SECOND EDITION

OPERA COACHING

Professional Techniques for the Répétiteur

Alan Montgomery

OPERA COACHING

Opera Coaching: Professional Techniques for the Répétiteur, Second Edition, is an update to the first practical guide for opera coaches when working with opera singers to help them meet the physical and vocal demands of a score in order to shape a performance. Opera coaching remains a mystery to many musicians. While an opera coach (or répétiteur) is principally tasked with ensuring singers sing the right notes and words, the coach's purview extends well beyond pitches and pronunciation. The opera coach must have a full understanding of human physiognomy and the human voice, as well as a knowledge of the many languages used in Western vocal music and over four centuries of opera repertoire – all to recognize what must happen for success when a singer steps on stage.

NEW to this second edition:

- New and updated chapters throughout, featuring new discussions on large ensembles, twenty-first-century demands, and more.
- Deeper investigation of the styles of and problems posed by particular operas.
- Revised chapter structure that allows for an expanded and progressive emphasis on technical work.

Modern singers have bemoaned the scarcity of good vocal coaches and conductors – those who understand voices and repertoire alike. *Opera Coaching: Professional Techniques for the Répétiteur*, Second Edition, demystifies the role of the opera coach, outlining the obstacles facing both the opera singer and the coach who seeks to realize the performer's full potential.

Alan Montgomery was the Assistant Music Director of the Oberlin Opera Theater for thirty-three years. He has coached a plethora of major singers, such as Denyce Graves, Derrick Lee Ragin, Daniel Okulitch, Todd Thomas, Limmie Pulliam, Edward Parks, and Elizabeth de Shong.

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Second Edition

Alan Montgomery

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PREFACE

The trained pianist can make a good living and have a respectable career in many areas of music, opportunities that many pianists do not consider. The professional accompanist is one of those – about which more in later pages. The pianist might also consider playing in chamber music, the repertoire for which is extensive and certainly not easy just because it is accompaniment. As examples, Richard Strauss's Sonata for Violin and Piano and Tchaikovsky's Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano are incredibly difficult to play.

The orchestral pianist has another viable and difficult repertoire to tackle. It includes "Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy," which is easy, and Shostakovich's Symphony #1 or Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, *neither* of which are easy.

Some pianists have trouble memorizing music, while others unfortunately have nerves which don't let them perform in public, even in ensembles. There are other avenues to let the talent of these pianists blossom. One such field is the area of opera coaching, a job that remains a mystery to many musicians. The definition is simple, but it doesn't explain the full scope of what can become a wonderful career.

In sports, people understand what a pitching coach does. Or they know what a free-throw coach addresses – at least in principle. All sports have areas that specialists address. I was not created to coach any of those!

A music coach helps musicians learn music, although the help they provide is not usually of a technical nature. That work is reserved for the vocal or instrumental teacher. The coach leads the musicians being coached to consider such things as articulation, phrasing, balance, tempo, intonation, stylistic concerns, dynamics, and even the overall shape of a piece.

Anyone who thinks coaching opera is an easy task does not realize the size of the repertoire or the depth of it. The first opera was written back in the 1600s, and the first "standard repertoire" opera is from 1642 – *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (*The Coronation of Poppea*) by Claudio Monteverdi. Since new operas were written in 2019, that means we have over 400 years of opera. That is a huge spread of time for opera literature.

True enough, there are specialists in certain eras and nationalities of music, but opera coaches frequently are called upon to understand them all. It is to that end that I wrote this book, revising it now for a second edition. This edition will dive more deeply than the first edition into the assortment of styles and problems some operas cause. Difficulty of performance is not reserved only

for *modern* operas, but I will deal more extensively than previously with operas that aim toward the twenty-first century.

Instrumentalists also cover a wide repertoire and a music coach can help them immensely, but learning the notes and style doesn't mean they play everything from memory, in the same way that almost all singers perform. And instrumentalists don't have to deal with multiple languages.

The opera coach, Korrepetitor, or répétiteur must make sure the singers sing not only the right pitches, pronouncing the words correctly, but also that they know what they're singing about. Supertitles may help an audience understand what is sung, but they do not excuse the singer from doing their homework. Singers need to know the text well enough to understand and put across the nuances in the verbal text.

