2012

# Extended Program Notes for Thesis Voice Recital

Shanna Nolan
*Florida International University*, Shannoll@aol.com

**DOI:** 10.25148/etd.FI12050212

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

# EXTENDED PROGRAM NOTES FOR THESIS VOICE RECITAL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER

in

MUSIC

by

Shanna Nolan

2012

To: Dean Brian D. Schriner
College of Architecture and the Arts

This thesis, written by Shanna Nolan, and entitled Extended Program Notes for Thesis Voice Recital, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

_____
John Augenblick

_____
Joel Galand

_____
Robert Dundas

_____
Kathleen Wilson, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 22, 2012

The thesis of Shanna Nolan is approved.

_____
Dean Brian D. Schriner
College of Architecture and the Arts

_____
Dean Lakshmi N Reddi
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2012

DEDICATION

For their loving support this thesis is dedicated to my husband, Craig Gundry, my family, and Dr. Kathleen L. Wilson.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

EXTENDED PROGRAM NOTES FOR THESIS VOICE RECITAL

by

Shanna Nolan

Florida International University, 2012

Miami, Florida

Professor Kathleen Wilson, Major Professor

This thesis presents extended program notes for a sixty-minute vocal graduate recital consisting of the following repertoire for soprano: "How Beautiful are the Feet of Them" and "He Shall Feed His Flock" from *Messiah* and "Lascia ch'io pianga" from *Rinaldo* by George Frederick Handel; "La morte d'Ophélie" by Hector Berlioz; the Swedish art songs "Vingar i natten" by Ture Rangström and "Jung fru Blond och jung fru Brunette" by Wilhelm Stenhammar; the contemporary art song "Animal Passion" by Jake Heggie; and the following arias and duets by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: "Mi tradi quell 'alma ingrata" from *Don Giovanni*, "Bei Männern, welche liebe fuhlen" and "Papageno, Papagena" from *Die Zauberflöte*, "Deh vieni, non tardar o gioja bella," "Venite inginochiatevi," and "Via resti servita" from *Le nozze di Figaro*, and the Concert Aria "Ch'io mi scordi di te?...non temer, amato bene," K.505. These works encompass a variety of styles, musical periods and forms spanning over four centuries. The recital itself is documented on the accompanying compact disc, while these program notes contain discuss historical context, musical analysis, and performance practice for this repertoire.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF EXAMPLES

**Chapter 1**

George Frederick Handel (1685–1759):

"How Beautiful are the Feet of Them" and "He Shall Feed His Flock" from *Messiah*

"Lascia ch'io pianga" from *Rinaldo*

Handel arrived in England in 1711, and within a year he had already composed *Rinaldo*, the first opera written in Italian specifically for an English audience. The aria "Lascia ch'io pianga" exemplifies two characteristics of Handel's earlier operas. The first is his use of pre-existing material. In the Baroque era, composers regularly borrowed from earlier works. This technique is called *pastiche*, aptly named due to the pasted-together nature of these operas. While it seems unethical by today's standards, in Handel's day *pastiche* was not only accepted but expected and necessary because of the incessant demand for new works, which exceeded what original music a composer could produce in a single season. Today when major opera houses have essentially become monuments to the historical operatic canon, it is hard to imagine the hectic productivity demanded of the eighteenth-century operatic composer. Essentially, the idea of the original genius is a nineteenth-century Romantic construct and should not be applied to another era.

In *Rinaldo,* the melodic content of "Lascia ch'io pianga" is first found in an aria "Lascia la spina" from *Il trionfo del tempo e del disinganno*, Handel's first oratorio. The

arias have different lyrics and tempos but the melodic material is clearly identical (compare the openings of the two arias, shown in Figures 1 and 2). [1]

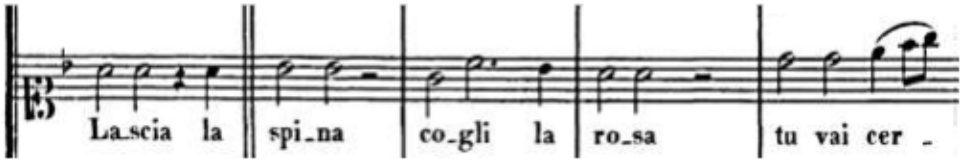


Figure 1. Handel: Opening of "Lascia la spina."

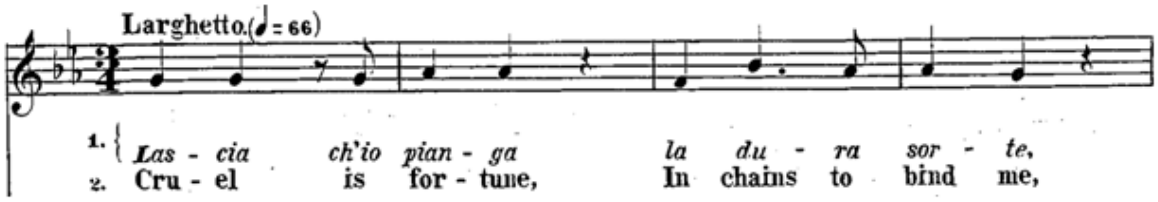


Figure 2. Handel: Opening of "Lascia ch'io pianga."

The earlier incarnation of this melody is not well remembered today because *Rinaldo* has become one of the best known of Handel's operas.

The second technique exemplified by the present aria is the use of thematic content and musical symbolism, or, more precisely, iconicism. The most obvious example of this is heard in the fluttering of the orchestral flutes in the initial scene, set in an idyllic garden inhabited by lovers who are unaware their perfect world will soon be

[1] Anthony Hicks, "Rinaldo," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians On-Line*. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com. (Accessed January 28, 2012.)

disrupted. In the original production, at the moment the flute fluttering began, birds were released on the stage (Grout 2003, 191).

The libretto by Giacomo Rossi from a scenario by Aaron Hill is loosely based on the epic poem *Geruselemme liberate* (*Jerusalem Liberated*) by Torquato Tasso, and it relies heavily on baroque operatic conventions and the suspension of disbelief. The plot allows for the spectacular use of stage machinery that was common in the baroque era and was deployed in *Rinaldo* to great acclaim. Armida's descent from the heavens—like a *deus ex machina* to steal away Almirena, the boat that takes Rinaldo to Armida's lair, and the ever popular battle scene are perfect examples of typical Baroque stage craft.

*Messiah* is an oratorio based on sacred texts written by Charles Jennen, a wealthy country squire who had written other librettos for Handel. Like many of Handel's works, *Messiah* was composed very quickly. Handel began it on August 22, 1741 and finished it by September 14. This was much too fast for its librettist. Jennen remarked that "his *Messiah* has disappointed me, being composed in great hast, tho' he said he would be a year about it…I shall put no more sacred works in his hands to be thus abus'd."[2] *Messiah* is unique in that its text was directly derived from scripture. This caused a significant amount of controversy. Its sacred content was considered unsuitable for performance in the theater, where most oratorios were performed. The performers, both male and female, were considered too immoral to speak its revered words. The work had to be referred to as a "new sacred oratorio" to avoid an outcry from using a sacred word like *Messiah* on

[2] Howard Serwer, "Handel, Jennens and Messiah," in *Handel Studies*, ed. Richard G. King (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 1998), 199.

theatre posters. Over time it became acceptable to the general public and is now one of Handel's most popular and commonly performed works.

Controversy still follows *Messiah*, although today it has to do more with performance practice than the content of its libretto. The major debate is whether to remain faithful to familiar, though anachronistic, performance traditions that arose in the nineteenth century performance or to turn for inspiration to performance practices appropriate to Handel's time. Even if performing *Messiah* in an anachronistic recital setting, with keyboard accompaniment rather than with orchestra, and even if, for reasons of expediency, one uses a modern piano rather than a Baroque continuo group, as in the present recording, it is still possible to make a choice between more or less historically informed alternatives. Consider, for example, the choice of edition. The following figure is from a standard keyboard reduction of the orchestration:

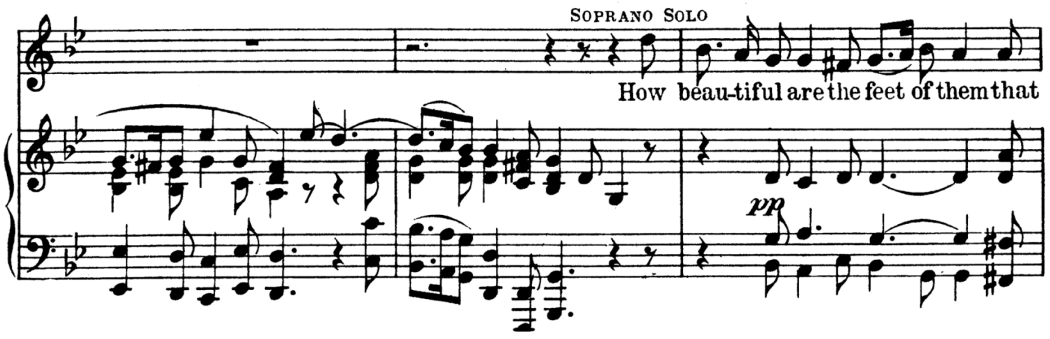


Figure 3. *Messiah*: "How Beautiful are the Feet," piano reduction by Ebenezer Prout.[3]

