this certainly helps the clarity despite occasional lapses in diction. Some less clear diction in 'Casta Diva' is seen in Example 3.35 below.

Ex. 3.35 Bars 51-53 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'

sempre cresc. sino al *ff*

ter - ra spar - gi'n ter - ra ah - - - - - ah -

che - re - (gnar)

In bar 52 (Ex. 3.35), Sutherland vocalises on a vowel '-ah'. The words '*quella pace*' are omitted. There is a similar occurrence in bar 27 (Ex. 3.34) with the omission of the words '*il bel sem-bian-te*'

Another example is found in the melismata, bar 33 (Ex. 3.39), where the '-za' is indistinct and the voice vocalises on '-ah' replacing 'za'. In fact every time the text is '-te, *il bel sembiante*', the diction and clarity are lost. Some would debate that the expressiveness of the Italian text creates the drama, regardless of the fact that the listener can't understand the words. The poor diction at this point is minimal and insignificant, as, in the most part, Sutherland emulates a genuine Italian accent, even though she is not a native speaker.

Sutherland created the role of Norma, likening herself to Norma as a woman in love, and a mother. A warm personality is important in developing the role.¹²⁰ An in-depth study of bel canto style, coupled with much experience in singing both Bellini's and Donizetti's operas, together with the répétiteur support of Bonyngé, has enabled Sutherland to focus on this role with the expressiveness Bellini desired for his masterpiece. Recordings of *Norma* have further encouraged generations of singers in the last fifty years.

¹²⁰ Brian Adams. *op. cit.*, p. 213.

3.6.4. Elements of bel canto

Bonyngé was meticulous in his preparation and training of Sutherland to sing bel canto. He studied Sutherland's breathing techniques, and devised suitable embellishments for her which were, in his opinion, in keeping with the way sopranos of Bellini's era, such as Pasta, sang the role. The reader should remember that Sutherland's voice ranges from low g'' to e''' in altissimo, and f''' if pushed. She has clarity and purity of notes above g'' and a'' and therefore is well suited to sing bel canto. In particular, the flexibility of her voice provides the technique required to manage the ornamentation with ease.

Examples of embellishment are shown below to illustrate one of Sutherland's most expressive features of bel canto. The grace notes are so inclusive that they are barely detectable. They are sung as written, bar 24 (Ex. 3.36) below.

Ex 3.36 Bar 24 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'



Grace notes create expressive dissonance against the harmony. In bar 24 the grace note $f''\#$ leaning on to the dissonant e'' creates tension against the harmony chord of a diminished 7th on $f\#$. (Ex. 3.36). Sutherland's grace note in this bar is much more clearly enunciated than that of Callas.

However, surprisingly, she adds a small lower mordent on each b'' , in bar 27, (Ex. 3.37) and coupled with vibrato, she gives resonance and richness to the tone. This occurs also in bar 52 (Ex. 3.35) and her interpretation of these bars is consistent in each performance. However, from a listener's perspective, these mordents stand out and detract from the smooth forward movement of the bar. In comparison with the original scored bar 27 (Ex. 3.34), Sutherland sings bar 27 with wobbles like grace notes or mordents, seemingly over exaggerated vibrato. No other soprano sings this bar in the same way.

Ex. 3.37 Bar 27 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'

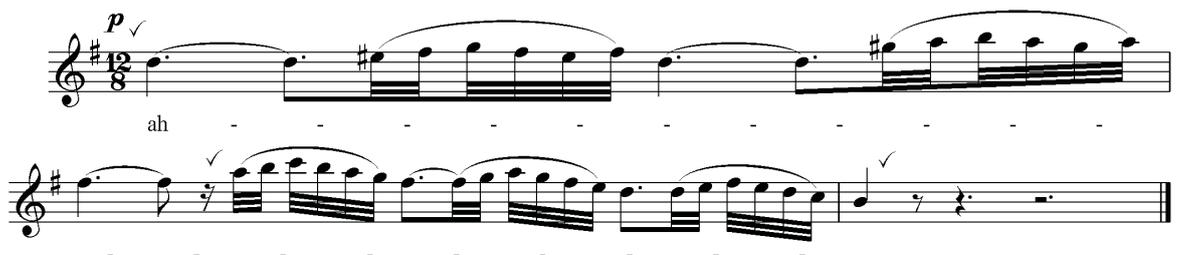
'Casta Diva' has finely shaded phrasing, precise articulation and crystalline fioriture between stanzas one and two. As had been shown in the foregoing discussion, subtle expression is used, for example, on the high b's (G major version) in bar 27 on the vocalised 'ah'. Sutherland uses messa di voce on the last b" paused note. In the passage bars 26-30 (Ex. 3.38), Sutherland alters the phrases from the score and breathes accordingly shorter phrases to express the meaning of the words more clearly, 'bel semblante' (appearance, semblance). This phrasing follows the words 'senza nube e senza vel' more effectively (bars 28-29), especially with diminuendo to pianissimo.

Ex. 3.38 Bars 26-30 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' showing breathing by Sutherland

In addition, Sutherland sings in Bellini's original key of G major (Ex. 3. 38) and this allows the soprano to attain the high c''' in bar 28. The other singers in this case study sing in F major, one tone lower, bar 28 being b" flat. This key is used frequently to prevent strain and a forced tone, because many singers cannot easily attain this high note c'''. Even Bellini transposed this aria into F major for Pasta. This change in pitch creates a different level of expression in this aria as her range is extended, and the full control of messa di voce on this note provides rare brilliance.

The melismata show great technical skill. The demisemiquavers of sequential figure patterns, in bars 32-34 (Ex. 3.39), appear to be taken in one breath in Sutherland's 1960 version, omitting the semiquaver rest. The first two ascending patterns, bar 32, give musical images of praise and prayer rising to the moon goddess. Three descending patterns in bar 33 symbolise reverence and devotion to the goddess. The meaning of the text of this phrase is '*senza vel*' (heavenly light). This example shows Sutherland's breathing in the sequences, and, compared with other singers, it suits the words better. The score does not show clearly these aspects, and leaves them to the singer's discretion. Although the syllable '-za' is shown on the score to be sung on the beginning of the last quaver of bar 33, it is inaudible. This position in the bar is unsuitable to sing the consonant which would be better sung on the last demi-semiquaver. Rather the word appears to be vocalised on 'ah' replacing '*sen-za*'.

Ex. 3.39 Bars 32-34 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'. Melismata showing breathing of Sutherland's 1963 version



In the 1963 version, (Ex. 3.39), Sutherland takes a small breath at the semiquaver rest in bar 33, while the 1978 version reverts to the same breathing as the 1960 performance, the semiquaver rest not being observed. The earliest recording made when she was younger has greater quality.

Messa di voce is used on the long high notes. Significant examples which demonstrate this are the last b" of bar 27 (Ex. 3.37), the high notes of the cadenza, especially the high long f"# before she begins the trill in bar 57 and the last note of the cadenza g", in the penultimate bar 58 (Ex. 3.41).

The jewel in Sutherland's crown is undoubtedly the concluding cadenza with its trill. Her trills are in true bel canto style and she is original in their performance, setting her apart from all other performers. Sutherland grew up listening to her mother and no doubt heard her trill. Bonyngé believed she felt her trill and instinctively knew how to sing it. In this respect, Bonyngé claimed that he did not need to do a lot of work to perfect her trill.¹²¹ By comparison, singer Jenny Lind had to learn how to sing a trill from

¹²¹ Stephanie Buchau. 'Bonyngé on Bel Canto'. *Opera News*. 22 January 1994: 16.

Manuel P. R. Garcia II. Trills at the end of an instrumental cadenza were a well-established convention in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the conventions of opera allowed the performer of bel canto to insert an elaborate trill at the end of the cadenza if desired.¹²² Montserrat Caballé is the only other performer in this study who includes a trill in the cadenza.

It is well known that Bonyngé wrote out by hand most cadenzas for Sutherland to sing.¹²³ Sutherland referred to Bonyngé's manuscript as 'fly specks', impossible to read, and often it amazed Sutherland that she could sing them at all.¹²⁴ Usually they were hastily written out before the performance, and *Norma* was no exception. The end result was that the cadenza was a supreme example of bel canto style, and of the flexible, spontaneous improvisation which epitomized Sutherland's artistry.¹²⁵ Example 3.40 shows the original score, bars 56-59, without a trill. The Rockstro score differs very little from the Ricordi, with the omission of the pause on the f, bar 56, being the only variation.

Ex. 3.40 Bars 56-59 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'

The image shows a musical score for the vocal part of 'Casta Diva' by Rossini, specifically bars 56-59. The score is written in G major and 12/8 time. The tempo/mood is marked 'a piacere'. The vocal line begins with a trill on the note 'fa' in bar 56. The lyrics are '(tu) fa - - - - - i nel - - nel ciel - .'. The score includes a trill on the note 'fa' in bar 56, which is a variation from the original score. The lyrics are '(tu) fa - - - - - i nel - - nel ciel - .'. The score includes a trill on the note 'fa' in bar 56, which is a variation from the original score.

Example 3.41 shows the 1960 version of the cadenza performed differently from the score by Sutherland. From bar 56 she rises to the high top c'' with a swell as she sings the two turns, and this allows her to produce a controlled crescendo on the high c''. Unlike the original version, Sutherland pauses on this note. This is a point of suspense and creates a moment of anticipation for what is to come. From bar 57 the melody runs up by step from d'' to g'', bars 57-58, (Ex. 3.42). There is a pause on each long note and there is no trill. With outstanding breath control, she continues to increase her volume and to hold the last tied notes for a much lengthier pause than any of the other performers. This

¹²² Russell Braddon. *Joan Sutherland*. Sydney: Collins, 1962. p. 105.

¹²³ Norma Major. *Joan Sutherland*. London: MacDonald & Co, 1987. p. 99.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 99.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 99.

version is not as dramatic as the other versions, and is less ornamented, softer and a little slower, but gentler, and more beautiful. There are few other differences in this version.

Ex. 3.41 Bars 56-59 Rockstro Score 'Casta Diva' Sutherland's 1960 version

fa - i fa - - - - - i

tu fa - i nel - - - - - ciel - - - - -

In performance two, the 1963 version, the cadenza is particularly different, with its highlight being the trill added in bar 57.

Ex. 3.42 Bars 56-59 Rockstro Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Sutherland's 1963 version

(tu) - fa - - - - - i

fa - - - - - i nel - - - - - ciel - - - - -

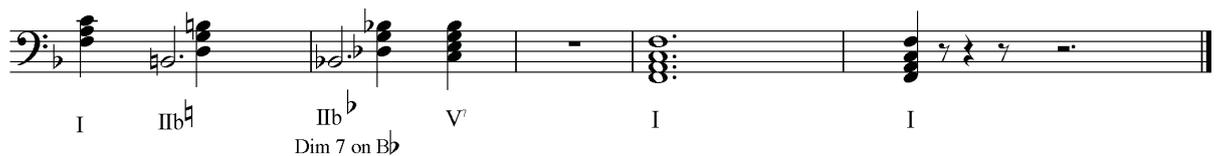
A distinguishing feature of the cadenza is the articulation of individual notes in the descending chromatic passage which follows the high c''' in bar 56 of the cadenza. These notes are clearly executed, in contrast to the other performers, who tend to glissando the phrase. She descends slowly with a small accelerando at the end, *scala volante*, to pause on f'. In bar 57 she starts the trill slowly, introduced by a mordent on g', then increases speed to the last f'#, the leading note. This is an expressive moment, as the trill creates dissonance on the leading note and dramatic anticipation of the resolution at the final cadence. The g' of the trill is dissonant against the dominant chord on D held by the chorus under the

trill. This is quite a different approach from the other singers, apart from Caballé whose trill is shorter by comparison.

Sutherland ends the cadenza with an effortless high g", a most dramatic note. It is long - held for more than the scored fourteen quavers, much longer than that of other singers, and creates dramatic tension. Sutherland sings this note with vibrato and messa di voce which enriches the tone.

It would be expected that the cadenza would be unaccompanied and that singers would improvise in the Italian tradition. In the Novello score, the accompaniment preceding the cadenza is interesting: a first inversion chord on the syncopated second beat of bar 55 on the supertonic, with its mediant raised, followed by a diminished seventh on the supertonic in first inversion and a dominant seventh (Ex. 3.43). This dissonant harmony creates further drama and suspense.

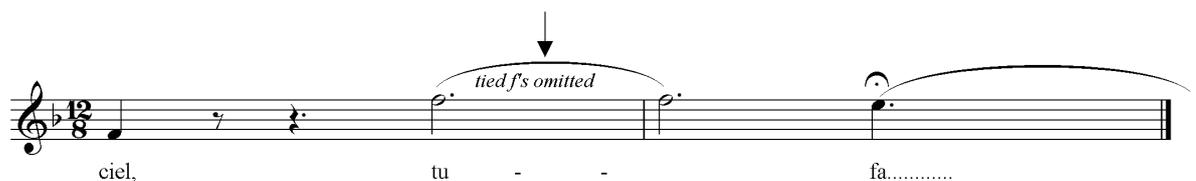
Ex. 3.43 Bars 55-59 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Harmonic structure of accompaniment



The cadenza proper is unaccompanied, bars 56⁴-57, but the preceding accompaniment finally resolves on to the tonic in bar 58, an inspiring moment in the conclusion.

The third performance from 1978 is in much the same manner as the 1963 version although it is sung in the lower key of F major. This time, Sutherland omits the two tied f' notes, bars 55 and 56, (Ex. 3.44), the word 'tu' being omitted. These notes are played only by the orchestra. Sutherland enters on high e" (Ex. 3.44), and ascends to b flat ". She sings the last two bars with the trill as she did in the second performance.

Ex. 3.44 Bars 55-56 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' 1978 version showing the tied notes - f' which are omitted



This makes an interesting comparison but it raises the question whether her performance, at age fifty-two, is as good as her earlier ones. She elected to sing this performance in key F major. One could suggest that Sutherland chose this key and left out the tied f's because she was conserving her breath for the final trill. In this performance, in 1978, she was eighteen years older than the 1960 version. Her breathing may have been less agile and she may have needed to adjust her technique. She may also have aimed to produce a better tone on the first e", bar 56 (Ex. 3.44), rather than straining to reach the high b" flat and to emphasise it richly before the descending cadenza passage.

Sutherland has the artistry and skill to sing bel canto and uses all the conventional techniques of ornamentation and variation, as outlined in this discussion of the style of Bellini's era., One need not agree with all aspects of Bonyng's musical approach to bel canto opera, although the addition of a trill in the cadenza, which many of the singers omit, is an expected characteristic.

3.6.5. Comparison of performances

Sutherland was a reliable singer of bel canto as her technique was so secure. Her singing shows grace, line and supple energy, and she is certainly a performer of authentic bel canto style. It is fair to say that she has been responsible for the transmission and preservation of bel canto traditions on an international scale.

John Steane argues that her most endearing work on record was done in her early years.¹²⁶ Steane's argument that Sutherland's best performances were recorded in her early years is without doubt valid, as her early recorded repertory catches her tone and technique in their absolute prime. However, the 1978 recording is remarkable in that she was still able at the age of fifty-two years to meet the most challenging of all vocal demands. The placing of the ornaments in 'Casta Diva', the cadenza and her high notes, which appear to be produced effortlessly all combine to deliver a performance full of energy and grace.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ John Steane. "Joan Sutherland". *BBC Music Magazine*, September 1994: 30. This statement was part of the title of the article written by John Steane.

¹²⁷ Roger Covell. *The Sydney Morning Herald Report*. 7 July 1978. from Norma Major. *Joan Sutherland*. p. 167.

Sutherland's recordings over three decades are important in the transmission of bel canto traditions. At the age of 78 years (2004) Sutherland commented that even though people miss her singing, she would not sing again. She added that she was fortunate to have made a large number of records, that these have been re-issued many times, and that they are listened to, being played frequently on radio and television.¹²⁸ Consequently, there is no doubt also that, together with Bonynghe she has been responsible for preserving and transmitting the bel canto traditions, bringing back many Bellini operas into the repertoire.

In conclusion, Sutherland remains the most successful and expressive performer of those under examination. To her, technique is the means to an end, and in bel canto the end is expression. Although she is, debatably, not as dramatic as Callas, she is the most exciting and intimate of all the singers, possessing the most sensuous of voices and using the cadenza in such a way that the emotion and expression are rich, without detracting from the flow of the melody. Her eloquently presented recordings preserve the range and extent of her achievements. From observations of media vocal presentations, it is clear that many young singers of today are concerned with how much sound they can make, rather than how expressive a sound they can make. The latter can be learned from Sutherland's recordings and this is their most important value. The legacy of her recordings left for posterity is substantial, and through her recordings her influences and contribution to the preservation of bel canto style will continue to be significant.

¹²⁸ Monica Attard. *op. cit.*, Interview. p. 15.

3.7 MONTSERRAT CABALLÉ (Performed 1973)

... the diva's legacy, the famous 1974 *Norma* filmed live at Orange, captured during the mistral, the diva's costumes billowing in the wind and Caballé, a bel canto goddess, in transcendent vocal and interpretive form. ¹²⁹

3.7.1. Introduction

Ira Siff claims Caballé's performance of *Norma* is her chief legacy. But Caballé's legacy has become more than one performance. Her enormous contribution to opera from over four thousand public performances of opera, concerts and recitals is well-known. Her discography includes thirty-four complete opera recordings in the studio, LPs, CDs, videos and countless arias. The study aims to examine aurally the 1973 performance of *Norma* with the view to exploring and supporting Siff's statement.

Montserrat Caballé was born in Barcelona in 1933. A Spanish soprano, she is celebrated for her bel canto roles. She replaced Marilyn Horne in 1965 in *Lucretia Borgia* (Donizetti) at short notice at Carnegie Hall, and enjoyed immediate stardom in New York. Subsequently, she made debuts at Glyndebourne, La Scala and Covent Garden. Her breakthrough into bel canto opera resulted in a significant career change from singing the heavier grand and melodramatic operas of Verdi, Puccini and Wagner, to the lighter bel canto operas of Donizetti and Bellini. Although she was a great Donizetti performer, she sang the title role in Bellini's *Norma* many times and was often regarded as Callas' successor in that role. Her first performance of *Norma* in 1970 in her home city of Barcelona was the crowning point of her career in bel canto. Reviews in *The Times* capture the quality of her performance:

At the Festival Hall, London, last night, April 26, 1971, Bellini's *Norma* was added to Caballé's most admired roles in concert performances. The slow smooth melody [of 'Casta Diva'] was exquisitely floated, no more than a promise of the vocal artistry that she revealed later. ¹³⁰

The new Milan filmed production of Bellini's *Norma* was televised direct to viewers in twenty-four different countries. In the name part Caballé moved with dignity, sang in just below her best form with

¹²⁹ Ira Siff. "The Magic of Montserrat Caballé." In *Opera News*. 11 (2002): 18.