Here are two examples of the importance of singers understanding what they are singing. In Puccini's *Turandot*, in Act 3, when Liù sings her plaintive aria "Tu, che di gel sei cinta" ("You, who are girded in ice"), the first word is set off from the others. In English-speaking countries, we don't realize that "tu" (thou) is the informal word for "you" (formal). For a slave girl to address a princess, "voi" (formal form) would be usual. But, by having Liù sing "tu," Puccini makes clear that she is speaking woman to woman, disregarding the standing of royalty to slave. Liù needs to understand this, as must Turandot. Yet Turandot frequently stands there, keeping her haughty resolve, not registering in any way the nuanced affront to her dignity. I didn't understand this for several years of coaching the opera. When I realized the difference, I checked my hunch out with an Italian conductor friend, and she said I was correct.

In Act 1 of *Yevgeny Onegin* (*Eugene Onegin* in English), Lensky sings a delightful ariette (small aria) to Olga. In the first verse he sings "Ya, lyubyu vas, ya lyubyu vas, Olga" ("I love you, I love you, Olga"). The "you" is the formal form. In the second verse, after singing some more impassioned measures in between, he changes it to "Ya lyubyu, tebya." Using "tebya" (informal "thee") is a conscious choice to become more intimate with Olga. English speakers, if they use "thou" at all, consider it to be formal, which is the opposite of all European usage.

Such niceties of language do not readily make themselves known to us all. Singers sometimes need help understanding the duplicity of Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the political savvy of Cavaradossi in *Tosca*, or even how happy Flute is in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when his off-pitch singing in Act 3 finally stumbles into the correct pitch.

Obtaining the guidance of a coach in so many areas of singing is one of the problems encountered by most singers. The knowledge is not hard to acquire, but it has not been passed along. There is also so much of it! Many singers of the last quarter century have bemoaned the fact that good vocal coaches and conductors, those who really know and understand voices and repertoire, are so difficult to find.

In this edition, I will usually use the term opera coach for the following reason: Korrepetitor (German) and répétiteur (French) tend to make the reader translate them as repeater. That would be someone who repeats the lesson or music to be learned until the singer learns it by rote. The learning process was once done much in that fashion, but, as what I've already said indicates, learning a role goes much deeper than that. This volume will deal with many of the problems facing a coach. It should help the pianist interested in this field find ways to open the door to a rewarding and lengthy career, one which requires little musical memory work, few performances – unless pressed into accompanying or occasionally playing the harpsichord in recitatives of Monteverdi, Handel, Mozart, Rossini, and Stravinsky. It does require imagination, learning to follow a conductor, and long hours in rehearsals – all of these with seemingly limitless endurance and good humor.

I once attempted singing roles. Initially these were small roles – the Fool in *Wozzeck*, for example – and then I moved up – literally – to the tenor leads in *Rigoletto*, *Così fan tutte*, *La Bohème*,

and even *La fille du régiment*, the aria from which has nine high Cs. I wish someone had been a stronger coach for me. No, I can't do those roles anymore, but I'm happy to say those experiences led me to a far better understanding about what must happen when a singer steps on stage.

In the time since my book was first published, I've had various people give opinions about how I can improve my attempts to explain coaching opera, and I hope that many of them are covered in this second edition. In 2006, few twenty-first-century operas were available for perusal, but many more are now gracing the stages of opera houses. Those not in print do exist in recordings. Thus, a new chapter is included near the end of the book where the challenges these new works present are brought to the fore.

Enjoy the book and realize how exciting being an opera coach can be.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I dedicate this book to my mother and father. They did not always understand what an opera coach does any better than many other people do, but they always supported my efforts and took pride that I could do them. For that, I cannot give them enough thanks and love.

I include Dr. Victoria Vaughan, Judith Layng, Tibor Kozma, Ronald Wachholtz, Jonathon Field, Steven Daigle and many others in this dedication, because they gave me the understanding of a level of music making in opera and musicals that is vast and endlessly entertaining. I must also mention Daniel Michalak, whose work in a studio next to mine frequently led to discussions on how to understand scores, particularly those of the newer schools.

