

Opera as Music Drama



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Of Rochester

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Music Drama

- ◆ An opera is more than a collection of tunes. It is a complete “Music Drama”.
- ◆ There is a musical, dramatic and emotional continuity to the entire work.
- ◆ This continuity is must be within the music, as well as the plot.
- ◆ The orchestral part is as important as the vocal part.

The Premise

- ◆ The Dramatic Content of an Opera is carried by the music.
- ◆ The Plot conveys the story and is a framework for the music. It defines the action and the mood, but the drama is carried by the music.
- ◆ An Opera with great music will work, even if the plot is inferior, while an Opera with an excellent plot won't work if the music is inferior (mostly).

A Guideline:

Opera is Music Drama.

Don't be overly concerned about the logic of the plot. Just pick up the premise and go with the music.

Examples

- ◆ Grief over Unrequited Love
- ◆ Love Duets
- ◆ Anger and Revenge
- ◆ Comradeship
- ◆ Yearning for the Homeland
- ◆ Ceremony and Spectacle
- ◆ The Climax

Unrequited Love Unremitting Despair

"Vesti la giubba" from *Pagliacci*

Placido Domingo (t) – 1983
Orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala,
Georges Prêtre, cond.

Pagliacci

Ruggero Leoncavallo, 1857 – 1919

Libretto by the Composer

First Performance, 1892, Milan

Set in a small village in Calabria, end of 19th
century, featuring a troupe of traveling
commedia dell'arte players.

"Vesti la giubba": Canio, head of the troupe,
has just learned that his wife is unfaithful.
He is devastated, but the show must go on.

Anatomy of an Aria - 1

Recitative-Aria Form:

Recitative – sung passage with the rhythm of speech, rather than song.

Aria – lyrical, songlike passage.

In the recitative, the character states his or her situation, dilemma or state of mind,

Followed by . . .

The aria, in which he allows free rein to his emotions.

The orchestra accompanies, enhances and embellishes.

There may be an orchestral introduction and an orchestral finale

Anatomy of an Aria - 2

The *aria* is often divided into two sections:

The *lyrical* section (“cantabile”), where the expression of emotion begins to develop;

The *dramatic climax* (“cabaletta”) where the emotional expression reaches its peak.

Often with a transitional passage between the two.

Usually, an Orchestral Climax completes the scene.

Anatomy of an Aria - 3

"Vesti la giubba"

Recitative: *"How can I go on? . . . but I must . . ."*

{Orchestral "punctuation"}

Aria, lyrical portion: *"So put on your costume . . ."*

Transition: *". . .turn your tears to laughter . . ."*

Aria, dramatic climax: *"Laugh, clown laugh!"*

{Orchestral recapitulation}

"Vesti la giubba"

Recitative

How can I perform! While I'm in such delirium,

I no longer know what I'm saying,

or what I'm doing!

But you must! Force yourself!

Bah! Can't you be a man?

{Laughs ironically}

No! You are a clown!

{Sad orchestral punctuation: "and that's that!"}

"Vesti la giubba"

Aria – Lyrical section

So put on your clown suit,
and your funny whiteface makeup.
The people pay, and they want to laugh,
don't they!
So what if Harlequin steals away your
Colombine?
Laugh, clown, laugh! and the world will
applaud!

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"Vesti la giubba"

Aria - Transition

Turn your tears into a funny face,
Change your pain into laughter.

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"Vesti la giubba"

Aria - Dramatic Climax

So laugh, clown laugh!
Laugh at your broken love!
Laugh at the pain
That crushes your heart!
{Weeping . . .}
{Orchestral recapitulation}

Unrequited Love

Wistful Regret

"Ella gemmai m'amo" from *Don Carlo*

Ferruccio Furlenetto (br) – 1993
Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, James
Levine, cond.

Don Carlo

Giuseppe Verdi, 1813 - 1901

Libretto based on a plays by Schiller and Eugène Cormon. Several French and Italian versions of the libretto were created.

First Performance, 1867, Paris (French version)

Set in royal courts of France (act I) and Spain (acts II-V), 16th century.

"Ella gemmai m'amó": Philip II, King of Spain, alone in his room, reflects sadly that his young, politically arranged bride never loved him.

"Ella gemmai m'amó" (*excerpt*) from Verdi's *Don Carlo*

{*Orchestral introduction*}

She never loved me!
No, her heart is closed to me,
she doesn't love me!

I still recall how sad she looked
when she saw my white hair,
the day she arrived from France.

No, she does not love me.