¹³⁰ William Mann. Reviews. *Norma* Festival Hall. *The Times*. April 27 1971. Issue 58157. Col. A. p. 12.

touching tenderness and passion. Much that these singers conveyed, and Gianandrea Gavazzeni as conductor, must have won new converts to the poise and purity, classic virtues of early romantic Italian opera.¹³¹

The 1973 recording of Caballé in the role of Norma, not released till 1983,¹³² captures a performance three years after her debut as Norma. Many thought she was going to be a carbon copy of Callas, but this was not the case.¹³³

Caballé interprets 'Casta Diva' with simple transcendental beauty and achieves a full tragic Norma. Caballé's best years are considered to be 1956-1976, but 1974 is considered her best and most famous performance of *Norma* at the Festival of Orange. According to a Caballé fan, the diva declared, 'This was the best performance of my [Caballé] career'.¹³⁴ Clearly the recording of the 1973 performance matches her performance at Orange in 1974. Her final performance was in 1992.

3.7.2. Performance and dramatic events

As well as recognising this performance as one of her technical best, it should be noted that Caballé excels at using her voice to create drama. This performance is slower than the majority of the other singers under study, but in singing it more slowly, and in this way, Caballé brings great pathos and dramatic tension to the flawless lines of 'Casta Diva', the prayer to the Greek goddess. By interweaving violent and ferocious tones with soft high notes to achieve a dramatic effect, Caballé presents this aria in an emotionally intense and pure bel canto style. Generally, the poetic element is emphasised in bel canto rather than the dramatic, but Caballé's singing encompasses both.

From the beginning, this performance displays Caballé's greatest strengths, both breathing techniques and the use of messa di voce. Caballé has a profound grasp of where to place the breath to produce a

¹³¹ Reviews. "Opera in Milan and London". La Scala, Milan, BBC2, *The Times*. 20 January 1977. Issue 59912. Col. D. p. 13.

¹³² Vincenzo Bellini. Montserrat Caballé in *Norma*. Performed 1973. 3 LPs. London Philharmonic Orchestra and Ambrosian Opera Chorus: London: RCA, 1983. The conductor on this occasion was Carlo Felice Cillario, the same one who conducted her debut performance. Refer to audio CD, track 8.

¹³³ Frank Granville Barker. "Caballé's First Norma". *The Times*. Review. 27 January 1970. Issue 57778. p. 12. Col. A.

¹³⁴ Robert Pullen and Stephen Taylor. "Montserrat Caballé". *Bel Canto Society Newsletter*. 16 May 2007:1.

pianissimo and how to expand the breath to produce forte tones. The fact that she sings slowly attests to her breath control. Caballé prepares for long phrases well, taking a breath after a short group of notes to prepare for a long phrase.

Ira Siff reported that, in a telephone interview, Caballé herself said she learned her breathing techniques quite young and developed and sustained them throughout her career.¹³⁵ Advised by Sutherland to simply follow the line written by Bellini,¹³⁶ Caballé believed that, in order to express the feeling of the line through the sound, she should have a technique that was more than just singing and a good voice. Siff also described how Caballé worked every morning to develop the way she supported her diaphragm and allowed her lungs to expand as much as possible up and down,¹³⁷ thus increasing the capacity of her chest. Her breathing became the basis of her fine technique. This is a most important factor in her performance.

The following examples illustrate her breathing techniques. Example 3.45 is an exemplary example of Caballé's pianissimo high note passages, which are achieved by her great breath control.

Ex. 3.45 Bars 37-38 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' showing breathing



Caballé uses messa di voce on long sustained notes, producing a tone which is ideal for a realisation of the expression of the text and its meaning. Both Philip Duey and Enrico Stinchelli regard messa di voce of great importance because it allows the singer to show how long the breath can be held, the ultimate test of breath control.¹³⁸ Bellini asks for messa di voce in many parts of *Norma* besides 'Casta Diva', for example, he instructed 'messa di voce assai lungai' in the duet between Adalgisa and Pollione, Act One.

¹³⁵ Ira Siff. *op. cit.* 11. (2002): p. 18. Ira Siff is a New York-based voice and interpretation coach, stage director and artistic director of La Gran Scala Opera Co, Barcelona.

¹³⁶ Joan Sutherland. *A Prima Donna's progress*. The autobiography of Joan Sutherland. Sydney: Random House Australia, 1997.p.154.

¹³⁷ Ira Siff. *op. cit.* 11 (2002):18, 20.

¹³⁸ Philip A. Duey. *Bel canto in its Golden Age: a study of its teaching concepts*. New York: King's Crown Press, 1951. p. 89. and

Generally it is left to the performer to include other points where messa di voce adds a dramatic tension of the sort achieved by Caballé, as the melodic line is written in such a way to indicate to the performer where to use messa di voce.

Caballé's voice is deeper and fuller than most others who sing the role of Norma, and this contributes to the way she acts with her voice. However, in her florid legatissimo passages, occasionally she lightens her voice to the other extreme, which is suitable for Rossini but too undramatic for Bellini. Example 3.45, a melisma, shows controlled breathing over a long chromatic passage sung quite slowly. Her breathing is succinct and hardly discernible, using just one breath for twenty-one notes. Her somewhat slower tempo allows her more time for the expressiveness, but the drama is lacking here.

In contrast to this passage (Ex. 3.46), bars 27-28 illustrate passages where fortissimo is used to the extreme.

Ex. 3.46 Bars 27-28 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Caballé's version

sempre cresc. sino al..... **ff**

bian - - - an - - - te, il bel - sem -

In bars 27-28 (Ex. 3.46) she uses violent, ferocious tones. While this is a dramatic moment in the aria, she swoops up a huge crescendo in bar 26 to bar 27 to articulate each a" powerfully and with strong vibrato. Generally, lighter more delicate singing is ideal for Bellini and Donizetti's style of bel canto and too much power here is undesirable.

Long legato phrases and floating pianissimo high notes communicate an elevated spiritual plane and add to the drama and tension. The control with which the opening phrases are sung pianissimo, slowly, is ethereal and creates a tension and image of what is to follow, as shown in Example 3. 47.

Ex. 3.47 Bars 16-18 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'

pp

Ca - - sta - Di - va. ca - sta Di - va, - che - i - nar

As to any perceived weaknesses, she uses too much vibrato and becomes almost too powerful for the refined lines of bel canto (Ex. 3.46) bars 27-28, but on the other hand, she is able to use her powerful voice to create great tension and drama and contrast with her breathtaking pianissimos. Caballé's performance is marred occasionally by too many drifting notes, too many variations and too much vibrato, none of which enhance the quality of tone. A consequence of this is that the sound is reduced in quality and she develops, at times, a tremor in her voice which is perceived as a waver on a long note. In addition she tends to scoop up the notes. Pier Francesco Tosi, writing in the classical era of bel canto, certainly regarded wavering of the voice in very bad taste, and claimed that forcing the voice may cause too slow and wide vibrato.¹³⁹

Some vibrato is acceptable because it may enrich the tone, but it should never be exaggerated. This spoils her recording. In example 3.48 the note g#, last quaver in bar 22 and first crotchet in bar 23 wavers on the long beat in both stanzas. This occurs also in stanza two, bars 47-48 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score).

Ex. 3.48 Bars 22-23 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' (identical with 47-48 in stanza two)

sa - cre, que - ste sa - cre an - ti che pian - te.

Apart from the vibrato, all other aspects of Caballé's bel canto style would be invaluable in allowing future generations to ascertain what is really meant by the bel canto traditions of Bellini.

3.7.3. Realisation of Bellini's style

¹³⁹ Pier Francesco Tosi. *Observations on the Florid Song: or Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers*. Transl. Mr Galliard. London: Wilcox, 1743. Reprinted London: Reeves, 1967. p. 27.

Caballé is respected as a great performer of Bellini, even though she performed many other works by a wide range of operatic composers. In this recording the ornaments are refined and well executed in bel canto style. Caballé sings the extract more slowly than Sutherland, but in a manner which takes the prayer into another dimension. No doubt she had heard many recordings of *Norma* and learnt from her predecessors. In 1968 Caballé appeared backstage on the opening night of Sutherland's Philadelphia performance, and declared to her, 'I am going to sing Norma myself soon and I thought I could learn from hearing you'.¹⁴⁰

Bearing in mind that Caballé has a powerful voice, she also demonstrates clear timbre of voice and at times delicate singing well-suited to Bellini's bel canto. She uses the music to give her words the power of expression, and realizes his poetic intent. Bellini speaks through the music, her sound, rather than the words. Many times she prefers to vocalise rather than enunciate the syllables, but the feeling for their meaning is still there. What is most pertinent is that Caballé is able to anticipate Bellini's intentions and incorporates this with skill.

3.7.4. Elements of bel canto

The ornaments in 'Casta Diva', such as the turn written out in full in bar 16 (Ex. 3.49.), are performed as written in the score with clear articulation. Although there are opportunities in the low register passages, Caballé uses little chest voice resonance, in the vicinity of the low *f* register (Ex. 3.49), and she could utilise this more to introduce the aria with greater passion.

Comparison of performances

Ex. 3.49 Bars 16-17 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Low lying registers

Ca - - sta - Di - va. ca - sta Di - va, - i - nar

Caballé has considerable musicianship and refined phrasing. Arabesques (melismata) and arpeggios are well executed owing to her breath control and command of every note. The *legatissimo* effect, produced by the arabesques as they rise and fall, creates a performance which sets these bars apart from most other singers in this aspect. From a bel canto perspective, Caballé's fioriture have meaning, as well as brilliance, and give expression to Norma's shifting emotions. The fioriture are sung over one

¹⁴⁰ Joan Sutherland. *op. cit.*, p. 212.

syllable, 'sen-' which she articulates at the beginning of each phrase after a breath or dotted note (Ex. 3.50), bars 32-34.

In Ex. 3.50, the sequential descending passage has careful phrasing, and *legatissimo* and *diminuendo*, with the first note of each sequence clearly announced as it descends by scale.

Ex. 3.50 Bars 32-34 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Melismata showing breathing

Caballé builds up the tension more on each successive sequence up to b[♭], bar 33. Thereafter a release of tension occurs with the descending patterns. In this example it could be argued that she takes too many breaths in comparison with Sutherland. However, in the second melismata (Ex. 3.51) bars 37-38 taking only one midway breath (bar 37), Caballé glides chromatically from b[♭] to a', creating an image of the meaning of the words 'sen-za vel' (heavenly light) raining down on the goddess. This melisma is more stylish, with greater finesse than the previous passage.

Ex. 3.51 Bars 37-38 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Melismata

Caballé begins the cadenza (Ex. 3.52) by singing the tied notes, bars 56-59, followed by the pause on e[♭]. Her high b[♭] has a perfect *diminuendo*, followed by a descending scale, (bar 56) which is more like a *glissando* than individually articulated notes. Caballé ends the descending scale passage on low e[♭], and after a quick breath, rises to e[♭], the leading note, an octave higher, without any notes in between.

Ex. 3.52 Bars 56-59 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Cadenza and trill of Caballé

(tu) - fa - - - - - i

ne - l ci - el - .

What makes Caballé's cadenza special and individual is that she carefully crafts her trill beginning immediately on e", the discordant leading note, emphasising the dissonance. A short rest precedes her resolution on to the upper tonic, f'. This simple elaboration of a single trill adds increasing diminuendo as it proceeds for three full dotted crotchet beats (bar 57). This is not the whole range of her voice but more than half of it. Her pitch is exact, and this gives a final dramatic effect. A short break gives her sufficient breath before concluding on f' with a long pause and *messa di voce*. Caballé adds no other notes, as do Callas and Boninsegna.

Her trill, which can be identified with Sutherland's, is definitive but weaker by comparison. She may have adopted the idea of the trill in the cadenza from Sutherland's performance in 1960. Caballé meets the formidable challenge such a cadenza presents, and the trill is the only *bel canto* element that she adds to Bellini's written score.

3.7.5. Comparison of performances

This evaluation has determined from an aural perspective that Caballé's recordings have genuine value in transmitting *bel canto* traditions to future generations of singers. Caballé has achieved the demands of the aria clearly; her performance is good yet differs from those of her predecessors. She is not as impressive as Sutherland or Callas nor does she imitate them, but radiates her own refined simplicity and inner intensity. Despite Caballé's strengths, this 1973 LP recording¹⁴¹ does not match theirs because she has difficulty at times holding a note evenly, as well as an inability to show the same consistent flexibility or *legato*. Caballé's technique allows her to produce subtle tone and a voice filled with intensity.

¹⁴¹ Vincenzo Bellini. Montserrat Caballé in *Norma*. Performed 1973. 3 LPs. *op. cit.*

It is important to recognise the calibre of this performance and of the recording, and this examination supports Siff's statement. More than a decade after Callas, this recorded performance is part of her legacy, a valuable tool for preserving bel canto for future generations. Singers can learn much from her interpretation and will benefit from her entire legacy, which encompasses a number of diverse interpretations in various operatic title roles. Her ethereal pianissimos defined her career, and these are manifested in her performance of 'Casta Diva'. By following Bellini's melodic line, as advised by Sutherland and Callas, Caballé allows her performance to please the most devoted and critical Bellini supporters.

3.8 ELENA SOULIOTIS (Recorded 1965)

Italy soon proclaimed her as the true successor to Callas in the role [Norma], though in truth her portrayal of the role was no more than a simulacrum of the original.¹⁴²

3.8.1. Introduction

Elena Souliotis (Suliotis) (1943-2004) was born in Athens, Greece, and died in Florence, Italy. She made her debut at San Carlo, Naples, in 1964, aged 21, as Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Souliotis was not an imitator of Maria Callas, despite her having a voice of similar timbre. She took on many of Callas' roles, making her New York debut at Carnegie Hall in the title role in Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*, after which her star faded quickly. Considered exceptional in the early stages of her career, Souliotis attempted various other roles in subsequent years but by 1981, aged 38, she had worn out her voice through constant misuse brought about by singing so many roles unsuited to her voice too early in her career.¹⁴³

In 1967, Souliotis acquired a new role in Bellini's *Norma*, sung at Carnegie Hall, in a concert performance which received a mixed reception. Despite roughness of tone, she continued to sing the role to 1971.¹⁴⁴

Elena Souliotis recorded *Norma* in 1965, and for this aural study she sings 'Casta diva' from *Norma*.¹⁴⁵ Souliotis was endowed with a true lyric-dramatic voice and a definitive stage presence, and she soon learnt to portray some of the most difficult roles in Italian opera. *Norma* was no exception; it was recorded early in her career in 1965, and is considered equal to many other performances of this role. However, this role tested her capabilities to the limit and bears testimony to the style she created

¹⁴² Obituary. "Elena Souliotis (1943-2004)". London: *The Daily Telegraph*. 11 December 2004. p. 2.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ James C. Whitson. *The Short Unhappy Life of Elena Souliotis*.

< <http://www.metoperafamily.org/operanews/issue/article.asp?id=2292&issueID=93>.>
(30 March 2008).

¹⁴⁵ Elena Souliotis sings 'Casta Diva' from *Norma*, cassette tape of 1965 performance.
DECCA 1965 -66 417 407-2. Refer to audio CD, track 9.

before many difficulties beset her performances. Her style was Callas-like in its intensity of expression but was never controlled in its artistry.¹⁴⁶

3.8.2. Performance and dramatic events

Souliotis had a fiery temperament,¹⁴⁷ and, though she sang with intense passion, this recording shows signs of technical difficulties, graceless phrasing and clumsy passage work. Her passionate approach made her capable of dramatic tension and the intensity of her expression was somewhat like that of Callas. However, it is not always well controlled and this is evident in 'Casta Diva'. Consequently, she is too free with her high notes and lacks a command of placing piano and forte singing. This lessens the quality of her expression, and the aria is sung on a similar level of tone throughout, without sufficient variation.

The following examples illustrate some of her strengths, such as the use of her chest voice.

Ex. 3.53 Bars 16-18 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva'

The musical notation is a single staff in 12/8 time, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody begins with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a series of eighth notes: B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. A slur covers the first six notes. The next note is a half note D4, followed by a quarter note E4, and then a series of eighth notes: F4, G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. A slur covers the last six notes. The final note is a half note D4, followed by a quarter note E4, and then a series of eighth notes: F4, G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. A slur covers the last six notes. The lyrics are: Ca - - - sta Di - va, ca - sta Di - va - che - i - nar.

The opening passage, (Ex.3.53) shows good quality tone using chest voice in the lower register, and is well accomplished in bars 17 and 18. She appears to pour the notes out to great depths which is most unusual for a soprano. In some ways she is like Callas in using her chest voice. Yet she has a tendency to take the chest voice too high, which detracts from the transmission to the higher register and the quality of the higher notes. In addition, also being too free with her high notes certainly led to her early exit from the soprano repertoire.

While the beginning of stanza 1, bar 16 (Ex. 3.53), also stanza 2, bar 41 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score), provides an excellent opportunity for prolonged pianissimo, or even messa di voce, she is not able to demonstrate this, and her quality of tone is inconsistent. Her weaknesses are a lack of ability to place the breath in singing piano and also the expansion of breath to produce forte. In bar16 (Ex. 3. 53),

¹⁴⁶ Elena Souliotis. Obituary. *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 1.

Souliotis has the opportunity to project a pianissimo on the first note, a long a', followed by a forte in bar 18 as she sang the turn, rising to d". Instead, her fortes are abrupt and forced, as she appears technically unable to place both the piano and forte.

This passage, Bars 26-30 (Ex 3.54), highlights the same omission of piano and forte.

Ex. 3.54 Bars 26-30 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Souliotis' breathing, snatch breaths shown by ".

The image shows three staves of musical notation for the vocal line of 'Casta Diva'. The first staff covers bars 26-27, with lyrics 'vol - gi a noi vol - gi ah - - - - - ah -'. Above the staff, there are markings for 'sempre cresc. sino al'. The second staff covers bars 28-29, with lyrics '- - - - - il - bel - sem -'. The third staff covers bars 30-31, with lyrics 'bian - te - Sen - za - nu - be e sen - za - - - - vel.'. Performance markings include 'rall.' and 'dimin.' above the notes in the third staff, and various accents and slurs throughout.

Whereas most singers use crescendo and diminuendo as marked in bars 26-30 (Ex. 3.54), she omits the first words 'il bel sem-bian-te', replacing them with 'ah'. This occurs also in bars 51-55 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score). Souliotis sings at much the same level of tone, not observing the fortissimo or diminuendo in bars 28 and 29. As a result, her expression at this point lacks depth and meaning related to the words. She breaks the word 'sen-za' each time with a snatched breath and this disrupts the sense of the word. As the example clearly shows, she does not follow the slurring as marked and breaks up the phrase to some degree. However, her high notes are clear and accurately pitched. In bar 27 she articulates each high a", with an echo-like effect which is disconcerting and uncharacteristic of bel canto. Echoes, of course, are often used in opera but usually simulated on another instrument, often by another voice or flute.

3.8.3. Realisation of Bellini's style

Most recordings clearly identify additional elements of variation added to the melodic line. Souliotis follows Bellini's score exactly until the cadenza, showing no innovation or variation, nor does she appear to supplement this lack by using other techniques of bel canto. In the cadenza she conforms to

the final notes sung by Callas, but with a somewhat different rhythmic variation. Indeed, she uses *messa di voce* sparingly, and more of this characteristic *bel canto* technique would have enhanced the performance. Souliotis sings 'Casta Diva' in key F major, taking it at a much faster pace than most of the other performers discussed. This does not allow her time to produce a good tone.