As demonstrated in Figure 3, the editor has created a piano accompaniment that suggests a far thicker orchestration than Handel's, which is actually quite sparse, limited here to two violins (mostly playing in unison) and continuo. The resulting two-part texture

[3] George Frederick Handel, M*essiah*, ed. Ebenezer Prout (New York: G. Schirmer, 1912).

allows the exposed vocal line to be the main focus. The version in Example 4 corresponds more closely to the texture of Handel's orchestration; the small notes represent how the keyboard player in Handel's orchestra might have lightly filled in the chords according to Handel's figured bass:

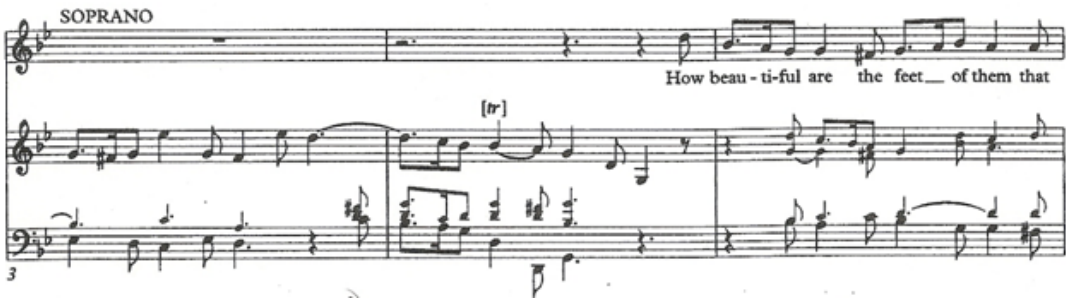


Figure 4. *Messiah*: "How Beautiful are the Feet," piano reduction by Watkins Shaw.[4]

[4] George Frederick Handel *Messiah*, ed. Watkins Shaw (London: Novello, 2003).

## Chapter 2

Jake Heggie (1961–): "Animal Passion" from *Natural Selection*

Jake Heggie is one of the most heralded of today's American composers. He is a one of the few contemporary composers who creates operas that are regularly performed in major opera houses. Heggie first rose to prominence in 2000 with his opera *Dead Man Walking*.

Heggie's works are highly melodic and draw from classical and non-classical sources. His biggest break came when while working in the public relations office for San Francisco. There he met his friend and muse, the famous mezzo-soprano, Frederica von Stade. Her championship of his works has been a major driving force in his career. Heggie's works favor vocal genres, which include four full-length operas, nineteen song cycles comprising over 200 art songs, three abridged opera scenes, and eight choral works. Heggie is inspired by jazz, musical theatre, gospel, dance genres as well as opera; these influences pervade his opera's, song cycles and instrumental works.[5]

Heggie admits to a wide range of influences stating, "In these songs, the singer encounters the full gamut of the influences I grew up with: folk music, jazz, pop, opera, rock, art song. I encourage performers to embrace these elements in the songs and not shy away from them. If it feels jazzy, well, it probably is."[6] This is particularly evident in "Animal Passion," which is highly theatrical and employs jazz harmony and dance

---

[5] Jake Heggie, "Jake Heggie Official Website." http://www.jakeheggie.com (Accessed September, 2010).

[6] Jake Heggie, *The Faces of Love* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Associated Music Publishers, 1999), Preface.

rhythms. The text alternates between literal references to cat-like preying ("Fierce as a bobcat's spring/With starting speeds of sixty miles per hour") and an intense desire for animal passion ("Want a lover to sep me off my feet/And slide me in the gutter/Without the niceties of small talk, roses, or champagne/…I want to be swallowed whole"). The singer becomes the predator, simultaneously stalking the listener and enticing him (or her?) to join her. Heggie exploits tango rhythms and jazz themes to create a highly sexualized, languorous atmosphere. Figure 5 shows a typical tango accompaniment in the left hand at mm. 68–69; also typical is the syncopation in the vocal line against straight eighth-notes in the right hand of the piano, and the vocal triplet in m. 70.

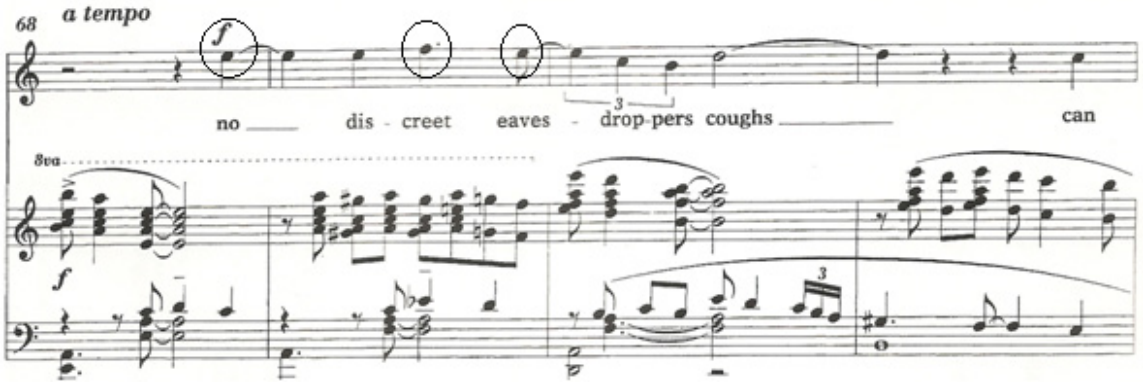


Figure 5. Heggie: "Animal Passion," mm. 68–71.

The highly evocative, mainly tonal melodic line, and the occasional use of dissonance combined with text painting directly references the style of impressionist composers around 1900. Figure 6 shows a climactic passage from this song. Note the juxtaposition of G (the vocal climax) and G# and the way Heggie builds tension and then suddenly

releases it, the voice plunging down to its lowest register and becoming softer.

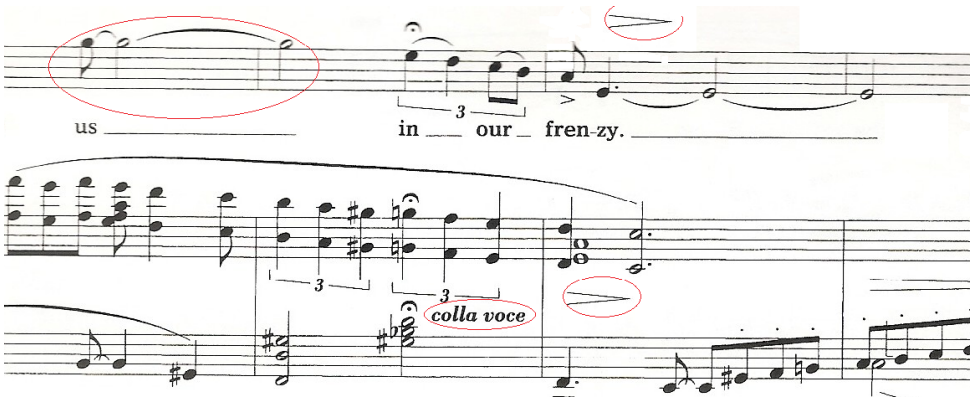


Figure 6. Heggie: "Animal Passion," mm. 72–74.

**Chapter 3**

Hector Berlioz (1803–1869): "La mort d'Ophélie"

Berlioz composed the art song "La morte d'Ophélie" in 1842, subsequently arranging it to accommodate orchestra, a lower voice, and a female choir. The poem by Legrouve is paraphrased from the Queen's speech in *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. The form of the poem is strophic; the music follows the poetic form by repeating the same melodic material several times with slight variation. The main melodic theme is based on a repeated motive, introduced in the piano at m. 26 and immediately taken up by the voice in m. 27. The recurrent use of the chromatic E-natural in place of the diatonic E-flat lends the theme an eerie, other-worldly quality entirely in keeping with Ophelia's "sweet tender madness" ("sa douce et tender folie") (see Figure 7).

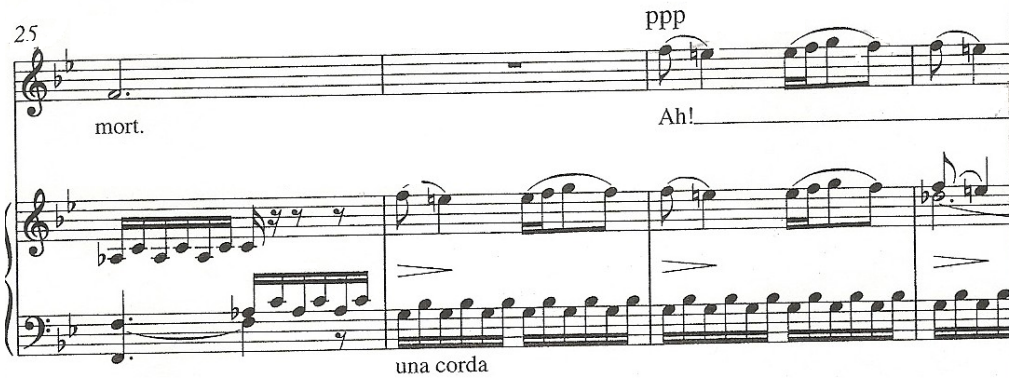


Figure 7: Berlioz: "La morte d'Ophélie," main motive.

