

An aural analysis of bel canto:

Traditions and interpretations

as preserved through selected sound recordings

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Abstract

An aural analysis of bel canto: traditions and interpretations as preserved through selected sound recordings.

The thesis addresses the lack of an aural appreciation of bel canto operatic traditions. Further it asserts that sound recordings are invaluable in examining aspects of improvisation and ornamentation of the melodic line that are characteristic of this tradition. A detailed aural analysis also provides valuable and unique insights into the bel canto techniques demonstrated by the performers as perceived aurally. The incentive to undertake this research from an aural perspective exclusively developed from the writer's physical limitations. This differs from more traditional methods of research which would focus on contemporary critiques on the subject. The essence of the aural research undertaken has been to compare different recordings by different singers in various eras, and to establish the ways bel canto traditions have been preserved, maintained, nurtured and performed.

The project focuses on selected operas from the nineteenth century repertoire of Gaetano Donizetti and Vincenzo Bellini. Two arias are analysed as case studies, each one examining aspects of bel canto opera from the twentieth century to the present. The first case study focuses on the soprano aria 'Casta Diva' from Bellini's *Norma*, while the second is the tenor aria 'Una furtiva lagrima' from *L'Elisir d'Amore* by Donizetti. Each case study is documented, and includes transcribed excerpts from the chosen aria to illustrate and interpret bel canto traditions through both preserved and re-mastered recordings. Comparisons are made between different singers, describing which aspects of performance display the characteristics and qualities of bel canto.

High quality sound recordings are indispensable in making an aural approach, particularly if there are no longer suitably skilled singers available to perform the works live, since it is through this medium of sound recordings, as well as live performances, that future generations can appreciate these operatic techniques. It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to a significant appreciation of the Italian bel canto tradition of the nineteenth century and the transmission of its various techniques.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution, to Airlie Jane Kirkham, and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

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SIGNED: _____ DATE: _____

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