The faster tempo prevents Souliotis from infusing the lyrics with intense emotion, although she performs the embellishments as Bellini scored. The momentary suspense of the *appoggiatura* reinforces the expressive value of the ornament, but this is lacking in Souliotis' interpretation because it is sung too quickly to be elaborated. Souliotis has missed an opportunity to embellish the aria in its most expressive phrases because she is singing too quickly. This result is not a good example of *bel canto* style, and would not therefore be a good model to emulate.

3.8.4. Elements of *bel canto*

As discussed, Souliotis is not innovative and interprets Bellini's *bel canto* aria 'Casta Diva' only as he has scored it. The turn in bar 18 (Ex 3.53), the grace notes in bars 24-25 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score) and bars 49 and 50 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score) are sung as written. However, she tends to have a surge of power and harsh tone on the high *f'*. The turns written out in full, bars 16 (Ex. 3.53) and 41 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score) are dutifully executed. Indeed it is difficult to find any variation from the score apart from the changed rhythm in the final bars of the *cadenza*.

Souliotis' diction has clarity, and while it can be argued that clear diction is not as important as flexibility, it is still necessary for an articulate performance.

In the melismata below, bars 32-34 (Ex 3.55) and 37-38 (Ex 3.56), Souliotis sings the phrases faster than most other singers, and although she is able to control her breathing well, the phrases lack finesse.

Ex. 3.55 Bars 32-34 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Unclear notes identified by ↓

At the same time, a sacrifice is made in enunciation, as the first notes of each of the descending sequences, bars 33 (Ex. 3.55) and 37, (Ex 3.56) are not clear. She either omits the first note entirely or slides over the repeated notes from the previous phrase so that it becomes inaudible. However, in bar 37 (Ex. 3.56), the melismata are taken in one breath, with fine legato.

Ex. 3.56 Bars 37-38 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' showing Souliotis' breaths

The image shows a musical score for 'Casta Diva' in 12/8 time. It features a chromatic run of notes. A slur labeled 'one breath' spans the entire run. The lyrics 'sen - sen - - - - - za - vel.' are written below the notes. The word 'molto dim.' is written above the run. A checkmark is placed above the first 'sen' syllable.

Souliotis has good breathing control in faster passages. The chromatic runs have exceptional clarity on each note in all melismata (Ex. 3.56). Note, however, there are no repeated notes at the beginning of each sequence in bar 37 (Ex. 3.56), as in bar 33 (Ex. 3.55). The score is erroneous at this point; a slur cannot be placed over a change of syllable. It is hard to determine exactly where Souliotis sings the syllable '-za', (written under d' flat) but if it is sung more correctly on b' flat, then the text should be placed under b' flat.

Souliotis uses more pauses and rests than Callas, suggesting her control of breathing is not as strong in rallentando passages. Breathing in bars 26-30 (Ex.3.54) show both the long sustained a's as well as the frequent breaths. To her credit, these passages are legatissimo. Yet she is not exact with high notes. These a's have echoes - Bar 27 (Ex. 3.54) and similarly in bar 52 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score).

Souliotis does not use much messa di voce. One example is in bar 18 (Ex. 3.53) on the note following the turn. In bars 26 (Ex. 3.54), and bar 52 (See 6.2: Appendix B: Score), suitable places for this technique to be displayed, messa di voce is not demonstrated. In comparison with Callas, bars 26-30 (Ex.3.23) Souliotis shows an almost identical style with the same breathing places, yet Callas is more expressive.

A comparison of the cadenzas of Callas and Souliotis draws some pertinent conclusions. In the final bars of Souliotis' cadenza it is possible to draw a parallel with Callas, as these bars show Callas' influence. Souliotis ornaments the cadenza as written in the score, but the pauses are in different places from Callas' and the rhythm is varied frequently. The cadenza shows flexibility and legato, but the last

descending chromatic glissando run is not well articulated. Souliotis shows some flair and deviation from the original. However, her version is somewhat rushed and lacking in style, whereas Callas' is slower and much more expressive. Souliotis adds many breathing breaks and takes it up to high f' in the last bar.

A comparison of examples 3.57, 3.58, and 3.59 below illustrate much variation in style and interpretation.

Ex. 3.57 Bars 56-59 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Cadenza.

a piacere

(tu) fa - - - - - i
nel - - nel cie - l.

Ex. 3.58 Bars 56—59 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Cadenza Souliotis' version

no tie
poco

fa - i ah - - - - - si
re - gnar tu fa - i nel, nel ciel - - .

messa di voce

Ex. 3.59 Bars 56-59 Novello Vocal Score 'Casta Diva' Cadenza Callas' 1954 version and 1960 version

(tu) fa - i fa - - - - - i

ne - l ne - l ciel. - - -

Souliotis sings the tied f' in bar 56 (Ex 3. 58) as does Callas (Ex. 3.59). Souliotis' pause marks are different from the original bar (Ex. 3.58) and they are similar but not identical to those of Callas (Ex. 3.59). Souliotis does not articulate the descending chromatic run as well as Callas. In contrast, she uses three quavers in quick succession in bar 57 of the cadenza as compared with Callas' three dotted crotchets, only pausing on the last high e" before the final f'. Souliotis' three quick quavers give a rushed impression, whereas the cadenza should be dramatic and expressive, with time allowed for a more lingering effect at the end. The slower version by Callas is more dramatic and intense.

Souliotis follows much of Callas' style, particularly phrasing, but with less flexibility and legato. She uses more pauses and rests, and her clarity of diction is inferior. These weaknesses inhibit her overall presentation and her performance is not as stylish, controlled or as convincing as the performances of Sutherland or Callas.

3.8.5. Comparison of performances

Souliotis' rapid rise to operatic fame was short lived, despite early acclaim and being hailed as the likely successor to Callas. Her stage presence was always imposing but her artistry was never of the same standard as Callas or numerous others. To aspire to great heights in bel canto singing, the soprano needs to be able to display a genuine command of pianissimo singing. Souliotis could never do this, lacking a real understanding of how to place the breath for this effect.

Souliotis follows much of Callas' style, particularly phrasing, but with less flexibility and legato. She uses more pauses and rests, and her clarity of diction is inferior. These weaknesses inhibit her overall

presentation and her performance is not as stylish, controlled or as convincing as the performances of Sutherland or Callas.

An aural analysis of Souliotis' performance clarifies her technical difficulties. The lack of drama, flexibility and a pure legato are evident in this recording, which does not impress the listener with the notion that Souliotis had a good command of bel canto style. The technical difficulties which too soon ended her career are evident. However, much can still be learnt from this aural appreciation.

3.9 Summary

A critical study and analysis of 'Casta Diva', from an aural perspective, has clearly shown how recordings of live performances have been pivotal in the understanding of bel canto style through the twentieth century.

Norma is a challenging role for a soprano, and most of the six singers chosen for the study have shown technique and style consistent with Italian bel canto operatic performance from the nineteenth century era of Bellini. The exceptional technique in their performance is demonstrated in the cantabile of 'Casta Diva'. Bellini's melody is embellished with appoggiaturas, chromaticism, melismata and irregular resolutions.

In the main, careful aural analysis has indicated that bel canto style has been realised in the recordings of Bellini's opera. Insight has been provided into the varying ways each singer has interpreted Bellini's score. It is evident that not all singers reach the same level of performance, and some weaknesses have emerged in each recording, in some more than others. This does not necessarily mean that the traditions are not handed on to future generations. Much can be learnt about bel canto techniques by analysing a singer's weakness.

By analysing these performances, the nature of individual interpretations of bel canto over one hundred years can be determined. Variations in improvisation, particularly in the cadenza, have provided evidence of insights into the nature and features of bel canto. Most importantly, and above all, recordings provide an important and invaluable preservation and transmission of bel canto traditions.

With rapid advances in sound production technology, an even greater understanding of bel canto techniques of the nineteenth century era of Bellini should result. An analysis of the recordings makes it clear that each soprano is a supreme artist of bel canto opera. Each singer's ornamentation and expressiveness of the bel canto tradition should be acknowledged.

4 Chapter Four

4.1 *L'Elisir d'Amore*: Case Study Two

4.1.1. Introduction

Donizetti was reported to have said to Romani, the librettist, 'It bodes well that we have a German prima donna, a tenor who stammers, a buffo who has a voice like a goat, and a French bass who isn't up to much.'¹⁴⁸ Despite Donizetti's forebodings, the opera, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, was a great and instantaneous success.

This chapter provides a critical aural study of 'Una furtiva lagrima', a well-known aria from *L'Elisir d'Amore*. Selected recordings of performances of four singers, namely, Enrico Caruso, Beniamino Gigli, Luciano Pavarotti and Thomas Edmonds, are analysed aurally, with the intention of tracing the evolution of bel canto characteristics as defined in chapter one.

Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) composed some seventy-five operas and he became one of the most productive composers of the decade following 1830. His opera melodrama in two acts, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, was composed in two weeks. Containing some of his most sparkling music, *L'Elisir d'Amore* was first performed at Teatro Cannobiana on 12 May 1832. It became a triumphant success throughout Italy, first in Naples in 1834 and La Scala in 1835, then reached London in 1836 and New York in 1838. Although it was the most performed opera between 1838 and 1848,¹⁴⁹ it had declined in popularity by the end of the nineteenth century. A notable revival at La Scala came in 1900 when, urged by Toscanini, Caruso sang the role of Nemorino, whose famous aria, 'Una furtiva lagrima', became the focus of his repertoire in ten of his seventeen seasons at The New York Metropolitan Opera.¹⁵⁰ Recordings of the aria are numerous, the earliest being 1902 when Caruso sang it in Milan for recording by The Gramophone and

¹⁴⁸ Charles Osborne. *The Bel Canto operas of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini*. London: Methuen, 1994. p. 210.

According to Romani's wife in her biography of Romani, the librettist had said this to Donizetti.

¹⁴⁹ William Ashbrook. "L'Elisir d'Amore" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Stanley Sadie, ed. London: MacMillan, 1992. Vol. 2. p. 38.

¹⁵⁰ Charles Osborne. *op. cit.*, p. 210.

Typewriter Company. The role of Nemorino was later assumed by his successors, Gigli, Tito Schipa, Pavarotti and Placido Domingo, amongst many others.

L'Elisir d'Amore, is set in France, in the early eighteenth century in a farming village in the Basque country. It is a demanding opera for a tenor voice, and 'Una furtiva lagrima', sung by the hero, Nemorino, is a popular and classic aria. 'Una furtiva lagrima' has bel canto lines and opportunities for innovative embellishments. An outstanding bel canto feature is the cadenza which allows the singer to display skills in dramatic tension, messa di voce and melodic elaboration. The tenor must have absolute command of agile and flexible voice production, breath control and legato. These are the criteria by which a good performance must be judged.

4.1.2. Scores

'Una furtiva lagrima' follows the duet between Adina and Dulcamara in E major in Act Two. It is a romanza beginning in B flat minor, and ending in the tonic major, B flat major. The sudden key change from E major sets the tone for sadness and passion. The aria is introduced by a bassoon solo, which establishes the mood and introduces a melody of great pathos and romance.

A number of scores have been consulted and are listed below.

Boosey and Co – ed. J. Pitman, London, before 1886. English words by Charles L. Kenney. 19- -
Public domain

Ricordi, G. and Sons – Milan, Italy. Reprinted 1944. Public domain

Schirmer, G. Inc. New York and London. 1960-1961. Public domain

Kalmus, Edwin F. London and New York. 1968. Public domain

All *L'Elisir d'Amore* vocal scores have editing problems related to phrase marks and articulation. The Kalmus score has many meaningless slurs and phrase markings, while the Boosey score lacks detailed phrasing marks and suggested dynamic markings for the singer. The Schirmer and Ricordi scores are almost identical, the Ricordi score having a slight advantage over the other scores. The Ricordi score has been selected as a reference example for this study, as it appears to have more detailed articulation suggested for a singer. Computer set transcriptions and facsimiles will be included in the text. These will be noted in situ together with annotated variations and embellishments made by the singer.

4.1.3. Singers

Undoubtedly, *L'Elisir d'Amore* is a tenor's opera. It is a classic example of bel canto style and the aria 'Una furtiva lagrima', Nemorino's romanza, from Act two, scene eight, is its most popular number, a great moment of pure sentiment. It is a two stanza aria with great depth of feeling. His librettist, Felice Romani, wrote the libretto of *L'Elisir d'Amore* after a text by Eugène Scribe. The text came from Daniel-François-Esprit Auber who wrote the opera *Le Philtre*, 1831. Interestingly, Donizetti's librettist, Romani, did not want this aria in the opera, but Donizetti insisted, probably because he foresaw the passionate impact this aria would have on both the plot and the music.

This aria is the turning point of the plot and an important musical climax. Romani thought it would hold up the action.¹⁵¹ However, in the scene following, Adina resolves the situation and the opera moves on to a brisk finale.

The aria holds a commanding position in the tenor operatic repertoire, and owes its success to being one of the earliest recordings ever of any aria (Caruso 1902). A wide range of available recordings of outstanding performances has been audited and evaluated, and from these, four performances have been selected for this study: Enrico Caruso (1902), Beniamino Gigli (1933), Luciano Pavarotti (1970) and Thomas Edmonds (1990).

4.2 UNA FURTIVA LAGRIMA Act Two, scene eight, *L'Elisir d'Amore*

4.2.1. Opera synopsis

The plot of *L'Elisir d'Amore* revolves around the story of the effects and non-effects of a love potion that goes disastrously wrong, an idea that was very popular in the 19th century. The characters have been given Italian names to create the illusion of an Italian village.

¹⁵¹ Charles Osborne. *op. cit.* p. 213.

The hero, Nemorino, is a poor young farm labourer in love with Adina, a wealthy landowner. She is amused, fickle and playful, but does not return his affections as he is so poor. Influenced by a version of the story of Tristan and Isolde and their love potion, Nemorino persuades an itinerant quack (Dulcamara) to sell him an elixir which, if taken, he believes will win Adina for him.

Act one is set outside Adina's farmhouse and later in the village square. Adina reads aloud the absurd story of Tristan and the powerful love potion. Belcore makes advances towards Adina, but Adina is in no hurry to make up her mind. Nemorino gains courage, after buying the love potion, to approach the beautiful but rich Adina. The potion is really a strong wine, but unaware of that, Nemorino awaits the following day, hoping the potion will work. Learning of Adina's impending marriage to Belcore, Nemorino is jealous and persuasively begs Adina to wait one more day. Nemorino is rebuffed by Belcore, and in a moment of great tenderness, Adina realises Nemorino's plight.

Act two is set firstly in the interior of Adina's farmhouse and secondly in a rustic courtyard. Belcore is annoyed at the delay in the marriage. He persuades Nemorino, for whom the love potion has not yet worked, to join the army, so he can amass enough money to pay for more potion. Nemorino spends all his bounty on the potion which arouses the village girls' interest in him. Dulcamara is amazed at the spectacle of Nemorino surrounded by the village girls, but Adina realizes the depths of Nemorino's feelings for her and her jealousy is aroused, especially when she learns that he has enlisted in order to win her hand. Nemorino reflects on the tearful eye he has observed in Adina, realizes she loves him and expresses this in his romanza, 'Una furtiva lagrima'. Finally, he overhears the heroine's weeping confession of her love for him, and because of this, Nemorino returns the enlistment papers. The lovers are united and the situation is improved by Nemorino hearing of his inheritance. Dulcamara leaves the lovers grateful for his elixir. Nemorino has won her heart, regardless of the potions.

In 'Una furtiva lagrima', Nemorino testifies to the deep love he has seen for himself in Adina. With its haunting bassoon obbligato and its minor-major melody, it presents a good example of Donizetti's skill at the outpouring of a new melody. The melody, which describes musically aspects of Nemorino's character, provides numerous opportunities for simple ornamentation and elaborate embellishment techniques. There are at least two significant aspects of this aria. Firstly, Donizetti uses a simple phrase, four times, each with simple variations from the original. The cadenza is the second feature. Again unaccompanied, as was the cadenza from 'Casta Diva', it is embellished individually and differently by each singer from the original scored version. This is an aria of genuine pathos because it is sad and dramatic, yet it is a romance which appeals to the listener as a human story.

4.2.2. 'Una furtiva lagrima'. Nemorino's aria from *L'Elisir d'Amore*¹⁵²

Una furtiva lagrima
negli' occhi suoi spuntò:
Quelle festose giovani
invidiar sembrò.
Che più cercando io vò?
Che più cercando io vò?
M'ama! Sì, m'ama, lo vedo. Lo vedo.
Un solo istante i palpiti
del suo bel cor sentir!
I miei sospir, confondere
per poco a' suoi sospir!
I palpiti, i palpiti sentir,
confondere i miei coi suoi sospir.
Cielo! Sì, può morir!
Di più non chiedo, non chiedo.
Ah, cielo! Sì, può! Sì, può morir!
Di più non chiedo, non chiedo.
Sì, può morir! Sì, può morir d'amor.

One tear that falls so furtively
from her sweet eyes has just sprung,
as if she envied all the youths
who laughingly passed her right by.
What could I want more than this?
She loves me! Yes, she loves me! I see it, I see it.
One moment just to hear her heart,
beating so close next to mine,
to hear my sighs like they were hers,
her sighings as if they were mine!
Heavens, please take me now:
All that I wanted is mine now!

The aria from *L'Elisir d'Amore* provides an example of the techniques of bel canto ornamentation used by Donizetti. It is an aural study of contrasts of conventional ornamentation and the florid lines of the improvised cadenza.

¹⁵² Michael Bolton. Una furtiva lagrima lyrics. Translation.
<<http://www.lyricsdepot.com/michael-bolton/una-furtiva-lagrima.html>> (8 April 2010).

4.3 ENRICO CARUSO (Recorded 1902)

4.3.1. Introduction

Enrico Caruso was born on the 27 February 1873 in Naples, Italy, and died on 2 August 1921 in Naples. At the age of ten years Caruso was employed in a workshop, and he studied singing at evening school. He first began singing in 1883 in churches in Naples, learning his elementary music and singing with Father Bonzetti at a small school attached to the church. His parents were poor and unable to provide him with singing tuition, and after his mother died when he was fifteen years old, his father left him to support himself.

In 1891, when Caruso was eighteen years old, a friend suggested he learn from Guglielmo Vergine, who became his maestro, and gave him a solid vocal foundation. He made his first real operatic stage debut in November 1894 at the Teatro Nuovo, Naples. His first performance of *L'Elisir d'Amore* in Naples did not receive a very good reception, and he vowed never to sing it there again, a decision that he did not allow to impede his career as he sang it elsewhere. Caruso was bound by a contract which was both limiting and binding in earnings, which were used to finance the lessons as he was unable to pay. Vergine encouraged him to sing different roles and used his influence to find him singing engagements. In the following years he sang at Palermo, Salerno, Milan, Genoa, St Petersburg and Buenos Aires.

In 1900 Toscanini invited Caruso to La Scala, Milan, to sing *L'Elisir d'Amore*. Thus began a great career which spanned twenty-one years. This performance enabled Caruso to make his entry into the world of the gramophone, one of the most extensive and important inventions of the late nineteenth century. In 1902, Caruso became the first tenor in history to record his voice. The confluence of Caruso's unique career with the coming of age of the phonograph industry has long been recognized.¹⁵³ The great voices of this era have been preserved in this medium, and Caruso himself said, 'It is impossible to overestimate the value of the gramophone as a means of comparison [of singers].'¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Enrico Caruso Jnr. and Andrew Farkas. *Enrico Caruso: My Father and my Family*. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus, 1991. p. 603.