This motive continues to sound even after the poor girl has sunk to her death, even though the text specifies that "this strange melody faded quickly; The dress weighed down by the waters/Soon into the deep abyss/Dragged the poor mad girl/Leaving hardly begun/Her melodious song" ("Mais cette étrange mélodie/Passa rapide comme un

son;/Par les flots la robe alourdie/Bientôt dans l'abîme profonde/Entraina la pauvre insensée,/Lasissant à peine commence/Sa mélodieuse chanson"). But earlier, Ophelia's song had been likened to a naiad's, "born in the midst of this torrent," and it is the naiad that takes over in the end. (In another famous art song drowning, the suicide at the end of Schubert's *Die Schöne Mullerin*, the final song of the cycle is the only one in which the poet/protagonist does not narrate an event and the emotional state it arouses; the river itself sings the hapless, love sick miller to sleep.)

Berlioz was an intensely passionate composer, choosing subjects that lay close to his heart; his works have an autobiographical aspect. The choice of Ophelia as a subject is a case in point; his first great love, whom he eventually married, was the Irish actress Harriet Smithson, best known for her passionate portrayals of Shakespeare's tragic heroines Juliet and Ophelia. Though Berlioz was smitten with her, he was surprisingly passive in his pursuit, preferring to nurture and sublimate his obsession. In his best-known work, the *Symphonie fantastique,* Harriet is the 'beloved' portrayed by a musical *idée fixe*, an obsessively recurrent theme found in every movement, as in Figure 8.[7]

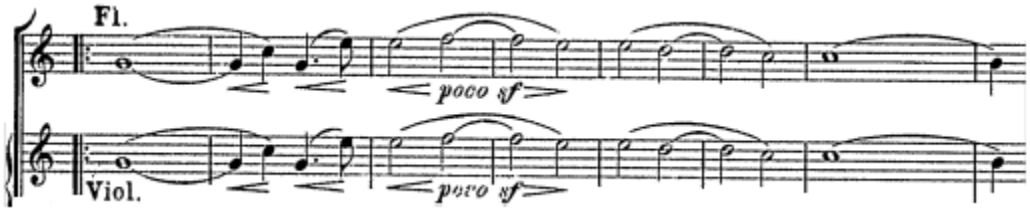


Figure 8. Berlioz: *Symphonie fantastique*, mm. 72–79

A major stylistic trait of Berlioz's writing is its rich texture. The piano in his art songs takes on the role of a full orchestra. In "La morte d'Ophélie," the piano depicts the

[7] Hugh Macdonald, *Berlioz* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 18.

undulating river, on the banks of which Ophelia picks the flowers that will soon form her funeral wreath (Example 9).


Figure 9. Berlioz:"La morte d'Ophélie," river motive.

This sixteenth-note motive only ceases at points of formal articulation, such as the end of the first strophe:

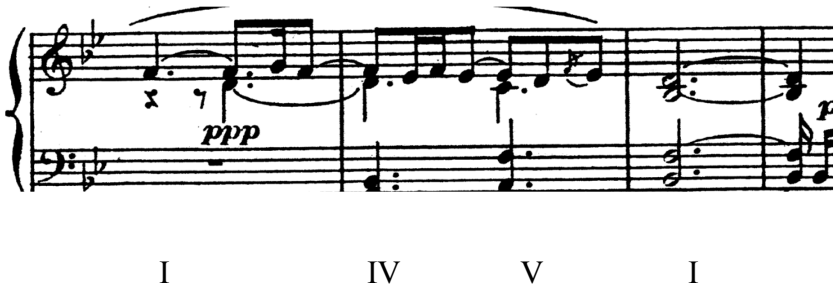


Figure 10. Berlioz: "La morte d'Ophélie," mm. 43–46.

Another example is the passage depicting Ophelia's drowning. At the point in the narrative when the breaking willow branch causes her to teeter and fall, the texture suddenly changes, and a pulsing eighth-note pattern take the place of the sixteenth notes. Finally, on the word *fall* ("tombe"), all motion abruptly stops, as the piano attacks *sforzando* and then sustains an A7 chord (Figure 11):

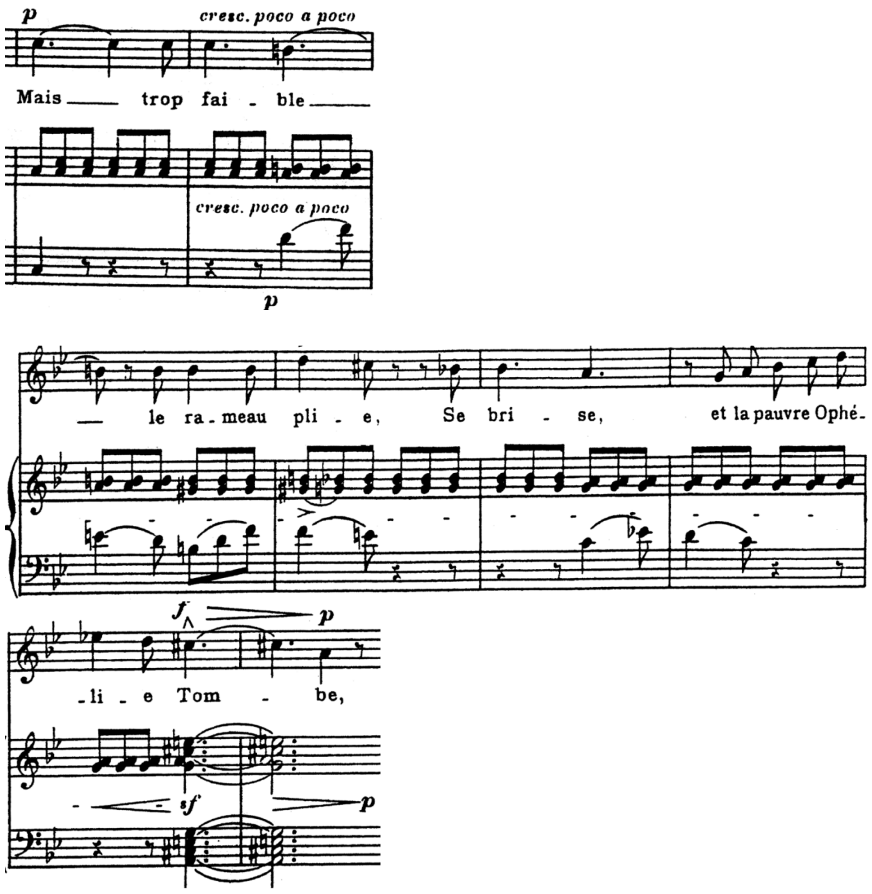


Figure 11. Berlioz: "La morte d'Ophélie," mm.67–73.

Rhythmic movement has driven the action up to now, and its sudden absence is startling. Rhythmic activity gradually returns after Ophelia's death, but now the music represents Naiads, who, in retrospect, we realize had been beckoning Ophelia all along.

Berlioz had a preference for mid-range female voices. In this piece, the voice never goes beyond a G5, the *tessitura* mostly lying between F3 and F4. The upper register is reserved for references to the Naiads. This *tessitura* is ideal for a either a high mezzo-soprano or a soprano with a strong lower range. He lamented that only high

sopranos were hired by the management at the *Opéra*. He believed that strong medium and lower registers were necessary for passionate and dramatic music.[8]

[8] Hugh MacDonald, "Berlioz and the Metronome," in *Berlioz studies*, ed. Peter Bloom (Cambridge, U.K., Cambridge University Press:), 95

**Chapter 4**

"Jung fru Blond och Jung fru Brunett" by Wilhelm Stenhammar

"Vingar i natten" by Ture Rangström

"Vingar i natten" and "Jungfru Blond och jung fru Brunett" are examples of the epoch of Swedish Romantic art song. Nordic art music is not as well known to the general audience as the art music of central and southern Europe. By the mid-nineteenth century, the myths of southern Europe had been exploited artistically to the point of over saturation. The poets, librettists, and composers of the south began to look northward for inspiration. The rich Scandinavian folk traditions provided new sources, as did the characteristics of the landscape—the dense forests, dark waters, fjords, mountains, and the curious phenomenon of the Aurora Borealis—that readily lent themselves to the darker psychological and mystic tendencies of the Romantic era. During the Romantic era, Nordic literature, art, and music became popularized.[9]

One of the difficulties facing the Nordic composers was extricating themselves from Germanic influence. Swedish composers had always been active, but they had tended to be epigones of German masters. The Danish composer Johan Peter Emelium Hartmann (1805–1900) was one of the first composers to cultivate a uniquely Scandinavian style. Evard Grieg's (1843–1907) style reflects the training he received in Leipzig, Germany. Nonetheless, by incorporating Norwegian folk tunes and folk music elements, including modality, drone basses, *slåtter* (folk) rhythms, and the imitation of Hardanger fiddle techniques (the Hardanger fiddle differs from the standard violin,

[9] Fredrick Key Smith, *Nordic Art Music* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 32.

having a lower action, a flatter finger board, and 8 or 9 strings), Grieg created a compositional style that is distinctly Nordic.[10] This set him apart from contemporaries who were still imitating German style. His enthusiasm for his native resources had such a tremendous impact on all other Nordic composers that came after him. Grieg's experiments with harmony exploited parallel chord motion, pedal points, and chord extensions (ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths). These would, in turn, influence the French impressionistic composers Debussy and Ravel, reversing the tide of influence. He was a master of art songs, composing over 200.[11] These works were compositionally complex and incredibly difficult.