PART I
Techniques

This section begins with the entry-level job of collaborative pianist for accompanying in auditions and possibly for recitals. Then it covers the basic techniques needed to coach soloists and ensembles. It also covers how to accompany rehearsals. Although there will be specific areas covered for certain composers, most of those stylistic differences will be covered in Part II. The chapters have been broken down into smaller units for this revised edition in the hope that locating references to solutions will be easier.

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1
AUDITIONS

Accompanying and Playing for Auditions – The Collaborative Pianist

An important introduction to playing for singers is accompanying voice lessons and playing for auditions, either live or recorded. The best accompanists help establish steady rhythmic sense, allowing the singer to have a strong sense of where the pulse of the music is. A good accompanist can also bring out colors in the piano that allow a singer to become acutely aware of orchestral colors that are part of the accompaniment, even if the score is not a reduction. Solo repertoire also has references to orchestral sounds. For example, the opening of Beethoven's E♭ Major sonata, "Les Adieux," is definitely a reference to "horn fifths" – those notes naturally available in the overtone series of a French horn.

During the activity of accompanying, a pianist becomes aware of dramatic and musical aspects that comment on what the singer sings. During rehearsals, a pianist and singer can discuss such things, giving reason to why singers choose to stretch certain phrases or have trouble pronouncing certain texts. A singer sometimes needs to tell the pianist why they want to underline a text for emphasis – which is accomplished by either slowing down or a change in dynamics. Accompanists need to feel at ease about offering ideas, both musical and dramatic, on a piece, ideas a singer might not otherwise consider. These moments become the entry into the realm of coaching.

An accompanist might, at such moments, impress on the singer reasons why they *can't* slow down. This may involve aspects of style, form, or even dramatic utterance. There is some literature in which the singer's ideas rule and other literature where the composer and structure take precedence. Accompanists learn to understand these problems well, because they must support the singer through those musical points. The more pianists accompany, the more they help singers find details of expression in performing the texts to the best effect. Coaching is all about the search for the ideal, where understanding a situation dramatically might collide with vocal perfection. Searching for personal expression allows the singer to put forth their musical and dramatic concept of an aria or scene – or even a song.

Bear in mind that being a singer is one of the most difficult jobs there is; instrumentalists don't realize the inherent problems that a singer faces. A singer, even in song literature, must act and react in a language frequently not their own, simultaneously singing with perfection music that is sometimes difficult vocally and musically, and doing so from memory. Singers must sing in most

of the European languages, and even other languages. Whether in opera or songs, other languages come into play. Unlike instrumentalists, the singer is also their own instrument. If they are under the weather, they must still perform. Only oratorio literature allows the singer to hold and read from their music.

Virgil Thompson, noted critic and composer, once gave a lecture at Indiana University, one I attended. He stated that "singers should never act, only react." His point was a good one, albeit simplified. The singer should alertly react to the stimuli the music and drama gives rather than settling into a preconceived mindset of what the character *should* be, staying fixed in that framework no matter what.

Accompanying a recital means jumping through three or four styles in the space of an hour. The awareness of baroque style may give way to classical style, followed by late-Romantic style and even more modern style – say works from the first half of the twentieth century. Composers are still writing new music, and that means accompanists must stretch their abilities to ever broader horizons. And they must sight-read much of that literature.

Accompanying auditions speeds that process up. It isn't unheard of to veer from Dowland to Britten, from Schumann to Debussy, from Mozart to Barber. And that covers only one hour – and possibly only one audition! The other difficulty comes in making each style individual, bringing out the nuance and beauty of the piece to aid the singer in the audition. Let us turn to that.

The Art of Auditioning – Helping the Singer Audition Well

Singers get jobs by auditioning. They will frequently come to coaches, teachers, and accompanists for advice about what to sing, how to present their music to the accompanist, and even how to make the auditioning process a happier event. This section has information for both the singer and for the accompanist. Coaches can benefit by passing this on to singers of all age groups and experience. A singer needs to take only a little time to think through the following information to realize that auditioning should not be ten minutes of terror.

Let us begin by saying that playing for a series of auditions, sight-reading every piece that comes in, can be a nerve-racking time for the pianist. The singer can become rattled, too, but that should be minimized by complete memorization of the music they are going to perform. It takes a cool disposition for the pianist to be both objective and subjective at the same time. Still, the good accompanist can sight-read, follow, and be musically supportive.