¹⁵⁴ Enrico Caruso. Quoted in Percy Colson. *Melba*. London: Grayson and Grayson, 1932. p. 185.

According to Rodolfo Celletti,¹⁵⁵ Caruso's vocal training was irregular and incomplete, partly due to his poor financial circumstances as he received no remuneration from his performances. In his early years he did not perform well in the upper register, often resorting to falsetto or transposition, and in this area did not achieve note security up to at least high b" until 1902. Once he had mastered his voice production, his voice, often regarded as baritone, became his great resource; later he reached a tenor range, and his high notes became brilliant and steady, with exceptional tonal and breath control. The tender messa di voce characteristics of bel canto, which he used, enabled him to sing Italian lyric repertoire, and lighter operas such as *L'Elisir d'Amore*. Contemporary reports agree that Caruso's voice at this time was light, lyric and short, and often he would not reach the high notes.¹⁵⁶

In 1896, while still under contract to Vergine, he started studying with the conductor Vincenzo Lombardi, who wanted him to sing Arturo in *I Puritani*, a role with a very high tessitura. Lombardi gave him the confidence that he could sing the troublesome high notes. Wah Keung Chan's claim that Lombardi that coached Caruso in the high d"s and d" flats, and f" above high c", which most tenors omitted, may be dubious.¹⁵⁷ Lastly, as he endeavoured to perfect his vocal technique, he studied with the conductor, Leopoldo Mugnone. The soprano Ada Giachetti, who later became Caruso's de facto wife for eleven years, encouraged him greatly with his vocal development. She studied parts with him, trained his voice, and gave him excellent instruction and wise guidance, as she was a singer herself, even though she was portrayed by the media of the time as a second rate singer.¹⁵⁸ His son, Enrico junior, maintained that the Caruso voice was the result of untold hours of study, practice and training.

The performance of the opera *L'Elisir d' Amore* at La Scala in Milan in 1902 was the beginning of a career in recordings. Fred and Will Gaisberg, of the Gramophone and Typewriter Company, had heard Caruso sing and proposed a series of recordings; thus began Caruso's recording career. In his memoir, Fred Gaisberg talked of how he enticed Caruso to sing and record for 100 pounds sterling, but when he called his directors in London, they cabled back saying, 'Fee exorbitant, forbid you to record'.¹⁵⁹ But

¹⁵⁵ Rodolpho Celletti. "Enrico Caruso." in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Stanley Sadie, ed. London: MacMillan, 2001. Vol. 5. p. 213.

¹⁵⁶ Enrico Caruso Jnr. and Andrew Farkas. *op. cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁵⁷ Wah Keung Chan, "The Voice of Caruso". *La Scena Musicale*. 7.7. April 2002. p. 2-3. He alleged that Caruso sang the Rubini version of *Il Puritani* but it is more likely the version Pavarotti made his own.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Andrew Farkas, "Researching Caruso." *The Opera Quarterly* 20.3. (Summer 2004): p. 357-383.

Gaisberg did anyway, and so Caruso made the first recording in a session held on 11 April 1902 in the Grand Hotel de Milan.¹⁶⁰ From his selection of ten operatic excerpts from eight different operas recorded, it is significant that one selection was 'Una furtiva lagrima' from Donizetti's *L'Elisir d' Amore*.

April 11 1902 will go down in history as the day that changed the world with the establishment of the recording industry. This set of historic recordings was an unprecedented success, and the first to create an impact and demand on an international scale. A new era opened which enabled people to hear their favourite opera singers in their own homes, and, subsequently, opera became available for ordinary people. The recording industry flourished, and it has been suggested that the gramophone made Caruso's career.¹⁶¹ The selected recording provides an excellent example of the style of early twentieth-century bel canto opera.

The first recordings were released just before Caruso made his debut at the New York Metropolitan Opera House, and this aria became his most famous piece. *L'Elisir d'Amore*, his most performed opera, was staged at least 78 times in opera houses around the world, compared with his 33 performances of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, another of Donizetti's famous bel canto operas.¹⁶² He made at least six recordings of *L'Elisir d'Amore*. Caruso's voice possessed a richness of sound that was unexpectedly real despite the scratchy gramophone acoustics of his day. People were intrigued with this new invention and listened to the records avidly in their parlours. Significantly, Caruso paved the way for recordings for the future.

This case study examines the old sound recording of 'Una furtiva lagrima' from the digitally re-mastered CD *Legend of Caruso*.¹⁶³ This recording has shortcomings such as minor crackling, no orchestral accompaniment and with a creaking rough piano accompaniment only. In addition, Caruso's voice is somewhat metallic sounding, as he recorded on an Edison phonograph. Early recordings were entirely made acoustically. The sound was collected by a horn and piped to a diaphragm which vibrated the cutting stylus. Sensitivity and frequency were poor and irregular. The singer almost always needed to put his face in or very near the recording horn to direct the sound in sufficiently to allow the recording.

¹⁶⁰ Fred Gaisberg. *The Music Goes Around*. 1942. Memoirs.

¹⁶¹ Enrico Caruso Jnr. and Andrew Farkas. *op. cit.*, p.603. Alternatively, Caruso was important to the phonograph industry.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* p. 250.

¹⁶³ Enrico Caruso. *Legend of Caruso*. CD. Milano: Warner Fonit, 1997. Opera Excerpts. Salvatore Cottone, piano.

Warner Fonit 398426900-2. Recorded 1902 on 78rpm disc. Refer to audio CD, track 10.

In the last fifty or so years modern technology has enabled RCA to re-issue all of its Caruso recorded material, firstly as LPs, then CDs digitally re-mastered from old recordings.

4.3.2. Performance and dramatic events

Caruso has a brilliant voice, his sound is steady, his breathing control is precise and he is able to create bel canto techniques with ease. His highest note is a'' (in the cadenza) and lowest f', a range of sixteen semitones (Ex.4.15). This is not a large range but it encompasses the tessitura of Donizetti's set melody. His intonation is generally impeccable, and his steady breath control gives his voice the flexibility so necessary in bel canto. Another strength lies in his ability to vary his tone from melting sensuality to fiery outbursts of passion.

Caruso's main weakness is the way he slurs notes over, rather than articulating them separately. Portamento, a smooth sliding over intermediate notes without a break when passing from one note to another of a different pitch, is a characteristic of bel canto singing, and it was used frequently by other styles of singers until the twentieth century. Some singers make excessive use of this vocal technique, with the intention of facilitating a rise to a high note. It is an easy but unnatural way to reach a high note: a poor technique. Instead they should use head voice, a term applied to using the high register of the voice. For some portamento becomes a soft option and forms a bad habit.

The following transcribed excerpts are intended to exemplify Caruso's strengths and weaknesses, as well as his use of drama and tension in this recording of 'Una furtiva lagrima'. In bars 20-22, (Ex. 4.1), Caruso needs power and controlled breath to sustain the note f', a dotted minim, using messa di voce and portamento. To facilitate his voice to attain the desired pitch, Caruso uses portamento, reaching up to f' from b' flat on 'io vo'. This is a bel canto technique, but Caruso's portamento is somewhat excessive, too heavy and not in good bel canto taste. The second portamento in this example on 'Ma-ma' is in the score and should be sung,

Ex. 4.1 Bars 20-22. Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' showing messa di voce and portamento

The image shows a musical score for the vocal line of 'Una furtiva lagrima'. The score is in 6/8 time and features a key signature of two flats. The lyrics are: 'che più cer - can - dó io vo? M'a - ma, si,'. The score includes several annotations: 'portamento' with arrows pointing to the melodic lines between 'dó' and 'io', and between 'ma,' and 'si,'; 'messa di voce' with an arrow pointing to the dotted note 'vo?'; and 'no tie' with an arrow pointing to the dotted note 'vo?'. Dynamic markings include 'p' (piano) before 'vo?' and 'f' (forte) before 'M'a - ma,'. Checkmarks are placed above the notes for 'dó' and 'si,'.

Likewise portamento occurs in bar 24 (Ex. 4.2), though in the latter f' is not as long a note (crotchet) as the dotted minim on f' in Ex. 4.1. Caruso takes a breath after the first a' flat, uses portamento to reach from the next a' flat to f' on which he holds a long pause.

Ex. 4.2 Bars 22-25 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' with additions by Caruso

M'a - ma, si - m'a - ma -, lo ve - do lo ve - - do.

Portamento is a desirable characteristic of bel canto and when used tastefully considerably enhances the expression of text, dramatic moment, and human emotion. When it is over-used, the effect is diminished. One might say that there is an 'inverse proportion' principle; potent when used sparingly, distracting when over-used. Caruso's use of portamento is sometimes closer to the latter rather than the former. On the other hand, these phrases do not negate bel canto as they are expressive, well-pitched and ornamented.¹⁶⁴ Caruso used portamento freely as the following examples show.

Ex. 4.3 Bar 10, bars 36-38 and bars 39-43 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima'

Ex. 4.3a Bar 10 'u-na'. Vocal Score

U - na fur - ti - - va

In this example (Ex.4.3a), the portamento is clearly marked in the score, although Caruso is not trying to reach a high register note, but rather glides from f down to b' flat. This is expressive and passionate, emphasising 'una', one (meaning only one tear). Again Caruso is overdoing it for effect, carrying too much weight up to the high notes. In bar 37-38 (Ex. 4.3b), there is a similar example to bar 20-21 (Ex. 4.1). Caruso adds to this almost identical bar an appoggiatura on the note c", -de (con-fon-de-re).

¹⁶⁴ John Potter, 'Beggar at the Door: the rise and fall of portamento in singing.' *Music and Letters*. 2006.Vol. 87. No. 4. pp. 523-550.

4.3b Bars 36-38 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' '(con) –fon-dere, i miei' and 'so-spir' with Caruso's additions

- tir! con - fon - de - re i miei co' suoi so - spir!

'Confondere', meaning 'to overwhelm with kindness', is again voiced expressively and the addition of the appoggiatura supports this tenderness.

In the third example (Ex 4.3c), Caruso tends to slide across all six semiquavers in bar 40 as he strives to reach g" in the following bar. Using portamento, this is an effective lead into the high g" and emphasises the meaning of the words of the text, '*di piu non*', (no more [I'd ask you]).

4.3c Bars 39-43 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' 'di piu non chie-do' Caruso's portamento

Cie-lo, si può mo - rir; di - più non chie-do, non chie - do ah! - cie-lo, si può, si può mo -

Apart from his use of portamento, Caruso has some weakness in nuance or dynamics. Identifying weaknesses such as these is not necessarily a bad thing. Firstly, it could be the fault of this primitive recording, where the tenor had to literally 'shout' into the horn collecting the sound, so that it was strong enough to vibrate the cutting stylus and record. Secondly, if this sliding upwards enables the tenor to reach the high g" and be expressive at the same time, he achieves his aim. Although it has been stated on page 97 that he is inclined to dramatic outbursts of tonal contrasts, in general terms he provides less variety of dynamics within a flow-on phrase, restricting slow moving changes in expression. Notes tend to be individually articulated or stressed. Caruso's phrases are not always well-shaped, particularly where rubato would aid musical flow.

4.3.3. Realisation of Donizetti's style

The sensuous nature of this larghetto aria in B flat minor, 'Una furtiva lagrima', is well sustained by Caruso. Donizetti's intentions are surely to allow the performer to include his own expressiveness, that

very important element in dramatic vocal music. Any consideration of bel canto traditions should include analysing how the melodic line is varied or ornamented. This aria has deep feeling imbued in its melody line, yet Caruso manages to take four similar phrases and inject much variety into their interpretation (bars 11-13, 15-17, 18-19, and 20-22, (Ex. 4.4, Ex. 4.6, Ex. 4.7 and Ex. 4.9), and similarly in stanza two). In Donizetti's score, these phrases are not identical, but rather follow a similar shape and style. To give these four phrases variety, Donizetti changes the end notes of each phrase. Caruso sings these as written but adds variations such as sustained notes, turns and mordents in clearly articulated phrases.

The following examples illustrate the elements of variation added to the melodic line by Caruso.

The first set (Ex. 4.4), bars 12-13, ends on B flat, the tonic. Caruso sings the first set as written, as if setting a theme, which will be followed by variations.

Ex. 4.4 Bars 12-13 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima'

negli oc - chi suo - i spun - to:

The second similar passage, bars 15-17 (Ex. 4.5) starts on a D flat major chord, the relative key, moves through the diminished 7th on E natural in the bass, bar 16 beat 2, to end at bar 17 on an F major chord, the dominant of B flat minor, a tonic-dominant cadence.

Ex. 4.5 Bars 15-17 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Donizetti's score

gio - van - i in - vi - di - ar - sem - brò.

D \flat major ii^{\flat} B \flat minor Dim7 V B \flat minor

This example from the score is compared with Caruso's version (Ex. 4.6) bars 15-17.

Ex. 4.6 Bars 15-17 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Caruso's version

This note is unclear

gio - va - ni in - vi - di - ar - sem - brò.

rall.

In bar 37, (Ex. 4.3b), ‘*confondere i miei co’suoi so-spir*’, f’ is slurred to the second c” semiquaver, then Caruso takes a breath. The next c” semiquaver ‘*mi-*’ is slurred up to e” flat followed by the last slur as written (Ex. 4.3b). While it is not a consistent problem, Caruso’s diction is not always clear. A few words are unintelligible, but the vowel sounds are very clear.

This discussion has so far examined Caruso’s strengths in relation to bel canto techniques, and has alluded to the way he has endeavoured to realise Donizetti’s style. The first significant feature of this aria has been documented. The expressive ornamentations, which Caruso has added to the similar phrases by means of his controlled breathing, are strong indicators of his interpretations, and indicate the means by which his recordings can be of lasting value to other bel canto performers.

4.3.4. Elements of bel canto

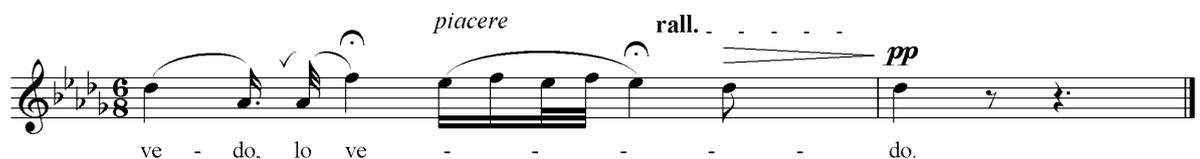
Embellishment and variation of the melodic line is important and significant in bel canto. Caruso shows bel canto style and controlled technical ability in interpreting Donizetti’s embellishments. This aria has many appoggiaturas to which Caruso adds his own turns, messa di voce and varying rhythms. Example 4.10 shows where Caruso added a turn on c” bar 16.

Ex. 4.10 Bar 16 Ricordi Vocal Score ‘Una furtiva lagrima’



Example 4.11 shows where Caruso has added a mordent in bar 24 (Ex.4.11) on e” flat including the appoggiatura.

Ex. 4.11 Bars 24-25 Ricordi Vocal Score ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ Caruso’s ornamentation



In bars 36-38 (Ex. 4.3b), Caruso does not add a turn or mordent but notes of the melody are varied by Donizetti. The embellishments in all these examples are effective, giving emphasis and expressiveness to the text. Coupled with the ornament is a tonal variation, which supports the meaning of the word on

which the ornament is sung. Rhythmic alterations, for example, are apparent where Caruso excludes the dot after e" flat in bar 33 (Ex. 4.12), making all notes equal quavers, and also in the similar bar 35. While these variations are small and subtle, they illustrate the way the bel canto singer can add expressiveness to the phrase.

Ex. 4.12 Bar 32-34 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Caruso's version

Bars 32 - 34 Original score	Bars 32 - 34 Caruso's version
<i>pp</i> <i>smorz.</i>	<i>pp</i> <i>smorz.</i>
	
per po-co a suo-i sos - pir! i	per po-co a suo-i sos - pir! i

Messa di voce is used from f' bar 42 to g" bar 43 (Ex. 4.13).

Ex. 4.13 Bars 42-44 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Caruso's version

<i>messa di voce</i>	
	
do Ah! cie - lo si può si può - mo - rir; di più - non -	do Ah! cie - lo si può si può - mo - rir; di più - non -

This has a very expressive effect. Messa di voce is used also in bars 21-22 (Ex. 4.9), bar 38 (Ex. 4.3b) on high f' and bar 45 (Ex. 4.14) in the final cadence, again climactic points of the phrases.

Caruso uses other aspects of bel canto including changes in the tempo. Whereas his predecessors, such as Giovanni Battista Rubini, had interpreted Donizetti with excessive rubato, Caruso refrains from this, except before the cadenza which he introduces with an expressive rallentando, anticipating the lead in to the cadenza proper, bar 45, (Ex.4.14). In Donizetti's day, it was the usual custom not to further embellish the bars preceding the cadenza, and in observing this tradition, one could assume that Donizetti had the intention that the singer himself would use other means to give the phrase expressiveness. Clearly Caruso achieves this through the rallentando, the pianissimo and the use of messa di voce.

The evenness of his voice is very noticeable, almost exclusively mezza voce, with perfect breath control. He uses very little fast vibrato. Caruso became popular because he had such good breathing

skills. His treatment of bel canto was unique; he had clear articulation and expressive tones. Often when Caruso sang with full dark tones, his voice could be seen sometimes to be too loud and lacking finesse, but this is not the case in this aria. While he had less dynamics and musical imagination, he was prone to embellish upon the composer's score.¹⁶⁵

From bar 39 (Ex. 4.3c), the modulation of key to B flat major from B flat minor changes the character of the melody, and prepares the way for the lively elaborations added to the already florid lines of the cadenza. The cadenza is the second and most pertinent significant feature requiring annotation. The cadenza is in B Flat Major, with a scored tessitura of f' to g''; it is wide and versatile (Ex. 4.14).

Ex. 4.14 Bars 42-46 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' showing cadenza proper

do, ah! cie - lo, si può si può - mo - rir; si più non
chie - do non chie - do.

After listening to Caruso's cadenza several times, it was clear that the last two bars of the cadenza posed a problem. Not only was the diction of the text not clear, but also it was evident that the cadenza consisted of more notes than scored. In addition, the cadenza was not limited to using the pitch of the scored notes. The last line of the full text, and therefore the music itself, had been omitted from the reference score.¹⁶⁶ After examination of other scores, it appeared that all texts are guilty of the same omission, the omitted text being '*Si, può morir! Si, può morir d'amor*'.¹⁶⁷ (See Ex. 4.14) But this line was part of Romani's libretto. (See section 4.2.2) This observation highlights the additional melodic lines and the usage of the full text, by Caruso, as well as other performers (Ex. 4.15). Which score they used is unclear, but it was an opportunity for all to display their bel canto techniques and to follow similar melodic variations as if it were a tradition among tenors.

¹⁶⁵ Metropolitan Opera Archives, New York. Extract from cover notes CD. Enrico Caruso. *Legend of Caruso. op. cit.*

¹⁶⁶ Novello and Co, London, Score. Undated.