After Grieg, the powerful influences of Liszt, Berlioz, Strauss, and Wagner crept into the work of Nordic composers. However, the Nordic style established by Grieg was so firmly entrenched that it was not easily displaced. It provided a point of reference for northern composers who wanted to escape Wagner's shadow. For Sibelius and Nielsen this escape was a herculean task, but was one they managed, while branching out and enriching the catalogue of Scandinavian art music.[12]

Early on, Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871–1927) struggled to establish his style against the looming shadow of Wagnerism, and many of his early works betray the Bayreuth master's influence. Later, he rejected Wagner in favor of stylistic eclecticism. His influences ranged from the classical models of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven to the Nordic influences of Grieg, and from Swedish Renaissance polyphony to the more recent

[10] Smith, 47.

[11] Smith, 50.

[12] Smith, 55.

works of his fellow Swede, Franz Berwald. Stenhammer integrated folk elements but avoided using specific quotations and derivations. He is considered the master of Romantic Swedish art song. He mostly set contemporary poets, Gustaf Fröding (1860–1911) and Bo Bergman (1869–1967) predominant among them. "Jungfru Blond och Jungfru Brunett" is a particularly dramatic art song. The text is based on a European folk tale about young ladies compulsively driven to dance to the point of exhaustion, which nearly kills them. The tale is widely disseminated in German and Nordic countries. The most common version of the tale is the Grimm Brother's, known as "The Twelve Princesses."

In the German version, the Princesses awake every morning exhausted with their shoes worn through as if they had been dancing the night away. Their father offers a reward to any man who can discover what is wrong with them. The princesses are found dancing in the forest at night with demon princes, magically exiting their home through their wardrobe. In most versions the fairy tale ends happily. This version, however, ends ominously. The light texture and polka-like rhythm suggests dancing young ladies, while the minor key evokes the demonic.

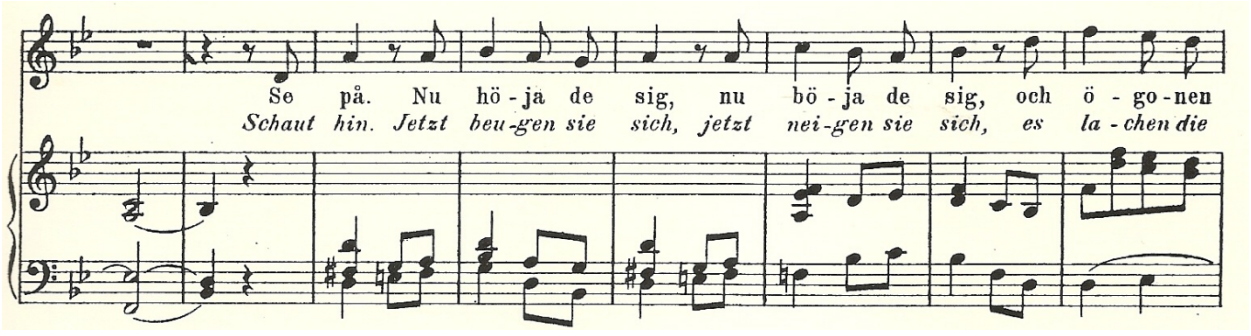


Figure 12. Stenhammer: "Jung fru Blond och Jung fru Brunett," mm. 23–30.

The poem alternates between active, animalistic descriptions of the ladies dancing and the cold, still isolation of their surroundings. The song opens with accented chords (on the text "Young blondes and young brunettes") that suggest a peremptory "invitation" to the dance (Figure 13).

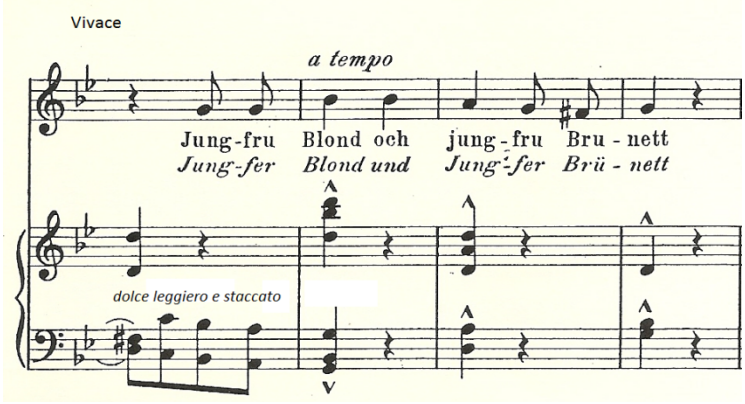


Figure 13. Stenhammer: "Jung fru Blond och Jung fru Brunett," opening.

What emerges is a descriptive but spare style, in which passages of rhythmically agitated dance, such as that shown in Figure 12, on the text "Look! Now they stand, now they bend, and the eyes light up, the heart palpitates, and the cheeks flush hotly", alternate with slower, bleaker, chordal passages that set the ominous descriptions of the cold winter night, "But over the meadow and the naked forest hangs a chill air", as in Figure 14.

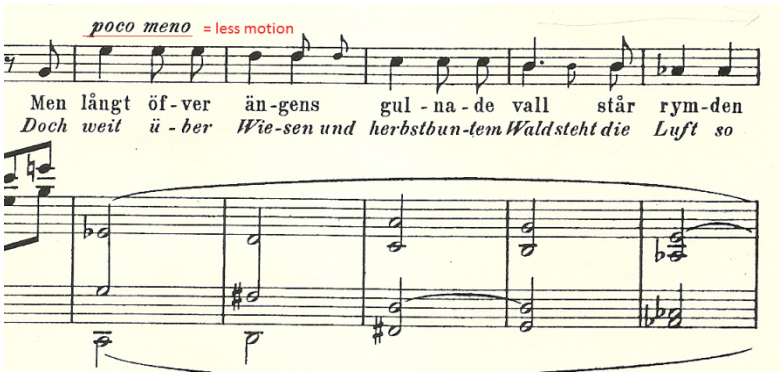


Figure 14. Stenhammer: "Jung fru Blond och Jung fru Brunett," mm. 40–45.

This contrast effectively divides the piece into alternating A and B sections. While the dance-like A sections are tonally straightforward, the B sections become increasingly chromatic. Figure 15 shows the end of the second B section, which arrives via a chromatic sequence to a tonicized A-flat minor, which stands in a remote tritone relation to the tonic D minor. The traditional symbolism of the tritone, the Medieval *diabolus in musica*, was surely not lost on Stenhammer. Stenhammer then immediate juxtaposes this remote A-flat with F#-major triad. Equally abrupt is the return from F# major to the tonic D minor. Such passages strain harmonic syntax to its breaking point.

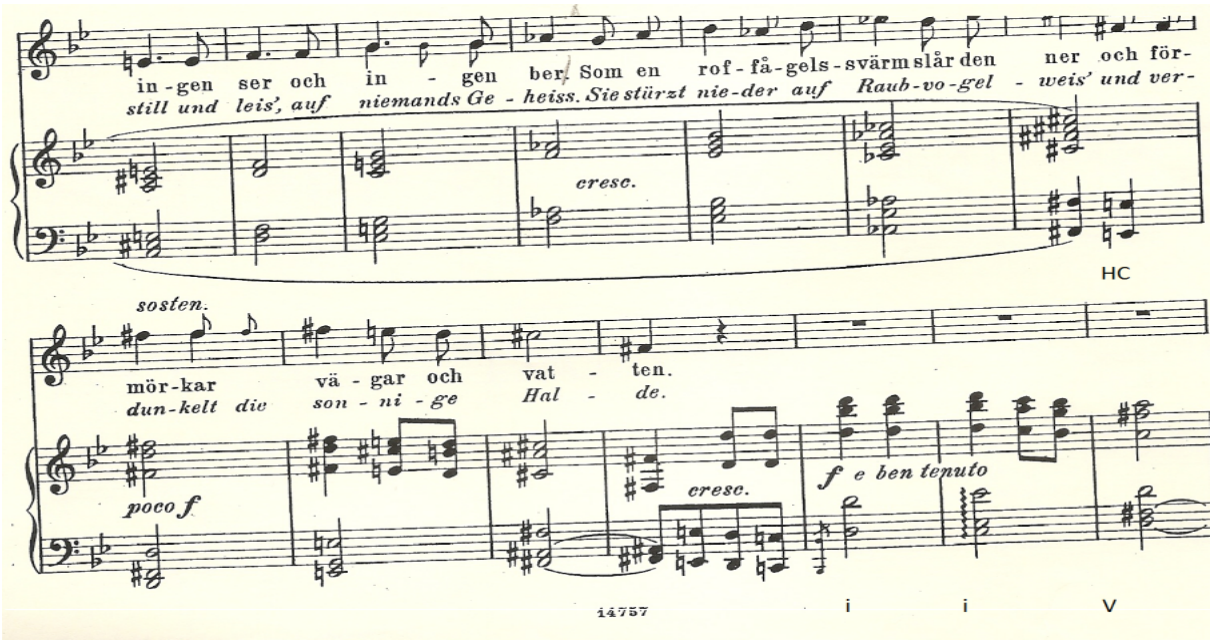


Figure 15. Stenhammer: "Jung fru Blonde och Jung fru Brunette," end of second B section.