• • •

Love Duet

Parting and Hope for the Future

"Verrano a te sull'aure" from *Lucia di Lammermoor*

Renata Scotto (s) and Luciano Pavarotti (t)
- 1967

SO of Italian Radio and Television,
Francesco Molinari Pradelli, cond.

Lucia di Lammermoor

Gaetano Donizetti, 1797 - 1848

Libretto by Salvatore Cammarano based on a
novel by Sir Walter Scott

First Performance 1835, Naples

Set in Scotland, end of 16th Century.

"Verrano a te sull'aure": Lucy Ashton and
Edgar of Ravenswood say farewell until Edgar
can return from a political mission to France.

"Verrano a te sull'aure"
from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*

My sighs shall be borne on the breeze
that wafts here, my love
Each murmuring wave shall echo how I
mourn thy absence
I shall bedew each thought of you with
many a bitter tear
You will not fail to write to me . . .
etc. . .

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Love Duet
Ecstatic "Love-Death"

"O, terra, addio" from *Aida*

Aprile Millo (s), Placido Domingo (t),
Dolora Zajick (ms) - 1991
Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, James
Levine, cond.

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Aida

Giuseppe Verdi, 1813 - 1901

Libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni

First Performance 1871, Cairo

Set in Ancient Egypt.

"O terra, addio": Radames has been condemned to death by being entombed alive. Aida hides in the tomb, to die with him. Amneris, overcome by grief and remorse, mourns.

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"O terra, addio" from Verdi's *Aida*

Aida & Radames, within the tomb:

O Earth, farewell, farewell you vale of tears.
Farewell, dreams of joy which have vanished in grief.
Heaven opens itself to us, and the wandering souls
Fly to the rays of eternal day.

(In the distance, chorus of priests and priestesses, praising Isis and Osiris)

Amneris, above the tomb:

Rest in peace, beloved.
May Isis be appeased and open heaven to you!
Rest in peace.

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Anger

Righteous Wrath

**Donna Ana's Aria, "Or sai che
l'onore" from *Don Giovanni***

Cheryl Studer (s) - 1991

Vienna Philharmonic, Riccardo Muti cond.

Don Giovanni

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, 1756 - 1791

Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte

First Performance 1787, Prague

Set in medieval Spain.

"Or sai chi l'onore": Donna Ana has just recognized Don Giovanni as the man who tried to rape her and then murdered her father. She asks he lover, Don Ottavio, to avenge her.

"Or sai chi l'onore"

from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

Now you know who sought to steal my honor,
who was the betrayer who killed my father.

I ask you vengeance, your heart asks it too.

Remember the wound gaping in his poor
breast, recall the earth covered with his blood,
if ever the wrath of a just fury should weaken in
you.

I ask you vengeance, your heart asks it too.

"Or sai chi l'onore" (Climax)

{Dramatic Climax, Mozart style}

I ask you vengeance, your heart asks it too.

{Dramatic Orchestral Climax}

{Mournful Orchestral Punctuation}

Anger
Evil Rage

**The Queen of the Night's Aria, "Der
Hölle Rache" from *The Magic
Flute***

Wilma Lipp (s) - 1952
Vienna Philharmonic, Herbert von Karajan
cond.

The Magic Flute

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, 1756 - 1791

Libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder

First Performance 1791, Vienna

Set in legendary times.

"Der Hölle Rache": The evil Queen of the Night appears to her daughter, innocent Pamina, and demands that she kill the virtuous high priest, Sarastro.

"Der Hölle Rache"

from Mozart's *Magic Flute*

The rage of Hell boils within my heart,
Death and despair flame about me!

If Sarastro does not, through you, feel
The pangs of death,
Then you will be my daughter no more.
Disowned will you be forever,
Abandoned will you be forever.

Destroyed be forever
All natural bonds between us,
Unless by your hands
Shall Sarastro turn pale in death.

"Der Hölle Rache" (Climax)

Hear, hear ye Gods of Wrath,
Hear the mother's oath!

{Orchestral Climax}

Comradeship

Two men whose friendship is inspired by
their love of the same woman

“Au fond du temple saint” from *Pearl Fishers*

John Aker (t), Gino Quilico (br) - 1989
Orchestra of the Capital of Toulouse,
Michel Plasson cond.

The Pearl Fishers

Georges Bizet, 1838 - 1875

Libretto by Eugène Cormon and Michel Carré
First Performance 1863, Paris
Set in Ceylon.

“Au fond du temple saint ”: Two long-lost
friends are reunited. They are in love with
the same woman, the priestess Léïla. Their
love for her inspires them to renew their
friendship.

“Au fond du temple saint ”
from Bizet's *Pearl Fishers*

. . .