¹⁶⁷ Boosey and Co before 1886, G. Schirmer 1960 and G. Ricordi and Co, 1944.

The cadenza at the end is the chief place for Caruso to display his florid bel canto style and move outside the realm of Donizetti's written score (Ex. 4.15).

Ex. 4.15 Bars 42-46. Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Cadenza line sung by Caruso

The musical score for the cadenza line is presented in two staves. The first staff begins with a rest followed by a note marked 'messa di voce'. The second staff contains the main melodic line with lyrics: 'ah! cie - lo, si può si può mo - rir; di più no - n chie-do non chie - - - do, si può mo-rir si può mo-rir d'a - mor.' Performance markings include 'pianissimo', 'rall.', and 'molto lunga'.

In bar 44, (Ex. 4.15), Caruso reaches over Donizetti's high g" to a", bar 45, in the first part of which Caruso emphasises this heightened pitch with additional notes, before falling to a'. After a pause, he moves into the florid lines of the first part of the cadenza. Caruso reaches beyond Donizetti's tessitura. He shows variations particularly in the penultimate beat, by expanding the written score dominant 7th (first inversion) of B flat major on a' to g" (a major 9th). Then he follows it with another dominant 7th with a minor 9th, effectively turning it into a diminished 7th on a'. Donizetti's descending arpeggio is consequently and effectively converted into one descending arpeggio and two ascending arpeggios, a performance convention followed by tenors when ornamenting the vocal line. The first arpeggio is sung evenly, the second with a tendency towards a dotted rhythm (although exact notation of the rhythm is unclear), while the third is sung evenly, using the text of the missing line, 'si, può morir ...' Caruso ends with three passionate pauses before the final bar, (Ex. 4.15). The additional last line of the text is illustrated in the rising arpeggios, 'Si può morir ...' in the penultimate bar followed by a passionate ending using some portamento on 'd'amor'.

The elements of bel canto featured in 'Una furtiva lagrima' have contributed to an understanding of Donizetti's melodic lines and how Caruso interpreted the aria. While performances of bel canto opera had begun to decline by the early 1900s, Caruso's recording demonstrates clearly that an understanding of the style persisted. Caruso has used ornamentation in the form of turns and mordents, and he has incorporated techniques such as drama, messa di voce, rhythmic and tempo variations, pauses and florid lines to produce effective, expressive and varied melodic lines. In particular, Caruso has been innovative and original in the embellishment of his cadenza. More pertinently, he has restored to the performance the lost last line of the text.

4.3.5. Comparison of performances

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, Caruso dominated the operatic arena, with by far the greatest part of his career being spent in the New York Metropolitan Opera House. He made 498 documented 78rpm recordings and 248 are known still to exist.¹⁶⁸

The study contends that much is owed to Caruso, and that his recording is a significant and valuable asset to generations of tenors, now and in the future. Analysis and documentation of techniques of performance and Caruso's interpretations of bel canto opera in this comparative way provide significant evidence of bel canto style.

Caruso was able to combine the style of verismo with the traditional techniques of bel canto in the Rubini style of singing. Giovanni Battista Rubini, (1795-1854), was an extraordinary bel canto tenor and a major exponent of Donizetti, one whose style influenced Caruso's. Caruso was famous for singing long sustained melodic lines; as is evident in this aria, bars 20-22 (Ex. 4.9) bars 36-43 (Ex. 4.3), and in the cadenza bars 42-46 (Ex. 4.15). There is no apparent evidence whether Caruso used original scores. Rubini would have worked with Donizetti's original scores as he performed in Donizetti's era, and since Caruso was influenced by Rubini's style, it is quite likely Caruso did so too.

It may be questioned whether Caruso's style was truly bel canto. Caruso practised vocal exercises daily to maintain the florid style of his voice and flexibility of the bel canto style of singing.¹⁶⁹ These exercises tested the agility of his voice, in vocalised patterns and tone production in flowing legato exercises. He used various bel canto techniques, such as *messa di voce*, as evidenced in example 4.13., well-controlled breath control, *portamento*, ornamentation and quality tone production, and therefore it is clear that he shows many of the characteristics of bel canto style.

Many people of Caruso's generation listened to the gramophone, the new wonder of the early twentieth century. Through his recordings, Caruso demonstrated aspects of bel canto style and listeners were exposed to the bel canto style of operatic singing. Gigli, who is discussed in the next section, was influenced greatly at an early age by Caruso's recordings. In addition, comparisons of Caruso's

¹⁶⁸ Rodolpho Celletti and Alan Blyth. "Enrico Caruso" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Stanley Sadie, ed. London: OUP 2006. Grove Music online < <http://www.grovemusic.com>.> (June 30 2006).

¹⁶⁹ Salvatore Fucito and Barnet J. Beyer. *Caruso and the Art of Singing*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1922. pp. 186, 187, 196.

recordings with those of other singers are made in subsequent sections of this case study. It is conceivable that the impact made by the invention of acoustic gramophone recordings, and Caruso's recordings, in particular, on decades of singers after him, has become greater than the influence he made in the opera house, and this impact has continued for over one hundred years. Generations of singers, especially tenors, have been inspired by Caruso's legacy of recordings.

4.4 BENIAMINO GIGLI (Performed 1933)

4.4.1. Introduction

Beniamino Gigli was an acclaimed tenor for over four decades, 1914 to 1955. He lived in the next generation after Caruso. An analysis of Gigli's recording of 'Una furtiva lagrima' from *L'Elisir d'Amore* enables the characteristics of bel canto opera to be observed.¹⁷⁰ Gigli's recording is a generation later than Caruso's recording and carries the traditions of bel canto into the 1930s. Gigli sings with expression and feeling, and demonstrates the style of opera recognised as bel canto.

Born in Racanati, Italy (1890) Beniamino Gigli died in Rome (1957). As a singer and operatic tenor, he made his debuts in Rovigo 1914, Palermo 1915, San Carlo di Napoli 1915, Roma 1916 and La Scala 1918. His teachers were Antonio Cotogni and Rosati of the Santa Cecilia Academy. Opera came to a brief end in 1916 when, in World War I, Gigli and many others donned a uniform, served in the war, sang to the troops at the front¹⁷¹ and in patriotic benefit concerts for Red Cross in Italy.¹⁷²

At the end of the war, he ventured across the Atlantic to Buenos Aires, where cities 'unanimously declared [his] performance to have been a revelation, a triumph and sublime, worthy of Caruso'.¹⁷³ Gigli found Donizetti's music particularly suited to his voice.¹⁷⁴ He was recorded by Gaisberg in 1918, sang *Lucretia Borgia* in 1919 and debuted in *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the New York Metropolitan Opera in December 1920.¹⁷⁵ When he went to the Metropolitan, he knew little except that Caruso had been the leading tenor there. He had eight Bellini and Donizetti operas in his repertoire when he went to see Caruso at Caruso's request in 1921, when the latter was ill. Gigli was not influenced by Caruso, the person, as this meeting was shortly before his death in 1921,¹⁷⁶ but he was undoubtedly influenced by

¹⁷⁰ Beniamino Gigli. *Opera Arias*. CD. EMI: 1988. CDH 761051 2. Recorded in 1933 on 78rpm with orchestra digitally re-mastered and transferred to CD. 1988. Refer to audio CD, track 11.

¹⁷¹ Michael Scott. *The Great Caruso*. London: Hamilton, 1988. pp. 58-59.

¹⁷² Beniamino Gigli. *Memoirs of Beniamino Gigli*. Transl. Darina Silone. London: Cassell, 1957. p. 76.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 103.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 78.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 114.

¹⁷⁶ Beniamino Gigli. *op. cit.*, p. 78.

his recordings. After Caruso's death, Gigli took Caruso's place at the Metropolitan 1920-1932.¹⁷⁷

The first gramophone record that Gigli had ever heard was that of Caruso singing the aria '*Com'è gentil*' from *Don Pasquale*. As he had never heard Caruso sing in a live performance, he listened to it with 'humility and awe'.¹⁷⁸ Gigli noted the affinity of tone between his singing and the Caruso recordings¹⁷⁹. Though he was regarded by many as Caruso's legitimate heir, he thought it was too soon after Caruso's death to speak of being his heir, and wrote a letter to the *New York Times* expressing this view:

In any way to mention Caruso's successor is a sacrilege and a profanity to his memory.....

The efforts of every artist today aim to gather and conserve the artistic heritage received from the great singer [Caruso], and everyone must strive to do this, not with vain self-advertisement, but with tenacious study for the triumph of the pure and beautiful. He struggled for this, and we for the glory of our art must follow his example with dignity.¹⁸⁰

Gigli was destined to assume many of Caruso's roles at the Metropolitan, but wanted only to be himself, despite being called the '*Caruso Secondo*'. A. P. Hatton, writing in *Musical Opinion*, wrote about Gigli's debut at Covent Garden, in 1930. 'He is undoubtedly a fine tenor, even if one cannot subscribe to the notion that he is a 'second Caruso'.¹⁸¹ According to Gigli, he comes very near to the younger Caruso.¹⁸² He sang French operas in Italian and was the only tenor to approach the same popularity as Caruso. He sang *Lucia di Lammermoor* from 1920-1932 six times, *L'Elisir d'Amore* three times and *La Sonnambula* once.

As the result of the Depression, Gigli returned to La Scala in 1932 to continue his career in Europe to 1939. During this time he returned to Buenos Aires for a short season, singing only a very few of Bellini and Donizetti operas. Towards the end of World War Two, he returned to the stage in Italy in 1945, and also sang in England and Europe after the war until 1955.

¹⁷⁷ Beniamino Gigli. *op. cit.*, p. 78.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 95.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 95 These were the 1918 Gigli recordings, compared with 1910 Caruso recordings. See also p. 59 for the Gigli recordings, quoted from *New York*, Sunday 3 Aug 1921.

¹⁸⁰ Beniamino Gigli. 'Musica America', letter dated 29 November 1921, in *Memoirs of Beniamino Gigli. op. cit.* pp. 344-45.

¹⁸¹ John Steane. *Gigli and Melchior: a double centenary*. Quoted from JSTOR: *Musical Times*. Vol. 131. No 1765. p. 139.

¹⁸² Beniamino Gigli. *op. cit.*, p. 113.

Gigli was a lyric tenor with extraordinary technique and vocal understanding. His voice was big and very sweet, with pure tone (warm *mezza voce*). He was more of a verismo singer than a bel canto singer, because he sang roles that depicted real life situations rather than idealized roles. He could reach past c'' as he did in the aria 'Che gelida manina' (from *La Bohème* by Puccini) with perfect legato. In 'Una furtiva lagrima' he reaches easily to a'' natural in the cadenza, bar 45 (Ex. 4.30). He had the stamina to sing long vocal passages, and used mixed sound, resonant in chest and head.¹⁸³ He sang Bellini, (*La Sonnambula*, *Norma* and *Il Pirata*) and Donizetti (*L'Elisir d'Amore* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*), but he did not devote his repertoire exclusively to Bellini and Donizetti, the main exponents of bel canto opera at this time.¹⁸⁴

Gigli cared for his voice so well that his career extended over 41 years. Recording primarily for RCA Victor, formerly Victor Talking Machine Co., his many recordings show his understanding of bel canto style, as well as some of his bad habits, such as sliding portamento, posed falsettoni, exaggerated accents, reinforced falsetto and modified natural voice.¹⁸⁵ Gigli's recording of 'Una furtiva lagrima', made on a 78rpm disc in 1933 with orchestral accompaniment,¹⁸⁶ provides much insight into his bel canto style. The quality of the recorded sound is good for the period. This recording was transferred to CD in 1988.

Throughout his memoirs, Gigli showed he had a good understanding of Caruso, his roles taken and his style of singing. It is evident that he was duly impressed with Caruso and undoubtedly influenced by him in many ways, particularly through his recordings.

¹⁸³ Enrico Stinchelli. *The Greatest Stars of the Opera*. Rome: Gremes, 1992. p. 233 and p. 238.

¹⁸⁴ Desmond Shawe-Taylor and Alan Blyth, "Gigli, Beniamino" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Stanley Sadie, ed. London: MacMillan, 2001. Vol. 9. p. 847.

¹⁸⁵ Enrico Stinchelli. *op. cit.* p. 11.

¹⁸⁶ Beniamino Gigli. *Opera Arias*. Performed 1933. EMI. Digitally re-mastered. CD. London: EMI, 1988. CDH 761051 2.

4.4.2. Performance and dramatic events

Gigli had a dramatic style which in many ways emulated Caruso, but in his early recordings his voice lacked passionate tone and depth of feeling. His notable strength was the large powerful tenor voice which handled technical aspects with extraordinary ease. His voice commanded attention but he was not as particular or impeccable in finesse. His singing was mellifluous and golden, but lachrymose dramatically.

The romanza, 'Una furtiva lagrima', occurs at the point in the opera near the end of the story, when Nemorino, overhearing Adina's weeping confession of her love for him, expresses his feelings. He, like many other tenors, sings this aria as an expression of lament, rather than the joyous feeling of a loving heart that Donizetti intended by the aria. Many performers have interpreted this aria as a sad song about tears rather than joy. Nemorino has seen Adina return his love and it is more likely a tear of joy. Some tenors, especially Gigli, tend to exaggerate the sadness imbued in the opening key of B flat minor. If Nemorino has won the hand of Adina, then one would expect a song of happiness, with many emotional moments; even happiness can bring tears to the eye.

Gigli generally creates drama with every phrase he sings. However, the dramatic tension is not as well balanced between verses in this recording. In stanza one his style is rather undramatic and subdued, and he performs Donizetti's ornamentations perfunctorily until bar 22 (Ex. 4.21) In stanza two he shows more vocal understanding of Donizetti's style and drama, using more bel canto techniques incorporating the ornamentation well into the melodic line.

One of Gigli's weaknesses is his sliding and crooning approach to mezza voce passages. He slides up into initial notes from placing voiced consonants consistently below the pitch of the vowel. His smooth fluency, sweetness and natural and vital spontaneity are often too sentimental. He was a popular singer but tried to be dramatic with excessive use of portamento, which is undesirable. While Caruso also uses portamento, Gigli often aspirates when using portamento, that is, when gliding from one note to the next, he is rough or noisy.

Aspiration, audible or rough breathing, is a fault in singing. Gigli aspirates often, and seems to gulp in the air noisily as he takes a breath. Despite the aspirates, Gigli can hold on for long phrases as in bar 12 (Ex. 4.16). Another aspect which Gigli uses to control the piano dynamic in soft passages is voce

finta to which he resorts when he strives for the high notes, bringing about a musical and emotional effect of great beauty.

The following examples serve to illustrate some of Gigli's techniques and habits. In bar 12, Gigli aspirates, e" flat down to d" flat (*suo*), as he uses portamento to slide down and this noisy mannerism disrupts the legato.

Ex. 4.16 Bar 12 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's version

portamento

negl' oc - chi suo - i spun - tò:

He makes a gasped sound also in bar 32 (Ex. 4.17) before the f', first beat in bar 33, which causes him to delay the pianissimo which occurs midway through bar 33. This is rather late and prevents full use of smorzando.

Ex. 4.17 Bars 32-34 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's version

pp smorz. starts pianissimo here

per po - co a' suo - i sos - pir!...

Example 4.18 shows the end of the cadenza as scored by Donizetti.

Ex. 4.18 Bars 45-46 Ricordi Vocal score 'Una furtiva lagrima'

chie-do non chie - - - - - do.

Compare bars 45-46 (Ex. 4.18, original version) with Gigli's version following (Ex. 4. 19 and Ex. 4.30). In the penultimate bar 45, Gigli uses portamento or glissando from his last note f' down to b' flat in bar 46, and holds this last note two full beats (a dotted minim), rather than the written quaver, with dramatic control and release of tension. This is an effective ending and climactic point.

Ex. 4.19 Ricordi Vocal Score Bars 45-46 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's version last two notes

messa di voce

port.

chie - - - do.

Gigli uses portamento effectively on the rising semiquavers of second beat of bar 40 (Ex. 4.20) as an introduction to the cadenza proper, bars 42-46 (Ex. 4.30).

Ex. 4.20 Bars 39-42 Ricordi Vocal score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's version

portamento

no pause

messa di voce

Cie - lo, si può - mo - rir; di più non chie - do, non chie - do ah!

In bar 41 (Ex. 4.20), he pushes deep and loudly into the first note g", slides down to b" flat, takes a quick breath, and then separates all four remaining notes as if staccato, not as marked. This phrase lacks finesse in that it is disjointed and non legato. Unlike Caruso, he does not pause on d" in the middle of the second beat, bar 41. At such an important point in the aria, lack of a pause on d" renders this phrase ineffective, as it is in need of more emotion.

Gigli appears to have great stamina and appears to sing with ease. Although he is ostentatious and uses exaggerated accents, he sings with a pure and simple tone. Gigli's voice is one which is sometimes lacking in colour, and at times seems without fire and passion. Other faults are the loud notes and appoggiaturas which he seems to articulate poorly. However, when his tonal dynamics are considered, he ranges from pianissimo to forte and uses messa di voce well in long notes and pauses. Much of the time, he remains on an uninteresting tone level of mezzo forte.

It is interesting to compare Caruso and Gigli at this point. For example, Caruso varies each of the four similar bars, bars 12-13, 15-17, 18-19 and 20-25, with subtle tonal nuance as well as adding ornaments of his own. On the other hand, Gigli keeps much the same tone level and variety through the phrase and around the ornaments, only adding one ornament of his own, a mordent in bar 16 (Ex. 4.25). His best variety of dynamics is shown in bars 20-25 (Ex. 4.21). Messa di voce is used in bar 21 on f' to the

climax bar 23. The following bars 23-25 are most expressive, with tender clear notes and ornamentation at the end of the phrase.

Ex. 4.21 Bars 20-25 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's version

che più cer-can-do io vo? M'a - ma, si m'a - ma, - lo ve - do lo ve - do.

Despite these weaknesses, particularly inconsistent tone production, his strengths in dramatic style, messa di voce and extraordinary technique in embellishing passages, provide much of interest to the student of bel canto. Gigli performs this aria in clear bel canto style and much can be learnt from this recording.

4.4.3. Realisation of Donizetti's style

Gigli has a lyric tenor voice which applies bel canto techniques to Donizetti's aria in keeping with traditional bel canto style. He exhibits an interesting mix of strengths and weaknesses. The scored ornamentations are moulded into Gigli's melodic line well and with some variance from the score. He alters the scored slurs to suit his breathing. In this way he enables the text of the words to better fit with the melody. For example, the vocal score has a slur over the first three notes (*cielo, si*). However, Gigli takes a breath after '-lo' on f', bar 39 (*si*), carrying the phrase through to its end (*mo-rir*) (Ex. 4.22).

Ex. 4.22 Bars. 39-40 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's version

Cie - lo si può - mo - rir;

This is a problem with the score and not the text underlay, but rather with the phrase marks. Gigli alters the articulation in places, omitting the staccato marks on the score, bar 12 (Ex.4.23). He varies the slurs, carrying the slur over whole phrases. Similarly to bar 39, Gigli in bar 23 (Ex.4.21) carries his breath through until the next bar 24, taking a breath after '-do', a' flat.