The A sections depict the ladies dancing in mm.1–39, 53–62, 82–89, 101–152 and 167–187. They are uneven in length and are agitated in nature, except for the final A section, which features the hours draining away and the ladies fully falling completely under the spell of the evil elf in disguise. Typically a poem with stanzas, such as this one, would be composed in a strophic manner. In this case Stenhammar chooses contrasting meter, dynamics, and harmonic language to differentiate between the ladies dancing, their stark natural surroundings, and the evil spell under which they have fallen.

Ture Rangström (1884–1947) was educated in Stockholm but finished his education in Berlin and Munich. Rangström's corpus contains mostly works for voice and piano. His songs are very dramatic and indicative of his Swedish roots. Like Stenhammer, he set works by contemporaneous Swedish poets. His songs seem simple

and folk-like in nature but are exceedingly lyrical. This is evident in the poems by Bo Bergmann that he chose to set. “Vingar i natten” is an excellent example of an art song simulating a folk song, emphasizing every first and fourth beat of its lilting 6/8 meter through duration, dynamics, and a regular harmonic rhythm. In the following example, the change in vocal and bass register and the goal of the *crescendo* coincide on beat 4:

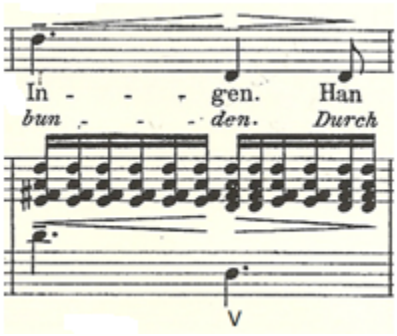


Figure 16. Rangström: “Vingar I natten,” m. 5.

The musical structure is relatively simple throughout the piece, which is reflective of the text’s straightforward nature. Each stanza begins on I and ends on V, a half cadence. This allows for each stanza to stand on its own while still having a sense of leading to the next section. The harmonic rhythm is leisurely, with chords changing infrequently. The only exception at mm. 17–25 (Figure 17), where the right hand of the piano does change harmonies every half measure, the rising progression suggesting the flight of the birds. But even here, the dominant pedal that sounds throughout the passage in the left hand conveys an inexorable stasis behind all this activity.

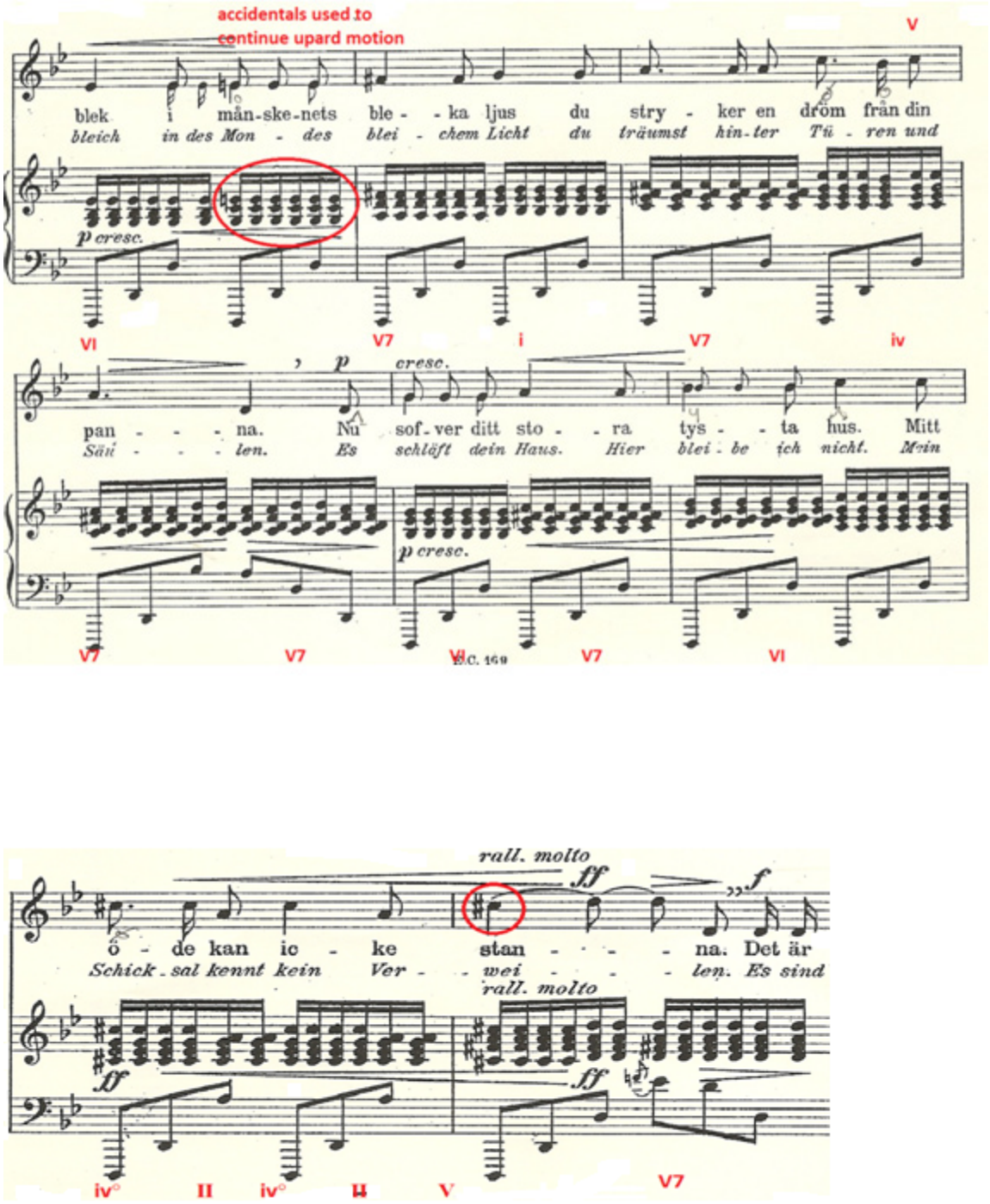


Figure 17: Rangström: "Vingar i natten," mm 17–25.

The musical language of both Rangström and Stenhammar is mostly straightforward, and they share an affinity for the poet Bo Bergman. Bergman was a

proponent of the decadent movement and highly influenced by the Gothicism of Edgar Allen Poe. He thought the universe devoid of meaning, and his poetry expresses a jaundiced world view. In "Jung fru," a tale that usually ends happily, with a young man discovering the maiden's secret rendezvous and putting an end to it, offers only the certainty that life is painful. Regardless of the outcome of their dancing, the girls will suffer. In "Vingar i natten," the bird and the speaker fail to find respite; they are resigned to their without trying to seek redemption. They share a disillusioned, fatalistic view of life.

## Chapter 5

Mozart's Muses

The female singers in Mozart's life inspired his operas in many ways. Some prima donnas inspired him through their failings, others by their virtuosic ability, and still others with their senses of humor. Understanding their personalities and abilities can suggest to modern singers how these roles might be approached.

Caterina Cavalieri created three of Mozart's lead female characters: Konstanze in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Madame Silberkang in *Der Schauspieldirektor*, and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*. She also sang the role of the Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro* in its Vienna revival. *Die Entführung* is a classic rescue opera with a Turkish setting, which was fashionable at the time. The hero Belmonte, assisted by his servant Pedrillo, attempts to save his beloved Konstanze and her servant Blonde from the seraglio of Pasha Selim. This opera is a *Singspiel* (literally "song play"), a type of German opera in which the action is propelled by spoken dialogue rather than recitative. This *Singspiel* happens to contain some of the most difficult arias written by Mozart, especially those arias written for Cavalieri. Mozart was familiar with her vocal prowess and wrote the arias to show off her considerable coloratura skills.