But through the crowd she makes her
way Already her long veil hides her
face from us. My eyes, alas! Seek her
in vain!

*{Orchestral section building to ominous
tension}*

“Au fond du temple saint ”
(cont.)

But what is this strange flame which is
suddenly kindled in my soul! What
unknown fire is destroying me?

Your hand pushes mine away! Love
takes our hearts by storm and turns
us into enemies!

No! Let nothing part us! Let us swear to
remain friends!

"Au fond du temple saint " (conclusion)

Yes, it is her, the goddess, who comes to
unite us this day. And, faithful to my
promise, I wish to cherish you like a
brother!

It is her, the goddess, who comes to
unite us this day! Yes, let us share
the same fate, let us be united until
death!

Comradeship

Devotion to Duty

**"Dio, che nell'alma infondere" from
*Don Carlo***

Michael Sylvester (t), Vladimir Chernov
(br) - 1993

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, James
Levine, cond.

Don Carlo

Giuseppe Verdi, 1813 - 1901

Libretto based on dramatic poem by Schiller and play by Eugène Cormon. Several French and Italian versions of the libretto exist.

First Performance, 1867, Paris (French version)
Set in royal courts of France (act I) and Spain (acts II-V), 16th century.

"Dio, che nell'alma infondere": Carlo is distraught over losing Elizabeth. Rodrigo inspires him to continue in their mission to free the Low Countries.

"Dio, che nell'alma infondere" from Verdi's *Don Carlo*

{Rodrigo warns Carlo that Elizabeth and the King are about to enter the chapel.}

{Carlo is distraught over his lost love.}

Rodrigo:

Take heart, my Prince, dispel the clouds of grief and sorrow. Your rising star shines so clear and bright upon tomorrow.

Have faith, and pray that God may be with you.

“Dio, che nell'alma infondere” (2)

Carlo and Rodrigo:

God in his infinite love has filled the hearts of
man with fire. Yes, God, our Lord, guiding
us from above, let freedom be our first
desire.

Father in heaven, steel our hearts, beating
forever united!

To fight for right through death and night, shall
be our last eternal plea.

Yes, God, guiding us from above, has meant us
to be free!

“Dio, che nell'alma infondere” (3)

{Elizabeth and Philip enter, accompanied by a chorus of monks.}

{Carlo becomes distraught once again; Rodrigo consoles him,
encouraging him to devote himself to the Cause.}

{Monks chant mournfully about the death of Charles V}

Carlo and Rodrigo:

I stand with you until death!
Throughout life to fight for right!
Until men can joyously shout:
Liberty!

{Rousing orchestral climax}

Yearning for the Homeland

**“Va, pensiero, sull’ali dorati” from
*Nabucco***

1991

Orchestra and Chorus of the German
Opera of Berlin, Giuseppe Sinopoli,
cond.

Nabucco

Giuseppe Verdi, 1813 - 1901

Libretto by Temistocle Solera, based on
History of the Babylonian Captivity,
First Performance, 1842, Milan

Set in Jerusalem and Babylon, 587 BC

“Va, pensiero sull’ali dorati”: The exiled
Hebrew slaves in Babylon, laboring on
the banks of the Tigris, lament their
exile and dream of their Homeland.

"Va, pensiero"
from Verdi's *Nabucco*

Fly, my thoughts, on gilded wings;
Go, rest on the slopes and mounts
Where the sweet breezes
Of our native soil give off a sweet perfume
The banks of Jordan, greet,
And the fallen towers of Zion...
Oh my country, so beautiful and so lost!
Oh remembrance so dear and so desperate!

"Va, pensiero" (cont.)

Golden harp of the prophetic poets,
Why do you hang so silently from the willow?
Reignite the memories in our hearts,
Speak to us of the times which once were!
O like Solomon draw forth a sound
Of raw lament to destiny,
Or may the Lord inspire you to a harmony
Which instills the courage to suffer!

Ceremony and Spectacle

The Consecration of the Sword in the Temple of Vulcan from *Aida*

Placido Domingo (t), Paata Burchladze (b)
et al. - 1991

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, James
Levine, cond.

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Aida

Giuseppe Verdi, 1813 - 1901

Libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni

First Performance 1871, Cairo

Set in Ancient Egypt.

Consecration of the Sword at the Temple of
Vulcan: Rhadames has been named General
to lead the battle against Ethiopia. His Sword
is consecrated in a ceremony at the Temple
of Ptah, officiated by Ramfis.

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The Conclusion

**“La commedia e finita!” from
*Pagliacci***

Juan Pons (br) – 1983
Orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala,
Georges Prêtre, cond.

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Thank You



And Good Night!

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