Ex. 4.23. Bars 12-13. Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's version

negl' oc - chi suo - i spun - to:

Likewise, Gigli does not break the phrase on both c's in bar 12 and by omitting the staccato makes one phrase (Ex.4.16). Similarly he slurs over the whole phrase in one breath as shown in bars 32-34 (Ex. 4.24)

Ex. 4.24 Bars 32-34 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's version

per po - co a' suo - i so - spir!... i

In this recording Gigli's diction is clear and most words are sung as written in the score. A few words are not broken into syllables: for example, 'La-grima' bar 11 and 'gio-vani' bar 15. A few words had unclear diction '-miel' bar 31 e" natural, 'chie-' bar 41 g" (*chie-do*). Chi-e-do is broken into three syllables in the cadenza. However, adherence to the stress of the word and its meaning has taken precedence over the musical intent of the score. By breaking the word into syllables, the rhythm and stress of the word is created correctly. This is in the florid lines of the cadenza as vocalise. (*chi-*) 'e' (-do). An Italian speaking singer would know how to divide the Italian words into syllables, whereas a non-Italian speaking singer might not know where to place the notes, and need to be coached. Gigli makes slight adjustments of tempo to move the music ahead. Being a native speaker of Italian, Gigli provides a good example of musicianship and intonation, using proper breathing to control a bel canto sound.

Gigli's elaborate addition of dominant and half diminished ninth arpeggios embellish the end of the cadenza, similarly to that of Caruso and using the omitted last line of the text. All singers appear to follow the same melodic vagary, but with individual annotations of rhythm, dynamics, pauses, portamento, and added appoggiaturas.

The analysis so far has examined the composer's intentions in 'Una furtiva lagrima', with the view to considering the way Gigli has fulfilled the bel canto style intended and to highlight the strengths that he has utilised in so doing. Despite some bad habits, not characteristic of bel canto, Gigli's performance has been indicative of depth of feeling and expressiveness. Gigli's modest expressiveness is characteristic of bel canto style and clearly evident in this recording.

4.4.4. Elements of bel canto

It is important to note that in stanza one, Gigli adopts the bel canto techniques indicated by Donizetti in the score. He has smooth legato and clear ornamentation, although he does little improvisation in this aspect beyond what Donizetti scored. He excels in messa di voce, a pertinent aspect of bel canto technique, taking a controlled breath before the first long note, bar 20-21 (Ex. 4.26), b' flat to f' which he emphasises and pushes into a climax point here and in other similar instances.

Both Caruso and Gigli show additional ornamentation. Gigli adds a mordent on d'' flat, bar 16 (Ex. 4.25).

Ex. 4.25 Bars 15-17 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's version

gio - van - i in - vi - di - ar - sem - brò:

In example 4.26, bars 20-22, Gigli does not take advantage of the opportunity to add a turn or mordent in bar 20 on the strong beat note d'' flat as Pavarotti does (Ex. 4.32). He would have created more emotion if he had done so and taken the phrase with some rubato. However, he uses messa di voce with great expressiveness on f', bar 21, the climax of this phrase.

Ex. 4.26 Bars 20-22 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's additions

che più cer - can - do io vo? M'a - ma si,

Similarly, at this point, he moves on to bars 24-25 (Ex. 4.27), and adds a mordent in bar 24 on e'' flat. Again he uses messa di voce on an accented f', beat 2 in bar 24 (Ex. 4.27) and also produces a rallentando on the mordent which follows with a steep, expressive diminuendo on e'' flat - d'' to the end of the phrase (Ex. 4.27) These examples show Gigli's adherence to solid technical preparation, good intonation, and use of rubato.

Ex. 4.27 Bars 24-25 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's additions

messa di voce
↓
rall.

ve - do, lo ve - do.

In stanza two his breathing is not as subtle. He sustains the long notes well in the four similar phrases (bars 29-30, 32-34, 34-36 and 36-38) and ends this part of the verse in B flat major with messa di voce and a rallentando. For example, from bar 36 to bar 39, Gigli takes this whole phrase in one breath until after the f', bar 39 (Ex. 4.28).

Ex. 4.28 Bars 36-40 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' showing Gigli's breathing points.

messa di voce
mf — *cresc.* — **rall.**

con - fon-de-re i miei co'suoi so- spir! Cie-lo, si può mo - rir;

By far the most elaborate and extensive embellishments are found in the cadenza. Gigli's effects and variations seem studied rather than spontaneous. Like Caruso and Pavarotti, Gigli's embellishments seem to follow the traditional variation added by other tenors, such as discussed in example 4.15, section 4.3.4. A comparison of Donizetti's original cadenza (Ex. 4.29) with that of Gigli (Ex. 4.30) shows how Gigli excelled at innovative, but studied and rehearsed, elaboration.

Ex. 4.29 Bars 42-46 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' showing lead in to cadenza, and the cadenza proper

do, ah! cie - lo, si può, si può - mo - rir; di più non -
 chie - do, non chie - do.

Example 4.30 shows Gigli's cadenza which can be compared with the scored version above. (Ex.4.29).

Ex. 4.30 Bars 42-46 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Gigli's cadenza

ah! cie - lo, si può si può - mo - rir; di più non -
 chie - do non chie - do, si può mo - rir; si può mo - rir; d'a - mor.

In the cadenza, Gigli creates far more tension by improvising in the penultimate bar. The first notes are somewhat varied, but the florid lines are the same as scored. Gigli does not wait as long on the top note g" as Caruso did, preferring to sing and pause on a" before proceeding down to a'. Gigli's improvisation is comparable with that of Caruso but is not identical (Ex. 4.15). From this point, Gigli identifies with similar arpeggios to Caruso - dominant major 9th and diminished' minor 9th, pausing similarly on each high note, but keeps the rhythm even. Here, each of his arpeggio notes are more separately articulated than those of Caruso, and this has the effect of clarifying the melody line. Gigli also uses messa di voce and rallentando, with glissando from f' down to b' flat, incorporating some portamento as he approaches the final b' flat in bar 46. The cadenza shows Gigli's strengths well. He is able to sing without limits and use excellent breath control.

In brief, Gigli has displayed many bel canto techniques which are worthy of imitation. At times his expression and chiaroscuro seem carefully rehearsed but at other times he is flexible and spontaneous in his expressiveness. He is a good example of virtuosity. Whereas other tenors may have better legato, Gigli uses portamento appropriately many times. Gigli reveals sparks of imagination and fine elements of melodic variation, and these occur chiefly in the cadenza.

4.4.5. Comparison of performances

Gigli uses many fine bel canto techniques, such as sustaining power and breath control which allows him to improvise over long phrases. He uses messa di voce well. His voice lies best in the middle register and he has uncommon virtues such as steadiness and reserves of strengths. However, these skills do not make him an outstanding bel canto performer. His numerous faults, easily identified as aspiration, gasping, sliding and crooning, detract from the quality of his performance and could lead a young singer to believe that these were also part of the bel canto tradition. In addition, the notion that he was the second Caruso cannot be subscribed to. Certainly he was similar in style in many ways but he was an individual. Although he adopted many of Caruso's roles, he approached them individually in his own style.

Gigli's recording was made in that difficult period of world history from 1920 to 1950. It was a period of austerity, after World War I, followed by the Depression and World War II. Operatic performances were curtailed as a result of lack of money and theatres damaged in the war. Nevertheless, much can be learnt about the state of bel canto operatic art at that time. Undoubtedly Caruso's recordings have influenced Gigli's style, and consequently, from Gigli's recordings, much can be discovered which supports the aim of this study. Despite his shortcomings, Gigli has in turn been responsible for also handing down to future generations of singers the essence of bel canto through his many recordings.

4.5 LUCIANO PAVAROTTI (Recorded 1970)

4.5.1. Introduction

Luciano Pavarotti, aptly named ‘the KING of the high ‘Cs’, displays a special feeling for *L’Elisir d’Amore* as he was well suited to its vocal and dramatic demands. ‘I love Donizetti’s *L’Elisir d’Amoré*. I think it is a masterpiece’, he said.¹⁸⁷ He was one of the most well known and outstanding tenors of the twentieth century, thanks mainly to the popularity of the ‘The Three Tenors’, with José Carreras and Plácido Domingo. Pavarotti’s voice and bright, incisive style were well suited to Donizetti’s operas. As he himself said, ‘My voice likes Donizetti.’¹⁸⁸ His style was marked with flawless technique, unparalleled intonation and elegant phrasing. His voice had rich timbre, resonance and exemplary finesse. His sensuous, serious, yet vibrant performance of the aria ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ will be evaluated in this case study.

Luciano Pavarotti was born in 1935 in Modena, Italy, and died in Modena, Italy, in September 2007. In his autobiography, Pavarotti once said his father had a great influence on him, and ‘suffocated me with tenors’.¹⁸⁹ He heard Gigli sing at Modena when he was a young teenager. Frequently, Pavarotti’s father brought home many recordings of great tenors, including Giovanni Martinelli, Tito Schipa, Enrico Caruso and Beniamino Gigli.¹⁹⁰ These were important to him and influenced him greatly in his early operatic training.¹⁹¹ He learnt the basic techniques of bel canto opera at an early age, and studied with Arrigo Pola, a teacher and professional tenor in Modena from 1954-1956. His second teacher was Ettore Campogalliani, and his mother also encouraged his ambition to be a professional singer.

Pavarotti made his Italian debut on 29 April 1961 in Reggio, Emilia, Italy, singing the role of Rodolpho in *La Bohème* (Puccini), followed by success in Miami, USA, singing the tenor role in *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Donizetti), in 1965 with Dame Joan Sutherland. At this time, Pavarotti was an understudy travelling with Sutherland, and when the tenor took ill, he took over his role. His partnership with Sutherland was to become historic. From 1966-1970 he added many bel canto operas to his repertoire, culminating in *L’Elisir d’Amore*(Donizetti). His career developed further after an outstanding performance

¹⁸⁷ Luciano Pavarotti. *My own Story, with William Wright*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1981. p. 139.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.139.

¹⁸⁹ Antony Pealtie. ‘*Unmasked at the Ball*’. London: BBC Music Magazine, July 1995. Vol. 3. No. 11. p. 31.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Jon Tolansky. “Luciano Pavarotti” in *Limelight Magazine*. Sydney: ABC, November 2007. p. 21.

as Tonio in *La Fille du Régiment* (Donizetti) at the New York Metropolitan Opera House in 1972, when he received great acclaim with nine high c"'s in the aria 'Ah mes amis, quel jour de fête'.

Pavarotti performed the title role of Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore* in 1970 with Sutherland at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in London. Richard Bonyngue coached both Sutherland and Pavarotti for their recordings of bel canto, and this recording stands as one of his best.¹⁹² This case study aims to investigate aurally the way Pavarotti has used bel canto techniques in the 1970 recording of 'Una furtiva lagrima', and discusses how Pavarotti has preserved the tradition of bel canto opera.

4.5.2. Performance and dramatic events

Beginning in the key of B flat minor, 'Una furtiva lagrima' brings a total change of mood to the opera. Pavarotti was able to imbue his singing with passion and dramatic tension in a subtle way. Pavarotti displays feeling for the most delicate and dramatic of pianissimos, and uses messa di voce in such a way that dramatic tension is created and released. An example of this technique is found in bar 15 (Ex. 4.31)

The following examples are intended to complement discussion about Pavarotti's dramatic style.

Ex. 4.31, Bars 15-17 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Pavarotti's version (Pavarotti follows the slurring of the Schirmer edition)

messa di voce
mf ————— *pp*
 in vi - di ar - sem - brò:

Bar 15 begins mezzo forte on f", the upbeat leading to bar 16, followed by a diminuendo to the first beat of bar 16, creating a dramatic feeling on a passionate e" flat. The turn on d" flat (Ex.4.31), given more notes on its syllable, provides dramatic emphasis to the word 'invidiar'—'jealousy or envy'. Even on the shortest or longest notes Pavarotti can use messa di voce equally well. In bar 20, (Ex. 4.32), he takes a

¹⁹² *L'Elisir d'Amore* Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London. DECCA, conductor Richard Bonyngue, with the English Chamber Orchestra and Ambrosian Opera Chorus, 1970, original set of 3 LPs. Released on CD. Pavarotti. *The Opera Collection*. NSW: Castle Communications Australasia, 1992. MBSCD 307. Refer to audio CD, track 12.

breath before b' flat' which allows him to hold the long note f' with greatly increased tone in to the next bar.

Ex. 4.32 Bars 20-22 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Pavarotti's version

che più cer - can - do io vo? - - M'a - ma, si

Beginning mezzo forte, his sound increases to forte with added messa di voce for an extended pause on f', bar 21. This has the effect of increasing the tension and producing a dramatic climax near the end of verse one. The tension is released as he moves on to bar 22 (Ex. 4.32) with 'M'ama' which is sung passionately, decreasing the sound to piano, the meaning of the words being, (she) 'loves me'.

Clearly the whole aria is suffused with many examples of carefully executed and refined messa di voce which show a wide tonal range from fortissimo to pianissimo. This is Pavarotti's greatest strength. In bars 24-25 (Ex. 4.33.), Pavarotti uses messa di voce with rallentando, and this is conceivably his best example. This is a difficult combination of techniques but Pavarotti excels at this artistry.

Ex. 4.33 Bars 22-25 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Pavarotti's version

si, m'a - ma, - lo ve - do lo ve - do.

In bar 24, the messa di voce begins from the f' held forte on a long pause. A diminuendo on the last e'' flat of bar 24 is refined with added finesse. Pavarotti introduces a mordent in bar 24 on the last quaver before the end of verse one (bar 25, Ex. 4.33). This was not written by Donizetti and appears to be a bel canto singing tradition perpetuated by tenors in 'Una furtiva lagrima'.

Pavarotti's messa di voce is most impressive and expressive. The quality of his sound is quite different from other tenors, with far superior and carefully articulated dynamics. Carefully executed and refined, Pavarotti shows wide ranges, fortissimo to piano, even very narrow in dynamic range, pianissimo (pp) to very pianissimo (ppp). In Bar 41 (Ex. 4.34), both Caruso and Gigli pause on the quaver d" and use messa di voce.

Ex. 4.34 Bars 41-42 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Caruso's and Gigli's version.

messa di voce

chie - do, non chie - - do, ah!

Pavarotti does not pause at this point nor use messa di voce, but has an audible change in tone on this note. At other times he can achieve a piano to forte range in a greater number of beats, as in bar 21 (Ex.4.32). This gradation has the effect of prolonging the messa di voce and is totally controlled, despite the additional length of the note and the extra amount of air needed. Likewise in verse two, beginning mezzo forte on the upbeat b' flat, bar 37, Pavarotti uses crescendo in bar 38, 'so-spir' (Ex. 4.35).

Ex. 4.35 Bars 36-39 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Pavarotti's version

mezza voce

mf — *cresc.*

con - fon - de-re i miei co'suoi so- spir! Cie-lo, si può_ mo - rir;

Messa di voce is used to emphasise the imminent, dramatic and unexpected key change at the most emotional point. Recognising that the first verse ends on its relative key of D flat major, the second verse returns to the tonic key B flat minor, and continues thus to bar 38 where a dramatic key change occurs to B flat major, the tonic major, in bar 39 (Ex. 4.35).

Pavarotti's cadenza, bars 45-46 (Ex. 4.46), is very emotional and passionate. He takes his time and uses messa di voce with finely tuned and controlled dynamics. The cadenza has great importance as it allows Pavarotti to exhibit the fullness of his sound and technical ability. The last two notes of the cadenza create the final drama. The tension here is acute and surely the audience or listener is left wondering how long Pavarotti will hold this penultimate note f", and not run out of breath before it

resolves on to b' flat. A remarkable feature of his performance is his ability to produce a surprise such as this which is powerful and creates dramatic tension.

Pavarotti has remarkable ability to add rubato or rallentando at the same time as he performs messa di voce. This technique involves carefully monitoring his outflow of breath, gauging exactly the right point at which to begin the rallentando and to allow him to sustain messa di voce, particularly from pianissimo to pianissimo (ppp), a very difficult technique indeed. Breathing therefore constitutes a major part of his strengths. His ability to use such controlled messa di voce contributes to the dramatic tension.

The bel canto style of singing must be florid, ornamented and expressive. The performance would not be a good example of the genre without good breath control and messa di voce. Pavarotti highlights this very important feature of bel canto. His mellifluous voice, which has absolute breathing control, allows him to produce impeccable phrasing. He finishes phrase endings well, and uses techniques to produce controlled messa di voce in florid passages. Pavarotti's strengths are numerous but this is his greatest strength. This adds drama to his phrases which are always well balanced with bel canto aspects. In 1965, Bonyngé claimed Pavarotti's only weakness was his lack of experience,¹⁹³ but this comment was no longer relevant by 1970 through Bonyngé's coaching.

In this aria there are few weaknesses. Diction and articulation are generally clear, with only an occasional lack of clarity. The words in bar 37, (Ex.4.35), are not articulated well – '*con-fon-dere i miei co'suoi so-spir*'. On the long top high f', '*so-spir*' is not clear (sighs or longing). Another example of this aspect is found in bars 29-30, where the word '*sen-tir*' is not clear (Ex. 4.36).

Ex. 4.36 Bars 29-30 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima'



This lack of clarity is disappointing for an auditor, as the sense and flow of the sentence is lost. The words need to be coherent in both bars 29-30 and bar 37, as volume and some tone are reduced at such tender and important moments in the aria.

¹⁹³ Luciano Pavarotti. *op. cit.*, p. 97. Bonyngé made this comment about Pavarotti's Miami, USA, debut in 1965 when he took over the leading role in *Lucia di Lammermoor* at short notice.

In other sections of the aria, Pavarotti's diction is generally good. In the opening bar 10, (as in Ex. 4.3a), 'Una furtiva lagrima', the diction gives clear warmth to the focus text of this aria. 'Spunto', (to well up of tears), bar 12, (Ex. 4.39), is well articulated, while bar 23 (Ex. 4.33), 'Mama' (she loves me), is full of tender passion and desire. Similarly 'lo ve-do' has a mordent and emphasis (I see it, from 'vedere', to see) bars 24-25, (Ex. 4.33). These are intrinsically passionate moments in the aria and serve as a model of bel canto style.

Overall, Pavarotti displays flawless bel canto technique, elegant phrasing and attention to details, with brilliant voice projection and an expressive variety of tone colours. Indeed, Pavarotti has many passionate qualities which are remarkable, distinctive and immediately recognizable.

4.5.3. Realisation of Donizetti's style

This 1970 recording with Dame Joan Sutherland, soprano, and Richard Bonyngue, conductor, is now history, and is recognized as Pavarotti's best recording of *L'Elisir d'Amore*.¹⁹⁴ Pavarotti has realised the composer's style clearly, coached by Bonyngue who played a vital role in the development of Pavarotti's command of bel canto. Bonyngue is a master of bel canto style, with an extensive library of bel canto manuscripts and scores, and Pavarotti's partnership with Sutherland was invaluable.