It has been debated, both among his contemporaries and by modern critics, whether Mozart, in his desire to please his diva, may have compromised his melodic integrity. Mozart himself did acknowledge that he "sacrificed Konstanze's arias to the flexible throat of Madame Cavalieri….I tried to be expressive as an Italian bravura aria will

permit."[13] But in fact, this opera as a whole contains a great deal of vocal ornamentation, even in arias entrusted to the *buffa* or comic characters, who more typically did not sing extensive coloratura.

Bravura arias were meant to show off the singer and were typically reserved for the prima donnas and their male counterparts, who were the romantic leads. The artistic sacrifice was not made for just Cavalieri but also to meet the expectations of Viennese society. While there is a great deal of coloratura, Mozart did not fail to infuse each character with a specific personalities to effectively differentiate one from another. Konstanze is a noble woman with a delicate constitution and emotional temperament. The athleticism of her arias, as shown in Figure 18, might seem to belie her station and character, but here, she displays the heroic aspect of her aristocratic upbringing. The Pasha may have captured her, but she will not be his sexual slave, preferring to endure whatever tortures he may have in store for her.

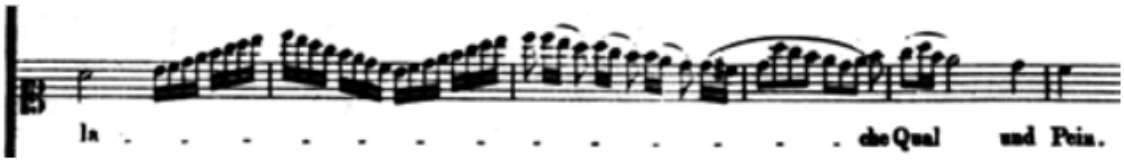


Figure 18. Mozart: "Martern aller Arten."

Caterina Cavalieri was subsequently featured in *Der Schauspieldirektor* (*The Impresario*). Mozart created this *Singspiel* as his entry in a musical contest with Salieri, his rival composer. The contest was sponsored by the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II.

[13] David Cairns, *Mozart and his Operas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 87.

Ironically, Cavalieri was Salieri's mistress. Gottlieb Stephanie, an actual Austrian Schauspieldirektor, was the librettist. The story pits Madame Silberklang, a prima donna played by Cavalieri, against Madame Hers, a rival played by Aloysius Weber, Mozart's sister-in-law. In real life the singers were indeed rivals, adding an additional level of humor. The war of egos featured the formidable coloratura skills of both sopranos, hilariously displayed in a duet in which they attempt to outdo one another, rising higher and higher into their respective ranges. This hilarious takeoff of prima donna behavior demonstrates that Cavalieri was not a typical *opera serial* singer; she was funny and could act. Perhaps this is why the multifaceted diva's next role with Mozart was the hybrid *serial buffa* character Donna Elvira.

In *Don Giovanni* Cavalieri premiered the role of Donna Elvira. *Don Giovanni* is a *drama giocoso*, an operatic hybrid containing both serious and comic elements. *Don Giovanni* is the story of the great lover Don Juan. With his faithful man servant, Leporello, Giovanni seduces (and perhaps even rapes on occasion) his way through Europe. His many women include the three female characters of the opera: Donna Elvira, Donna Anna, and Zerlina. The main instigating act of the opera is the killing of Donna Anna's father, Commendatore, while he is attempting to protect her from Giovanni. The main plot of the opera is the search for the Commendatore's killer and Donna Anna's alleged rapist (what exactly happened between her and the Don is left open to question).

The opera features typical *seria* characters, Donna Anna and her fiancé Don Ottavio, and typical buffa characters, Zerlina, Masetto and Leporello. *Don Giovanni* reveals Mozart's ability to marry tragic/*seria* elements and comical/*buffa* elements in the mixed

characters of Donna Elvira and Don Giovanni. The comic elements found in these characters serve to highlight their tragic aspects. In the original libretto, Donna Elvira was always a principal female character, but Caterina Cavalieri demanded the part be larger. She asked that for an additional aria to showcase her vocalism.[14] Mozart's responded with the insertion aria "Mi tradi quell alma ingrata" ("That ungrateful soul betrayed me"), an aria rife with pathos. The aria demonstrates the intense pain Giovanni's betrayal has caused her (she had been a nun who renounced her vows to marry him) and the inner conflict that her abiding love, intermingled with pity, arouses. Even if she cannot win him back, she hopes to save his immortal soul from hell.

The aria's place in the opera is flexible, as its placement depends on the production, and it is sometimes omitted altogether. Omission of this aria would do a disservice to the opera and to Donna Elvira's character. "Mi tradi" does not solely give a prima donna another featured aria; rather, it shows us the psychological damage Don Giovanni has inflicted on her, highlighting a cruelty that is otherwise glossed over in the opera's broader comic moments. He refers to her a crazy lady to discredit her revelations to the other women that he is a falsehearted apostate.

The other arias written for her character, "Ah, fuggi il traditor" ("Flee from the traitor") and "Ah, chi mi dice mai" ("Ah, who could tell me"), depict her as a shrill, one-note character bent only on revenge, giving the illusion the Don Giovanni is indeed correct in his assessment of her as a madwoman. "Mi Tradi" rounds out her character by adding another emotional layer. Donna Elvira has demonstrated recklessness by having allowed herself to be seduced by Giovanni. She is redeemed by the human sincerity

[14] Eric Blom, "The problem of 'Don Giovanni," *Music and Letters* 13/4 (1932): 381.

found in “Mi Tradi,” without which she is merely a rougher version of Donna Anna, similarly bent on revenge. The aria alternates passages of long breathed coloratura with broken melodic lines representing her sobbing (see Figure 19).

a. Long line


b. Sobbing broken lines caused by being overcome with emotion

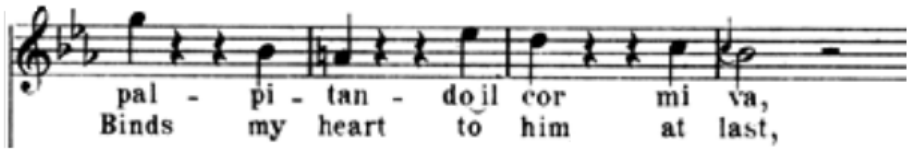


Figure 19. Mozart: “Mi tradi quell ‘alma ingrate.”

Also a hybridized character is Pamina, from Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, another *Singspiel*. While Donna Elvira’s complexity lies in her anguish, sincerity is the dominating personality of Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*. Pamina was first portrayed by the seventeen-year-old Anna Gottlieb, who had created the small role of Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro*. The character is an excellent example of the ultimate evolution of the hybridized *prima donna/buffa/seria* character exemplified by Donna Elvira. The obvious differences between the hybrid characters and the typical *seria* characters are the long lyrical lines typical of the latter (see Figure 20). Pamina’s multifaceted personality, sweet, endearing, strong and willful, allows a level of complexity typically not seen in a *seria* character.

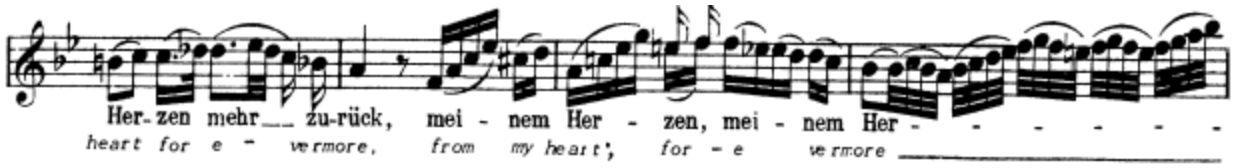


Figure 20. Mozart: Pamina's aria "Ach ich fuhls."

Pamina is noble in character and station, very typical of the *seria* soprano, but hers is a more fully realized personality.

In the duet "Bei Männern," the comic bird seller Papageno tells Pamina that the Egyptian prince Tamino is in love with her and is coming to save her from the clutches of the apparently malevolent high priest Sarastro. Pamina sympathizes with the lonely Papageno, who longs for a love of his own. This duet is an ode to conjugal, a love that is honorable and "sweetens every torment." This love duet is unusual in that the man and woman singing it are not in love with one another. Because of its platonic nature it becomes an abstract anthem to the relationship between man and wife and its sacred nature. This scene emphasizes that Pamina is the atypical heroine. She is not being rescued in any classical sense of the word. She offers consolation to her would-be rescuer, Papageno, effectively taking charge of the situation and speaking at this level.