Pavarotti learnt his breathing techniques from many people and teachers, but it was Sutherland who coached him and taught him by her own example.¹⁹⁵ Pavarotti was never satisfied with himself and worked hard to improve his singing, learning much from Sutherland's techniques, which he admired. As Sutherland said, 'Whatever he learned from me, he learned from observation'.¹⁹⁶ He observed from her how she supported her voice, how to use his diaphragm more effectively, how she breathed and made her voice so flexible, and he worked at improving his techniques using these observations. Pavarotti follows Donizetti's score fairly closely, but at the same time he adds some of the conventional embellishments as others before him have done. Other forms of embellishments are rallentando, rubato and articulation such as staccato and slurring.

¹⁹⁴ See Footnote 192.

¹⁹⁵ Luciano Pavarotti. *op. cit.*, p. 114.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 100 and pp. 113-114. These pages describe how Pavarotti worked at improving his techniques.

A further group of examples illustrate and discuss Donizetti's bel canto variations of the melodic line. A comparison of bar 39 with bar 43 (Ex. 4.37) illustrates such variations and articulation. Bar 39 shows slurred groups and staccato articulation over six quavers and bar 43 shows a variation at the end as follows.

Ex. 4.37 Bars 39 and 43 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima'

Bars 39 - 40.

Bars 42 - 44.

Bar 43 has the first three notes identical to bar 39 but articulated differently. The last three quavers in 39 are converted into six semiquavers in bar 43, again with different articulation and a notational variation at the end to accommodate the additional words '*si può*'. Pavarotti adds further variations. He articulates the six quavers individually in bar 39, not slurring them as written in the score. Pavarotti also adds a distinct *rallentando*, albeit *poco rallentando*, in bar 43. However, Pavarotti missed the opportunity to add a mordent on beat 2 f', bar 39 (Ex.4.37). This would have increased the expressiveness of the lead up to the cadenza.

Pavarotti initiates his own slurring and articulation, preferring not to segment short phrases into two or more parts, but takes the shorter phrases in one breath, following the words and punctuation marks. His breath is barely discernible, even when he takes a breath at suitable punctuation marks. Bars 16-17 are echoed in part by bars 18-19 (Ex. 4.38), but the first three quavers of bar 18 are altered by Donizetti, and the grace notes before c'' added. In bar 18, '*cer-can-do*' has two appoggiaturas (quasi mordent) on '*-can-*'; as is written, The meaning of '*cercando*' should be noted (yearning or desiring), and the ornaments are placed on the second strong beat of the bar on the longer phrase to enhance the meaning. Pavarotti retains the slurring in bar 16, adds a turn on d'' flat, but omits the staccato (as shown in the Ricordi score). This is the way it is written in the Schirmer score (Ex. 4.31). Pavarotti sings bar 18 in one breath omitting the slurs as shown in the Ricordi score (Ex. 4.38).

Ex. 4.38 Bars 16-19. Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Slurring in bar 16 and bar 18

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line in 6/8 time, key of B-flat major. It consists of four measures. The first measure contains the lyrics 'vi - di ar - sem - brò:'. The second measure contains 'che più cer - can - do?'. The third measure contains 'io vo?'. The fourth measure is empty. There are slurs over the notes in the first and third measures. A dynamic marking 'p' is placed above the first note of the third measure.

Bars 12-13 (Ex. 4.39) are sung as written, but Pavarotti uses two crescendos on the strong beats g" flat and e" flat, 'negli' and 'suoi' (her) respectively, which is more effective than only the slurring in the score. In some instances, Pavarotti controls the increase in tone in crescendo in a barely discernible way, yet the critical ear can still hear the change of dynamics, and this example is a clear definition of this skill.

Ex. 4.39 Bars 12-13 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Pavarotti's version

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line in 6/8 time, key of B-flat major. It consists of four measures. The first measure contains the lyrics 'negl' - oc - chi'. The second measure contains 'suo - i'. The third measure contains 'spun - tò:'. The fourth measure is empty. There are slurs over the notes in the first and second measures. Two arrows point to the notes in the second and third measures with the text 'staccato omitted' above them.

'Pal-pi-ti', (throbbing), bar 35, is onomatopoeic, as its sound gives a clear indication of the meaning 'throbbing' or 'pulsating', the first 'palpiti' being sung on repeated notes, (Ex. 4.40). Pavarotti takes this phrase in one breath, relating the meaning of the words well to the music, which he interprets with expressive emphasis.

Ex. 4.40 Bars 34-36 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima'

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line in 6/8 time, key of B-flat major. It consists of three measures. The first measure contains the lyrics 'spir!...'. The second measure contains 'i pal - pi - ti'. The third measure contains 'i pal - pi - ti sen - tir!...'. The notes for 'pal - pi - ti' in both the second and third measures are repeated notes.

It is true to say that Pavarotti has realised Donizetti's style by following Donizetti's score fairly closely. In addition, at the same time, he adds some of the conventional embellishments as other tenors before him have done. He adds rising arpeggios to the cadenza, bar 45 (Ex. 4.46), but also adds his own dynamics, pauses, unique phrasing and slurring. However, the writer believes Pavarotti could have added more embellishments to realise the bel canto style.

4.5.4. Elements of bel canto

There are many identifiable bel canto aspects. Pavarotti varies each one with subtle changes, even in similar bars in this aria. Pavarotti, making some use of the written score, individualises each phrase by

adding his own variations, such as mordents, turns, phrasing and articulation. Pavarotti has used ornaments for expressive embellishment, some of which are written out and others implied in the score.

Melodic variation is an important feature of bel canto style. Comparatively speaking, the followphrases from each verse may seem very similar (Exs. 4.39, 4.31, 4.38 and 4.32). The four phrases, bars 12-13, bars 15-17, bars 18-19 and bars 20-22, compared with bars 29-30, bars 32-34, bars 34-36 and bars 36-39 appear similar. This is not the case, because sometimes Pavarotti slurs as indicated in the score, such as in bars 12 (Ex. 4.39), and 20 (Ex. 4.32) but alters the slurring in other bars. Donizetti assists in variations from the score include altered note values (bars 33, 35 and 37) and articulation such as staccato omitted (bars 16, 39). Two examples will illustrate these variations, with the long slur indicating all the notes taken in one breath. The first is (Ex.4.41), a comparison of bars 15-17 and 32-34.

Ex. 4.41 Bars 15-17 and 32-34 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Pavarotti's versions

in - vi - di - ar - sem - brò:

a. Bars 15-17

per po - co a' suo - i so - spir!... i

b. Bars 32-34.

Pavarotti adds a turn on d'' flat, bar 16 (Ex.4.41a), compared with Gigli who added a mordent on d'' flat and Caruso who added a turn on c''. Pavarotti follows the score but omits the staccato shown on the Ricordi score. In bars 32-34, (Ex.4.41b), Donizetti alters the melody of the phrase slightly retaining the harmonic structure, while Pavarotti further alters the phrase by articulating each note separately, and also changing the value of the notes, the dotted quaver and semiquaver becoming two quavers. A second example is a comparison of bars 20-22 (Ex.4.42) and bars 36-39 (Ex. 4.43)

Ex. 4.42 Bars 20-22 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Pavarotti's version

che più cer - can - dó io vo? M'a - ma, si -

In Bar 20, (Ex.4.42), a passage of six even quavers, Pavarotti adds a mordent on d" flat, on 'can-' also for emphasis, slurring the first five quaver notes and taking a breath before the sixth. In bar 21 (Ex. 4.42), *f*' is piano followed by crescendo in *messa di voce*. In bar 22, *f*' is forte with crescendo, emphasised by repeating the *f*' from bar 21 instead of tying it. Both scores erroneously show the tie. Bar 21 is similar to bar 38 (Ex. 4.43) but there is no tied note, and bar 22 (Ex. 4.42) which follows bar 21 is different from bar 39. These are important embellishments and add finesse to the bel canto style.

In example 4.43, Donizetti assists with the variations by changing the melody line somewhat but retaining the bass harmonic structure. In bar 37, Pavarotti changes Donizetti's note values further to a dotted rhythm (Ex.4.43). Bar 37 is quite different from bar 20 and heightens the tender emotion expressed at this point. It is a prelude to the dramatic key change to come in bar 39.

Ex. 4.43 Bars 36-39 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Pavarotti's version

con - fon - de - re i miei co'suoi so - spir; Cie - lo, si può - mo -

He does not take a breath after 'confondere' and appears to sustain the breath to bar 39. Thus Pavarotti embellishes the bars differently to enhance the lyrics.

Grace notes provide dissonance, often occurring with an appoggiatura or a trill. There are many examples of dissonance, many occurring with an appoggiatura; these are important and central to the characteristics of bel canto. An example is found in bar 20, (Ex.4.42). The chord is F major, the dominant of B flat minor. On the second quaver the g" flat is over an f major chord providing dissonance. In the second beat the chord changes to B flat minor second inversion, and the c" in the melody provides dissonance against this tonality.

Turns and mordents also create dissonance. In bar 16, (Ex.4.31), the chord on e natural in the bass is a diminished 7th with the d'' flat in the melody, and it provides dissonance with the e'' flat in the turn.

E'' flat which is a diminished 8th above e'' natural resolves after the ornament falling to d flat, a diminished 7th, and then to c'', making a II⁷b chord before the dominant F chord in bar 17 (Ex.4.41a.), as an imperfect cadence. Dissonant notes, with a vertical reading of the interval and compared with the harmony to which it resolves, provide expressiveness to the melody, and if prolonged, the sense of expression is heightened.

In bar 24, (See Ex.4.33), f' dissonant over g flat in the bass leads to the mordent over e flat in the melody, a dominant seventh of D flat major, and resolves onto the new key D flat major in bar 25, (Ex.4.33), at the end of verse one. The preceding f' is prolonged with a pause, and this increases the expressiveness of this phrase. Pavarotti excels at imbuing passion into dissonant phrases.

Another example of dissonance is illustrated in bars 42-44 (Ex. 4.44)

Ex. 4.44 Bars 42-44 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' showing harmonic structure.

The image shows a musical score for three measures (bars 42-44) in 6/8 time. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The piano part includes harmonic structure labels: V7, I, V7, VI, and IV. The score shows a vocal line with a mordent over the note in bar 43, and a piano accompaniment with a dissonant interval in bar 43.

In bar 43, beat two (Ex.4.44), f' falls to e'' natural over the F chord, dominant seventh of B flat major, before resolving onto e'' flat, leading to the submediant chord in bar 44. Here dissonance has an expressive effect and gives quality to the resolution. Another instance of dissonance is in bar 15, (Ex. 4.45), the first beat, e'' natural, is over d flat major chord rising a minor second to f'.

Ex. 4.45 Bar 15 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima'

These are important dissonant embellishments and are an integral part of the bel canto style. Unlike many tenor arias in the Italian repertoire, the cadenza in 'Una furtiva lagrima' does not end with a dramatic high note which sends any audience into loud acclaim.

Ex. 4.46 Bars 42-46 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' showing Donizetti's cadenza.

Pavarotti takes Donizetti's suggested cadenza (Ex. 4.47) elaborates and expands it, following the performance convention according to which tenors would decorate the vocal line. Pavarotti rises initially to a" (Donizetti has g"), and thereafter sings as scored, rising again to a" for a long pause, vocalizing the florid lines with 'e' the last syllable of *'chi-e'* to the end of the sextuplet on *'do'*. He uses an incomplete descending dominant major 9th, similarly to Caruso and Gigli. He adds rising arpeggios to the penultimate bar 45 of the cadenza (Ex. 4.47), but also adds his own dynamics and pauses. Even these he varies somewhat from Caruso and Gigli in an individual way. There are two rising arpeggio runs. The first is mezzo forte, rising to g" natural at tempo, an ascending dominant major 9th, with the top note repeated. The second is mezzo piano and slower, a dominant minor 9th ending pianissimo, pausing with a finely executed diminuendo on g" flat, *'mor-ir'*, (to die). This emphasises both the meaning of the phrase on the last syllable of *'mor-ir'*, with a dramatic long note which fades away *messa di voce*.

Ex. 4.47 Bars 42-46 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Pavarotti's version

The musical score for Ex. 4.47 consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 6/8 time signature. It contains the lyrics: "ah! cie - lo, si può si può - mo - rir; di più non". The second staff continues with: "chie-do non chie - - - do si può mo - rir; si può mo - rir; d'a -". The third staff shows a long note with the instruction "rall. - - - lunga" above it and "messa di voce" above a slur, leading to a final note marked "ppp" and "mor.". Dynamic markings include *pp*, *mf*, *mp*, *rall.*, *pp*, and *cresc.*. Performance instructions include *portamento* and *messa di voce*.

The note f' (Ex. 4.47, bar 45), which announces penultimately the final cadence, is the climactic point. Pavarotti begins pianissimo, increasing tone with a huge crescendo, *messa di voce*, and holding the f' note on a long pause. His voice falls with *portamento* to conclude on b' flat. He holds this note fortissimo, applies *messa di voce* so that there is a diminuendo on this note, and holds it until it becomes pianissimo with a long pause on this final note (Bar 46, Ex.4.47). This realizes a reverse effect of extreme pianissimo. This technique uses only one breath, a technique known as *filare il suono*, and enables tone to be prolonged.

4.5.5. Comparison of performances

Pavarotti has a distinctive quality of voice and over the years he developed a bigger voice. The role of Nemorino was a key stage in Pavarotti's career, and he was able to overcome the chief difficulty in singing 'Una furtiva lagrima', which lies in eliciting the enormous potential and meaning from both the lyrics and the melody.

Pavarotti is able to show what a well-trained singer can do with beautiful music, despite the restrained and sad nature of this aria set amidst a comic opera. Up to this point in the opera, the music has been lively and light hearted, but this aria is serious. Pavarotti's technique is formidable and his vocal attack has warmth and musicality, while his top notes are perfectly pitched and well sustained.

Comparatively speaking, Pavarotti's messa di voce is impressive. It is exemplary and highlights a very important feature of bel canto style of singing; that is, florid, ornamented and expressive phrases. Pavarotti's command of bel canto by far excels that of Caruso and Gigli and was largely due to Bonynghe. In fact tributes on his recent death in 2007 attest to the calibre of his style.

Domingo said, 'I always admired the God-given glory of his voice ... that unmistakable special timbre from the bottom up to the very top of the tenor range',¹⁹⁷ while Carreras said he was 'one of the most important tenors of all times'.¹⁹⁸

Dame Joan Sutherland, his mentor in using breath support and flexibility, said of his remarkable voice, 'It was incredible to stand next to it and sing along with it. The quality of sound was quite different – you knew immediately Luciano was singing.'¹⁹⁹

Pavarotti was one of the greatest of all singers in the history of opera. His numerous recordings will ensure that bel canto style will be handed on to generations of singers in the twenty-first century. Pavarotti's virtuosity, perfection and control of all aspects of bel canto give an instant appeal to both the listener of a recording and to a live audience in a theatre. Pavarotti may be the most widely successful singer in the history of performing *L'Elisir d'Amoré*. Much can be learnt about bel canto from Pavarotti's recordings, and his recording legacy will show how Pavarotti sang at his best.

Zubin Mehta, a conductor who directed Pavarotti on many occasions said, 'The whole world will be listening to his voice on every radio and television station. And that will continue. That is his legacy'.²⁰⁰ Pavarotti's recordings will provide an enduring influence to future singers.

¹⁹⁷ BBC News. Radio 4. *Today* Programme. Thursday, 6 September. 2007.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Jon Tolansky. "Luciano Pavarotti". Cover story. *Limelight Magazine*. Sydney: ABC, November 2007. p. 27.

²⁰⁰ BBC News. *op cit.*

4.6 THOMAS EDMONDS (Recorded 1994)

4.6.1. Introduction

Thomas James Edmonds AM, an internationally renowned tenor, was born in Peterborough, South Australia. He completed his education at Adelaide University and Adelaide Teachers' College in 1955, graduating with B.A., Diploma of Secondary Education, Diploma of Teaching. In 1956 he began a teaching career in the Education Department of South Australia, and in 1960 he became a foundation teacher at Westminster College, Marion, South Australia, ascending to the position of deputy headmaster in 1965.

It was not until some years later that he changed his career for opera. He developed his singing voice assisted by his long time university and college friend, Peter Irwyn Tillett, who became his lifelong accompanist. No doubt his future experience and success were nurtured by the Teachers' College Music Society, in which they both performed principal roles in the college opera productions. In 1960 Edmonds began singing studies in Adelaide, under Arnold Matters at Elder Conservatorium, Adelaide University, and in 1970 continued his studies in England and Europe. Renowned for singing both classical opera and popular music, Edmonds won a popular TV show in Australia, 'Showcase Grand Finale', beginning in 1968, eight times in succession. Edmonds also excelled in aria, and won the Shell Aria Award and the 1969 Australian National Eisteddfod Operatic Aria Competition.

Edmonds was a principal tenor of the State Opera of South Australia and tenor soloist with the Australian Opera from 1976. Subsequently he has appeared in concerts and operatic productions in England, Ireland, Germany, USA, Norway and Sweden with critical acclaim. He has appeared at Covent Garden Opera House, the Edinburgh Festival and with the BBC. Amongst his repertoire are oratorios and operas such as Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*, Puccini's *Turandot* and *Tosca*, and Bizet's *Carmen* and *The Fair Maid of Perth*. He has sung Italian arias in concert; amongst his popular songs are those such as Danny Boy and theme songs from films. In recent years he has supported music, opera in particular, in South Australia, and has become a patron of Co-Opera, a South Australian opera company. He has adjudicated at the Adelaide Eisteddfod and National Young Performers Awards and he is one of the Australian Patrons of the Sir Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children.

Edmonds has released some twenty recordings, two of which received gold record awards. His recording of 'Una furtiva lagrima' from Gaetano Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*, issued on CD in 1994, is from a collection of Italian arias, performed with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, conductor James Christiansen.²⁰¹ As it is a relatively recent recording, its technical quality is good.

4.6.2. Performance and dramatic events

Edmonds performs 'Una furtiva lagrima' with clarity and depth of passion, achieving dramatic tension and expressive performance solely through tonal means, that is, with very little additional elaboration or ornamentation of the melodic line. This piece is such a well-known aria in the tenor repertoire that often it appears that the expression comes without consideration of the possible interpretations. Tenors reproduce similar versions simply by following what another tenor has performed before. This criticism applies to Edmonds, as he too has imitated other tenors in some respects. However, his increased tension and drama is achieved not by a carbon copy of another tenor, but by careful use of dynamics, legato, messa di voce and portamento of his own design. These are his greatest strengths and assets. Pure legato singing is a bel canto skill and imperfections would be obvious. Finely graded messa di voce ranging from mezzo piano to forte is one possibility which has good effect. Rarely does Edmonds reach for fortissimo, except in the long pauses in the cadenza on the rising arpeggios.

Edmonds begins the aria softly with some slight emphasis on the strong beats, and takes the passage rather slowly, not sparing the rallentando in the climactic points, such as the last two bars of verse one, bars 22-25 (Ex. 4.47). His breathing through the legato passages appears effortless yet his interpretation is quietly imbued with passion, as the following examples illustrate.

Ex. 4.48 Bars 20-25 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Edmonds' version

The musical score for Ex. 4.48 shows a vocal line in 6/8 time. It begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic, followed by a crescendo to forte (*f*). There are accents over the notes in bars 20 and 21. A *rall.* (rallentando) marking is present above the notes in bar 22. The final two bars (23-24) are marked *poco* (poco rallentando). The lyrics are: "che più cer-can-do io vo? M'a - ma, si m'a - ma, lo ve - do, lo ve - do."