Eventually, Papageno does find a love—a bird woman just like him but with a feminized version of his name. They are so happy, that at first, during the beginning of their duet they can do no more than stutter each other's names:

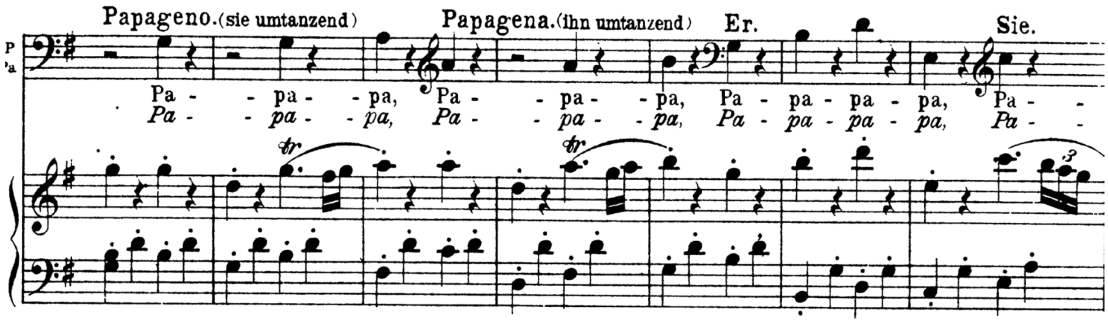


Figure 21. Mozart: "Papageno, Papagena," mm. 9–15.

They recover from their shock and sing of how happy they will be. They exchange soaring but brief melodic phrases, creating a musical version of finishing each others' sentences:

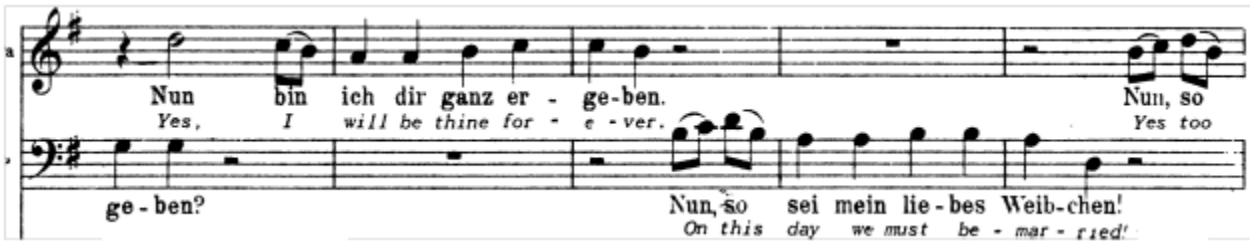


Figure 22. Mozart: "Papageno, Papagena," mm. 27–31.

They begin arguing about whether they will have little Papagenos or Papagenas; their frustration at not agreeing is heightened by the percussive, nearly staccato action of their repetitive Papagenos and Papagenas (Figure 23). Because of the difficulty involved in repeating so many consonants quickly, the tendency for the singers is to get faster and faster, but that fails to emphasize the duets percussive quality.

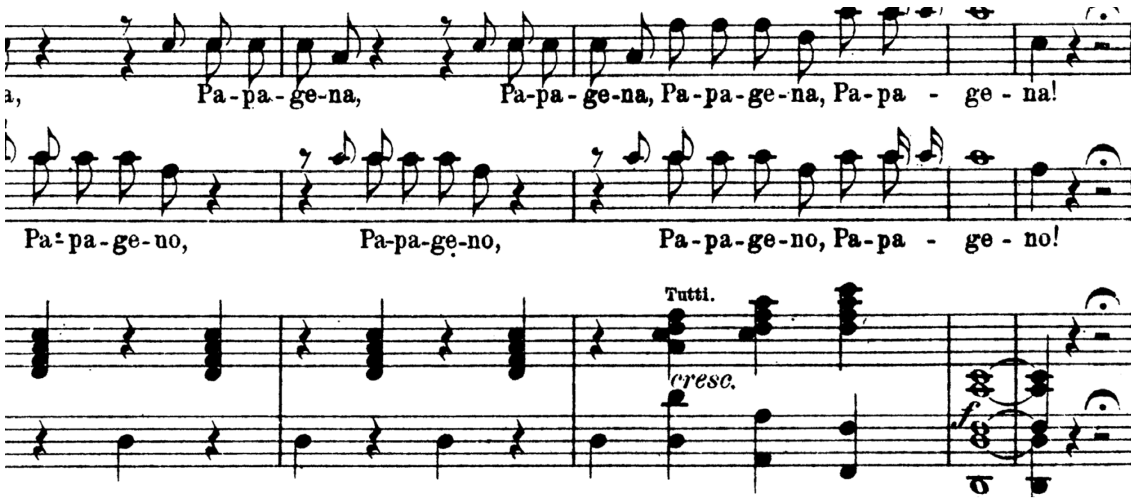


Figure 23. Mozart: "Papageno, Papagena," mm. 68–72.

Their anger is short lived and they quickly make up. Papagena is depicted almost entirely from the perspective of her male counterpart, since she is actually on stage for only a short time. Papageno is the natural man and she is the natural woman. Their duet contains patter singing, highlighting their *buffa* comic element, indicative of their type. As Mozart's style evolves we find his *buffa* characters staying less and less inside their prescribed limitations. They hold their own, in terms of complexity, against the *seria/*hybrid characters. They are so well written and complex that they have transcended their humble beginnings to become some of Mozart's most beloved characters.

This is particularly true of the clever maid Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*). The arias written for her character are "Deh vieni non tardar, o gioja bella" ("Oh come without delay, my beautiful joy"), "Venite inginochiatevi" ("Come kneel in front of me"), and "Un moto di gioia" ("O joyous emotion"). Susanna, a *buffa* character, is one of the most well-developed female roles Mozart and his librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte created. Susanna is on stage for almost the entire opera and is the protagonist that brings about the final resolution. She is witty, funny, and very charming. These qualities

are directly derived from the personality of the soprano for whom she was created, Nancy Ann Storace.

Storace had an affinity for pranks and dirty jokes, a trait she shared with Mozart. She was one of the finest singing actresses of her time. Storace's sense of humor and consummate acting skills inspired Mozart and Da Ponte to create a role that dominated the opera. She inspired Mozart to tip the balance in favor of the *buffa* character, normally a secondary female character. In *Le nozze* he fully exploited her charm and acting ability. She was a *buffa* singer, and the acting and movement required of her sharply contrasts with what was required in the prima donna, which was essentially nothing but to "stand and sing." What was required of the *seria* singer was virtuosic displays, seemingly improvised embellishments, and very little else. A *buffa* had to act, actually move on stage, and have spot-on comic timing, all while singing. Nancy's considerable talent and charm assured that any Susannas that came after her would be met with a significant challenge.

The libretto of *Le nozze* is derived from a Beaumarchais play about the volatile class politics surrounding servants and masters. *Le nozze* concerns Count Almaviva's desire to enforce the *jus primae noctis*, or the right to spend the first night after marriage with the bride. In this case, the bride is Susanna. He had previously abolished the right, fulfilling a promise made to Rosina, whom he had married in the earlier Beaumarchais play *The Barder of Seville.* But the Count, besotted with Susanna, regrets having done away with tradition. The play was banned by the Austrian Emperor Josef because of its inflammatory content. The underlying theme of the play is that aristocrats are incredibly fallible and, in some cases, stupid. The play emphasizes class injustice; the ruling class

does not deserve its position. The servant class is clever, wily, and able to easily put one over on their supposed masters. The changes made in order to allow the play's operatic adaptation performance served to emphasize the humanity of the story.[15]

Susanna is aware of the Count's designs on her and plots with the Countess and the page boy Cherubino to foil his plans. What follows are multiple cases of mistaken identity and a significant quantity of plotting done with the intention of exposing the Count, so that he will see the error of his ways.

In the Act IV aria "Deh vieni," Susanna is waiting in a garden for Figaro, whom she married earlier that day, but she is dressed as the Countess. It is a dark night, and Susanna and the Countess have switched places to trap the Count. The Count has planned a tryst with Susannah, but it is his own wife that he will try to seduce. Figaro sees Susanna dressed as the Countess and thinks she is using this disguise to cover a secret meeting with the Count. He remains hidden, or so he thinks, with the hope that he might surprise her infidelity. Susanna, of course, knows he is there and uses the aria simultaneously to arouse his jealousy and to profess her love for Figaro (although Figaro believes the words are meant for someone else). The aria is transformed from a simple love song, with a pure melodic vocal line, to a more complex artifact because of the feigned deception. The emphasis on the key word "*vieni*" or "come" is achieved by lengthening its note value (see Example 24), making it the point of emphasis in each phrase in which it appears. This draws in the listener, just as it is meant to beckon Susanna's lover.

[15] Christopher Benn, *Mozart on the Stage* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1946), 31.

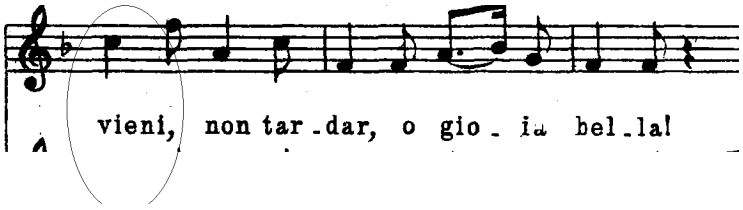


Figure 24. Mozart: "Deh vieni non tardar."