In the first example, bars 20-25 (Ex. 4.48), Edmonds breaks for a breath after the fifth quaver, 'c', in bar 20. He uses the following b' flat to propel the sound upwards to f' in bar 21, commencing mezzo forte,

²⁰¹ Edmonds, Thomas. *Donizetti's L'Elisir d'Amore in Italian Opera Arias*. Australia: ABC: Polygram Classics, 1994.

442 368 - 2. Refer to audio CD, track 13.

like Pavarotti but unlike Caruso, who starts piano. All singers lead into a crescendo to reach *f*' in bar 22 ('*Ma'ma*'). *Messa di voce* is used to build up the tension here over bar 21 only. It is a most dramatic point and very similar to Pavarotti's version but without the pause on *f*' bar 21.

Another example which shows drama is found in bars 18-19 (Ex. 4.48).

Ex. 4.49 Bars 18-19 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Edmonds' version is the same

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line in 6/8 time, marked piano (*p*). The melody consists of a series of eighth notes and quarter notes, with a fermata over the final note. The lyrics are: "che più che - can - do'io vo?". The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a dynamic marking of *p* at the beginning of the phrase.

If bars 18-19, are compared, it is clear that Edmonds differs from the other tenors. He sings this phrase as marked piano without variation in tonal intensity. Caruso does not observe the piano marking, singing rather mezzo piano, whereas Pavarotti adds small changes in the tonal quality of the piano as he moves through the phrase. Edmonds is different and illustrates the subtle shade of meaning which Donizetti would have expected to be brought out. In this way, he shows considerable restraint when improvising, by not elaborating the melodic line to the extent that the dramatic flow of events is interrupted, an aspect of *bel canto* that irritated Wagner and others of the German tradition. Some may argue that he should have elaborated the melodic line, as was the custom, but Edmonds has clearly added intense variation to the melody chiefly by tonal means. Lack of innovative embellishments is no indication that this performance is not as good as that of other tenors. While some may consider this a weakness of Edmonds, it is not the case, as his use of tonal variation, a great strength, reveals. The *cadenza* is the other example of a dramatic build up, a finale to the gradual increase in tension in verse two. This begins with the change of key in bar 39 and will be discussed in depth in section 4.6.4. Since Edmonds includes very little elaboration of the melodic line other than what Donizetti has scored, his intent appears to indicate he has no need for any other innovations.

4.6.3. Realisation of Donizetti's style

Edmonds has taken this aria as it is written, following many of the marked portamenti, but without the addition of many mordents or turns. In this sense he is not innovative. The trend over the last century in performing this aria seems to have been to follow the traditions of previous tenors, such as Caruso, Gigli, Schipa and others. Indeed, Edmonds is no exception, but he refrains from using more

improvisation in his interpretation of bel canto style. He has a secure technique and a fluent legato skill which would have enabled him to include more notes in the form of turns or mordents. He does some portamento as marked, but leaves out some where it is traditionally done.

The following examples illustrate possible phrases where more elaboration could be relevant. Edmonds could have added a mordent in bar 20, on the note d'' flat, beat two (Ex. 4.48), but then he would be copying Pavarotti. In bar 24 (Ex. 4.48), at this point the melody slows with a *rallentando*. It is a suitable place for a turn and also for a trill, but no tenor in this study has added a trill at this point, all preferring to add a mordent. Certainly the end of verse one is not a traditional place to have a trill, which normally would be placed in the *cadenza* near the end of the aria.

Verse two is followed similarly to the score by Edmonds. Again he does not embellish phrases any differently from the score. Whereas Caruso and Pavarotti change some of the note values in bars 33 and 35, Edmonds stays with the scored notation. He sings with clarity of sound; his diction is clearer than many of his predecessors, and the onomatopoeic '*palpiti*' in bar 35 makes an impact on the drama at this point.

While it is not documented that Donizetti wanted embellishment added at some points in this aria, nevertheless it is inherent in bel canto style. These bel canto techniques need to be incorporated into a musical context in order to achieve the composer's vision.

Several interpretive issues are faced by the singer when he performs bel canto music. Firstly breathing control in legato passages plays an important role. Edmonds' performance shows ability and perfection in controlled breathing. His phrasing is impeccable, but he ignores much of the slurring as marked in this vocal score. However, if he had added more embellishments he may not have retained the excellent control shown in this recording.

Secondly, ornaments embellish the style and need to be defined, but too many could be distracting and alter the intent of the phrase. Bars 20-25 (Ex. 4.48), '*M'a-ma*' (She loves me) need an emotional interpretation – smooth and appealing. One could argue that extra ornaments here would destroy the suave melody line at the expense of more florid lines overall. Edmonds is considered justified in his decision not to embellish this aria further, apart from changing the scored *appoggiatura* in bar 24 on

e" flat into a mordent (Ex. 4.48). In so doing he still achieves true bel canto expressive style. However, compared with Pavarotti and Caruso, Edmonds shows the least embellishment in bel canto style, although his technique is secure and stylistic.

4.6.4 Elements of bel canto

Edmonds has a silvery voice which is articulated well. Generally he follows the ornamentation that Donizetti has written. However, the following examples in verse one show various elements of bel canto style which he has added to the melody line. For example in bars 15 -17, Edmonds adds a mordent like Gigli, whereas other tenors add a turn (Ex. 4.50).

Ex. 4.50 Bars 15-17 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Edmonds' version

The musical score for Ex. 4.50 shows three bars of music. The first bar (bar 15) contains two eighth rests. The second bar (bar 16) contains a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note Bb4, and a quarter note G4. The third bar (bar 17) contains a half note F4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter note D4. The lyrics 'in - vi - di - ar - sem - brò:' are written below the notes. A 'rall.' marking is placed above the notes in bar 16, and a mordent is placed above the note 'ar' in bar 16.

In bar 16, from the phrase bars 15-17 (Ex. 4.50), Edmonds adds a mordent above d" flat in the same way as Gigli. In bar 16 Caruso and Pavarotti have a turn, the former on c' and the latter on d" flat, this mordent being shorter by two notes. Edmonds' mordent is clearly articulated and sung slowly on the note d" flat drawing out the '-ar' syllable from 'invidiar' (ex. 4.50).

Another example of Edmonds' own additional embellishments is found in bars 20-25 (Ex. 4.48). In bar 24, a scored appoggiatura is omitted and transformed into a mordent of three notes (see Ex. 4.48 above). This has the effect of slowing down the mordent and provides a better legato flow. Garcia, cited in Stark²⁰², contended that other aspects such as breathing, messa di voce, legato, timbre, trills and floridity could play a role in expressive singing such as bel canto. Edmonds uses these aspects solely to express emotions in 'Una furtiva lagrima', without embellishments of his own initiative.

Edmonds has clear diction most of the time with the exception of two notes found in bar 35 where the word 'i' is not sounded and its note c" is omitted (see ex.4.51, bars 34-36).

²⁰² James Stark. *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. p. xxiv.

Ex. 4.51 Bars 34-36 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Edmonds' version

i pal - pi - ti, pal - pi - ti sen - tir!...

Likewise in bar 37 in the phrase '*confondere i miei co'suoi so'spir*', after '*confondere*' he omits 'i' and its note and sings '*miei*'. (See 6.4: Appendix D: Score).

Edmonds uses bel canto technique in the cadenza, dynamic control and messa voce. He sings the aria at a slightly quicker pace than Pavarotti, suggesting that the cadenza could also be expected to be different in some way. In fact, Edmonds follows the wording of the vocal score, not inserting the missing last line '*Si, può morir! Si, può morir d'amor*' as the former tenors do. Despite this omission, Edmonds manages to include several variations from the score. The following example, bars 42-46 (Ex.4.52) shows a comparison of the score with Edmonds' version of the melody leading into the cadenza with a different emphasis from the scored words.

Ex. 4.52 Bars 42-46 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Cadenza

do, ah! cie - lo, si può, si può - mo - rir; di più non -
chie - do, non chie - do.

Ex. 4.53 Bars 42-46 Ricordi Vocal Score 'Una furtiva lagrima' Cadenza Edmonds' version

do. ah! cie - lo, si può, si può mo - rir; di più

non - chie - do non chie - do. di - - più non - chi - e -

do.

Edmonds' cadenza is innovative in the first part where he alters slightly the notation of the lead in to the cadenza proper, bar 44 (Ex. 4.53). This requires a stream of well-graded tone, as he omits two of the rising semiquavers, pauses and moves from e" directly to a" natural, before falling to g", thus omitting the f" and g" (Ex. 4.52, bar 44). E" flat rising to a" natural is an augmented fourth, and Edmonds resolves it downwards to g'. This is unusual, difficult to pitch, but by taking it a littler slower, it is very effective here, giving strengthened expression. None of the other tenors leave out these two notes, and therefore treat it differently.

Edmonds follows the same tradition as Caruso, Gigli and Pavarotti, in singing the rising dominant 9th arpeggios in bar 45 similarly to other singers. Caruso, Gigli and Pavarotti sang the original last line of the verse on these final notes (Ex. 4.47), but Edmonds repeats the words 'di più non chiedo' (Ex. 4.53), singing these words as the last line of the cadenza. He adds very little else to the cadenza apart from a number of pauses. By varying the length of the pauses Edmonds achieves noticeable variation in the cadenza. These are effective and emphasise in addition the words 'di più non chiedo' (I do not ask for more). Several other tenors not in the study such as Tito Schipa, did not follow the tradition, and it is interesting to note that Jussi Børling also sang the cadenza ending quite differently.

Edmonds makes limited use of messa di voce depending more on the lengthy pauses most of which he holds at the same tonal level. There is some messa di voce on the last arpeggio from forte to piano. He does not use portamento as marked in bars 10, 12, 23, 24 and 29. In this respect he is not following the score. In bar 39 he uses portamento for 'cielo' but not at bar 45 for the same word. Edmonds also has a

very different cadenza from the usual tradition, and has a slight downward movement on the last two notes of the cadenza.

In analysing Edmonds' bel canto aspects, it is important to recognize that voice qualities are as important in judging the expressive nature of bel canto as well as word-note relationships, that is, tonal relationships. This is true of all singers, in particular Edmonds, because he does not display very much in florid ornamented lines. Edmonds sings this aria with expression and well-articulated diction. Although he is not a native Italian speaker like Caruso, Gigli and Pavarotti, his diction is good, with authentic inflection and clarity. He excels at this compared with Gigli and Caruso, although undoubtedly the older recordings with less quality are a factor in this. His voice clarity and tonal variation have a very significant role to play in his interpretation of this aria.

4.6.5 Comparison of performances

Edmonds' voice has a distinct timbre which is quite different from the other three tenors. It has a tonal colour which distinguishes itself from the fuller and deeper tones of Pavarotti. The light resonance he produces in his voice sets it apart and allows him to express his melody lines with a wide range of tones.

Edmonds achieves the demands of this aria in a different way from most tenors, not so much by ornamentation but by his legato and expressive variation of his tones. Whereas Pavarotti uses *messa di voce* extensively, Edmonds uses it sparingly. He, like Pavarotti, uses pauses but utilises their effect much more dramatically. In the cadenza, Pavarotti has seven pauses. Edmonds has five. But some are more effective because they are held longer, although some are held shorter to allow the melody line not to be broken as much. Pavarotti takes a breath between the last two notes of bar 45, whereas Edmonds joins the two pauses together with one breath (see Ex. 4.53).

Edmonds varies the cadenza as described above. This in no way detracts from the outcome of his performance; his ending is different. Edmonds is the only singer who disregards the last line, part of which is sung previously in bars 43-44. The total meaning is not lost by this omission, but '*d'amor*', which is added at the end by Caruso, Gigli and Pavarotti, emphasises what Nemorino wants most, that is, love. Edmonds' art is an improvisation of this aspect in his tender vocal tones, in the words '*di più*

chiedo. In regards to ornamentation, Edmonds is less innovative in adding embellishments, but he uses other techniques as discussed in section 4.6.3 to achieve an expressive effect.

There are two differences in his performance. One is the lack of embellishment and the other is the cadenza wording and its different interpretation. This is not to suggest that Edmonds' performance is inferior.

There is much that can be learnt about bel canto from the analysis of this recording. It gives a singer alternative techniques to develop in the bel canto style. Aural analysis has illustrated dramatic aspects, the realisation of Donizetti's style and how Edmonds has displayed bel canto techniques, such as ornaments and elaboration of the cadenza. Edmonds' recordings have provided evidence of his bel canto style, and have preserved and maintained the bel canto tradition for future generations.

4.7 Summary

An aural appreciation of the aria 'Una furtiva lagrima' from *L'Elisir d'Amore* has provided a detailed analysis of a second set of case studies, complementing those of the sopranos. The studies of four tenors have been invaluable in examining aspects of improvisation and ornamentation.

'Una furtiva lagrima' has demonstrated the male singers' ability to perform with both passion and tender expression, a style inherent in Italian singers. At the same time, individual interpretations of improvisation and variation of the melodic line are included. This analysis has revealed many similarities between all the tenors, and each one has interpreted Donizetti's score with individuality. In particular, the cadenza shows versatility, which would surely be Donizetti's expectation of a tenor singing this aria.

A careful analysis of this aria has resulted in findings which are consistent with bel canto traditions; the listener would expect the tenor to follow the conventional interpretations. From Caruso's first ever recording, to the latest recorded performance by Edmonds, the bel canto techniques have been both traditional and individual, displaying originality in variations at some point throughout the aria, most commonly in the cadenza.

Future interpreters of 'Una furtiva lagrima' would do well to study and analyse aurally the style of these tenors. Their performances, as preserved in the sound recordings, are a means of gaining a greater understanding of nineteenth century bel canto style.

5 Chapter Five

5.1 Conclusion – Evaluation of aural analyses

This study has demonstrated the value of an aural appreciation of nineteenth century bel canto operatic traditions, as perceived from twentieth-century sound recordings, and has provided insights into the traditional techniques of improvisation and ornamentation of the melodic line, characteristic of this tradition.

One of the essential differences of this study from more traditional research is that it has been motivated by an aural approach. This approach allows the listener to concentrate on the features of the melodic line and the soloist's improvisation, rather than being distracted by costumes, drama and other visual observations from a performance. Nineteenth century traditions of bel canto identified here include the various techniques of ornamentation and embellishment of the melodic line, the use of elaboration in the cadenza, skill in breathing, *legatissimo* and *fioriture*, expressive tonal qualities and *messa di voce*.

Aural analysis has demonstrated how bel canto traditions and their interpretations have been preserved. The decision was taken to restrict examples to arias from two operas, *Norma* (Bellini) and *L'Elisir d'Amore* (Donizetti) as representative of the Italian romantic bel canto era of 1830-1860. Many variations and styles in bel canto techniques have been observed. The study has established the fact that nineteenth century bel canto traditions have been maintained, and attests to the usefulness of these recordings for twenty-first century singers.

Chapter one outlined the general historical background to the bel canto genre. The aims, methodology and historical perspectives set the background and context for understanding bel canto. Major characteristics of the singing techniques required in Bellini's and Donizetti's operas were established as essential criteria.

Chapter two discussed the historical connotations of the term 'bel canto', and defined its salient characteristics: the decoration of the melodic line by means of improvisation and ornamentation.

Chapter three established that the singers' interpretations varied considerably, despite each one maintaining a common sense of bel canto style. An analysis of the role of the sopranos, in interpreting

the characteristics, highlighted ornamentation and improvisation in the melismata or arabesques, and breathing techniques. These features are perceived more significantly from an aural observation than from viewing a performance. The six sopranos illustrated that each one has approached the cadenza in a different way, particularly the trill styled by only two sopranos as part of the cadenza. Six case studies of 'Casta Diva' from Act One illustrated that a variety of ways bel canto traditions can be effective in interpreting the style.

Chapter four analysed the techniques of bel canto as interpreted by four tenors in the opera *L'Elisir d'Amore*. Four case studies of 'Una furtiva lagrima' from Act Two were documented. The tenors selected are strong exponents of the art of bel canto. They have the tendency to lean towards traditional interpretations instead of individuality, but they excel at the cadenza, and it is at this point in the aria that their individuality comes to the fore. The final two bars of each cadenza are the climax of each performance. Each one was shown to be different, yet conforms to the bel canto style. Of interest are the variations in the wording of the last line of the cadenza, with Edmonds being the only tenor to omit the original last line.

The conclusion and evaluation supports the writer's view that techniques of the bel canto style of singing can be learnt and understood by skilled contemporary listeners. The documentation of careful analytical evidence has clearly shown the contribution of twentieth century singers of bel canto opera.

Documentary evidence has confirmed the value of the aural approach. In response to the proposal that authentic bel canto techniques can be perceived and analysed from listening to relevant sound recordings, the project has gathered authentic examples of bel canto style. It is also the view of the writer that the two chosen extracts, 'Casta Diva' and 'Una furtiva lagrima' represent the genre at its peak, and each example selected illustrates and interprets the tradition.

The performers chosen complement each other, in that they follow historical trends and provide a wide diversity of sopranos and tenors for comparison and evaluation. While it has been made clear that there are many similarities between each singer, it has been shown also that their skills and experiences determine the final outcomes, and that these differ from person to person.

While many singers learn bel canto style from the advice of teachers and répétiteurs, others learn from performances and media reviews. This study has clearly demonstrated that an aural approach to the

study is yet another way of learning about bel canto techniques. Comparisons between singers are invaluable, in that a variety of styles and improvisations has been observed and evaluated, reinforcing the variation element within the bel canto tradition.

There is a gap between separate visual and auditory impressions. Both can go hand in hand, but it must also be acknowledged that sound recordings have played an extraordinary role. There is much that can only be observed from close aural investigation. Recordings can be replayed continually or frequently in a short space of time, whereas a live performance is seen or heard once, perhaps only during a long period of time.

A visual performance allows the viewers to analyse body language, which would give a good indication of style of breathing, points when breaths are taken, and when rubato and tempo changes are made. In aural analyses, on the other hand, the listener has to rely totally on the ear. In this way there is no influence or indication by observation of such details. Thus a more accurate, valid and unbiased judgement can be made of the positioning of these aspects by aural analysis, and with the absence of any body language,

The study has provided a more definitive understanding of the cadenza. Original contributions and variations from the score have shown how singers can respond to an occasion or situation, how their own virtuosity can come to the fore naturally, but within the boundaries of the style and its traditions. Some of the obvious characteristics of bel canto, such as variations and embellishments, are easily discernible to a listener, but there are other more subtle and imperceptible effects, such as *messa di voce*, which are redolent of bel canto and which only the critical listener can identify.

This thesis has filled a gap in research and documented knowledge from an aural perspective of bel canto, and acknowledges that the art of bel canto has not been lost through a period of one hundred years of sound recording history. Furthermore, aural analysis of sound recordings may continue to help identify interpretations, and to this end will benefit future generations of operatic singers. A new depth of understanding and appreciation of bel canto will remain invaluable. Aural analysis of sound recordings provides the means to identify interpretations of performances of Italian nineteenth century style bel canto opera and its subsequent transmission.