"Venite inginochiatevi" highlights the movement and acting skills required of a *buffa*; it effectively displays Storace's talent for moving, acting and singing simultaneously. This action, coupled with the patter (i.e., one note per syllable) that is present throughout makes it a typical buffa aria (see Figure 25).

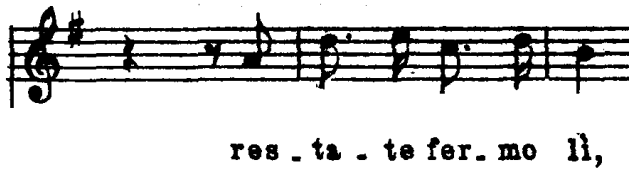


Figure 25. Mozart: "Venite inginochiatevi," *nota e parole* or one note per syllable.

Susanna pets, plots, teases, and harasses Cherubino while dressing him up. The aria is not a vocal showcase, but it is a showcase for acting and interacting. Nancy was an exceptional actress and acquitted the aria to great acclaim. The libretto the action of the aria clearly, and there is quite a bit of it.

When the opera was revived, Storace was unavailable to resume her role and Adrianna Ferrarese stepped in as Susanna. Insertion arias were necessary to take the place of "Venite" and "Deh vieni," because her skills did not lend themselves to these arias. Ferrarese was a *seria* singer and unaccustomed to interacting with other people while singing and, for that matter, unaccustomed to actually moving on stage while

singing. She possessed an uneven instrument and was utterly devoid of any dramatic skills.

Adriana later premiered the role of Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* to great praise. In *Così* Mozart was able to develop a character for Ferrarese from the beginning, creating a role tailored to Adrianna's limitations and strengths, even turning her limitations into strengths.[16] For *Così* Mozart created a role tailored to her wooden acting ability, vocal range, and the bravura devices she favored. Her preferred bravura device involved swooping down from the top of her range to her chest voice, which was formidable. This is featured extensively in Fiordiligi's music (see Example 26). To a less dramatic degree, it is also found in "Un moto di gioia" which replaced "Venite" in Act Two of *Nozze* (see Figure 27).

"Venite" required the singer to dress Cherubino while being funny, which Adrianna could not do.[17] "Un moto" requires very little acting and movement; Susanna need only stand apart from the rest of the scene and sing, which is typical of *opera seria* dramaturgy. The aria contains much longer lines than "Venite," and with opportunities for Adrianna's famous swoops.

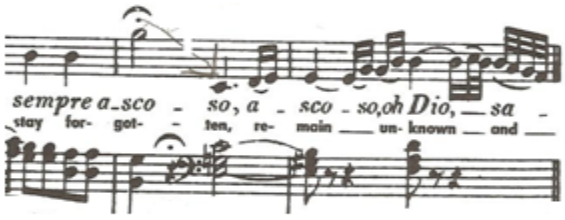


Figure 26. Mozart: "Per pietà, ben mio," from *Cosi fan tutte*.

[16] Patricia Lewy Gidwitz, "Mozart's Fiordigligi: Adrianna Ferrarese del Bene," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8/3 (1996): 199.
[17] Gidwitz, 198.

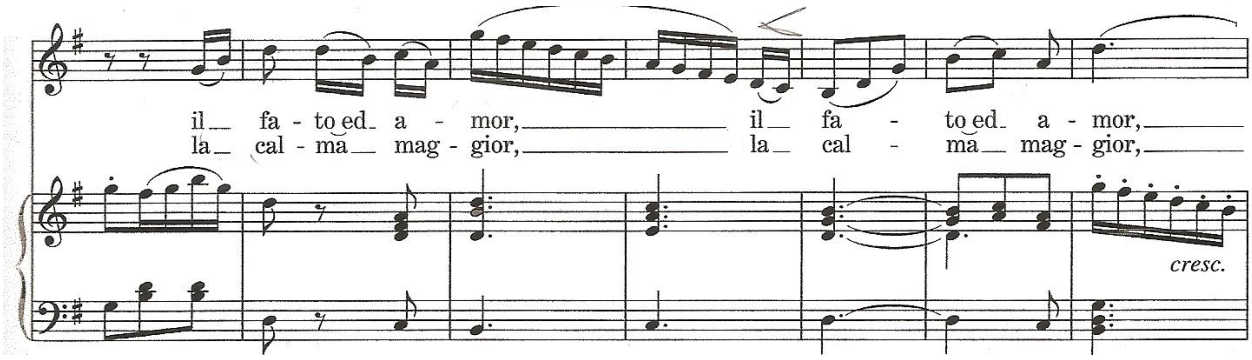


Figure 27. Mozart: "Un moto di gioia."

Though its melodic phrases are not as formidably long as those written for the role of Fiordiligi, "Un Moto" is distinctly different from the aria it replaced, which mostly stayed within the buffa tradition of *nota e parola*, assigning one musical note per syllable, which emphasizes the more speech-like nature buffa singing. "Un Moto" contains multiple notes per syllable and *fioritura* on single syllables for the sake of vocal display (see Figure 27).

While Adrianna lacked the true high notes in her top register that most *seria* singers commanded, she had a fearsome chest voice. The *tessitura* for her arias is wide-ranging, but the bulk of takes place in the middle voice. Her music employs bravura devices intended to impress but stays closely within her limited range. In *Le nozze* Mozart does his best to marry Adrianna's bravura needs to Suzanna's more buffa character. Though he succeeds in writing beautiful music, he fails to retain Susanna's multi-dimensionality. In *Così* he actually exploits Adrianna's inability to act and her unique vocal abilities to create Fiordiligi, a character who is comically wooden. Mozart took pride in his ability to tailor arias and roles to a singer, and in the case of *Così* he uses

this ability to create a role for a limited singer who in the end would find much less success with other composers.

"Ch'io mi scordi di te?" ("You Ask that I Forget You?") is a concert aria written for Nancy Storace's Vienna farewell concert, which was held in February 1787. The aria's text is excerpted from *Idomeneo*, libretto by Giambattista Varesco with revisions by Lorenzo Da Ponte. This work is unlike any of the other arias written for Nancy Storace, and at first glance more closely resembles a *seria* singer's *bravura* aria than a *buffa* aria. It contains copious amounts of coloratura, and we can hear how Mozart used this opportunity to provide his friend and collaborator with a spectacular send off. The choice of text is appropriate to the occasion. The singer assures her interlocutor, "You ask that I forget you…. fear nothing my love my heart will always be yours." The text is code for Mozart and Storace's relationship.

The aria is a scene in and of itself, containing a wide emotional range: despair, ardent love, and anger at the gods. It employs tempi changes. The *seria* nature of the aria creates a curious anomaly in Nancy's repertoire, but upon close examination there are numerous catch breaths built into the music; a *seria* singer would prefer longer, unbroken melodic lines. In Figure 28 the catch breaths are indicated by arrows. The singer is able to sneak in breaths between phrases.

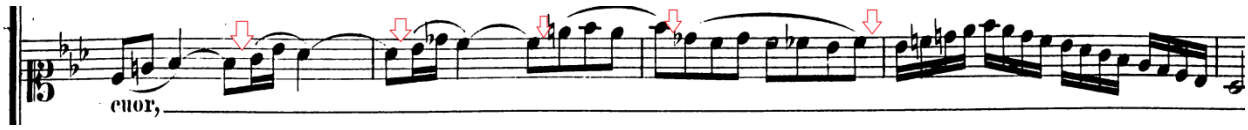


Figure 28. Mozart: "Ch'io mi scordi."

These catch breaths are necessary for a singer of Nancy's type to negotiate the extensive coloratura and rise above the complicated, richly textured accompaniment. Mozart himself accompanied Nancy during that farewell concert. The formidable combination surely must have left a major imprint on Vienna, precisely what Mozart had intended for his dear friend's farewell concert.

REFERENCES


Benn, Christopher. *Mozart on the Stage*. London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1946.

Blom, Eric. "The Problem of 'Don Giovanni'," *Music and Letters* 13/4 (October, 1932)

Cairns, David. *Mozart and His Operas*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006.

Gidwitz, Patricia Lewy. "Mozart's Fiordigligi: Adrianna Ferrarese del Bene," *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 8/3 (1996): 199.

Grout, Donald J. *A Short History of Opera.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

Handel, George Frederick. *Messiah*. Edited by Ebenezer Prout. New York: G. Schirmer, 1912.

Handel, George Frederick. *Messiah*. Edited by Watkins Shaw. London: Novello, 2003.

Heggie, Jake. "Jake Heggie Official Website." http://www.jakeheggie.com (Accessed September,2010).

Heggie, Jake. *The Faces of Love*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Associated Music Publishers,1999.

Hicks, Anthony. "Rinaldo." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians On-Line*. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com. (Accessed January 28, 2012.)

Macdonald, Hugh . *Master Musicians: Berlioz.* London: Oxford University Press, 1982.

"Berlioz and the Metronome." In *Berlioz Studies*, edited by Peter Bloom. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Serwer, Howard. "Handel, Jennens and Messiah." In *Handel studies*, edited by Richard G. King. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 1998.