And some can't! Auditions do occur where the accompanist should never have been hired without auditioning themselves. I once attended the state-wide theater auditions for the Indiana Theatre Association in Indianapolis. The assigned accompanist was rigid, played with no understanding of the repertoire (mostly Broadway genre), and could not follow or keep up with singers at the tempo they needed. One after another singer coped as well as they could. One young man was singing "Metaphor" from *The Fantasticks*. About halfway through his audition he waved his hand dismissively, saying effectively, "Forget it, I'm going to sing at my tempo and ignore the pianist." I was told later that he was reflecting the general opinion of every producer there.

This section is hopefully for accomplished pianists who can play a variety of music. It also aims to allow singers and accompanists to understand how to deal with the variety of challenges that a singer (and accompanist) face in auditions.

A singer needs to know why they are auditioning. Do they want a particular role with a company or in their high school/college? Are they auditioning for a performing group? Are they trying to get into college? Are they singing for a competition? Every audition has different goals and

parameters, and the singer needs to define those goals before deciding on the repertoire to be sung. This is true even at the highest level of opera auditions.

Once the reason for auditioning is defined, a singer must find the repertoire that matches the requirements set forth by the organization they are auditioning for. This may mean singing a number from a given opera, or, more likely, it will include a list of required variety: oratorio aria, song literature, opera aria – in a variety of styles and languages. A usual number of pieces for the repertoire list is five, but more are not out of the question.

Singers should realize that, no matter how hard pieces in the Broadway repertoire are to sing, some places ban that repertoire. It is generalizing, but many Broadway songs are more about putting the dramatic situation and personality of the character across than showing vocal splendor or precision. Broadway producers would rather hear an "old classic" from Rodgers and Hammerstein or Cole Porter than someone attempting to sing the most modern songs. Producers want to hear good voices *and* personality. The Broadway ban in other situations simplifies the audition process with no "*except for*" being necessary.

Accompanists are usually expected to have a wide range of literature in their repertoire, whether for colleges or for companies. The repertoire won't remain the same from place to place, but it will remain consistent for single venues from audition to audition. Certain arias can be expected at any time, particularly in the lyric soprano repertoire, as can the famous Italian songs. Beyond those, there are certain standards in all vocal Fachs (the German word for vocal classification and categorizing of repertoire – see Appendix A). If a company is planning a particular opera, it makes sense to program something from that opera or, at the very least, from that composer. Hopefully one can assume that the coach knows the requisite excerpts.

In choosing their selections, singers need to keep a few rules in mind. These aren't rules set by organizations, but they reflect common sense and reality on audition day. Coaches can advise on these rules for repertoire.

Rule one is to keep to the literature for one voice type. Mixing mezzo-soprano and soprano literature shows that the singer doesn't know the difference, or else isn't sure who she is. It might also indicate poor teaching. At a recent audition I attended, a singer paired the Mad Scene from *Lucia di Lammermoor* (high soprano) with the Habanera from *Carmen* (lower mezzo-soprano). It was an awkward mistake, funny in all the wrong ways.

Another singer, programming for the Metropolitan Opera National Auditions, wanted to pair Anne Trulove's aria from Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* with Zerbinetta's aria from Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos.* She said she could sing them both. The problem was that, while they are *nearly* the same vocal type, they are not the *same* vocal type. More importantly, she could not possibly sing them back to back. Those sorts of considerations must be made because, if a singer takes the chance that they will not have to sing both, they will inevitably be called on to do so.

Rule two involves practicality as well. Can an accompanist sight-read a piece accurately without advance notice? Zerbinetta's aria from *Ariadne auf Naxos* is very long, and while the accompaniment isn't hard to play, it is difficult to play well at sight. I was once presented with the task of a Rachmaninoff song, one I could not have played well after a week of practice, let alone at sight. I faltered, and the audition was marred. I didn't feel apologetic, because it was a poor choice of repertoire for that reason. Another soprano sang "Do I Hear an Army?" by Barber. I got through it, but I won no medals. It does not take much ingenuity to email or phone an organization and ask for a way to alert an accompanist that a piece is being programmed. For song literature, it is advisable, while contacting the accompanist, to tell them in what key a piece will be sung.

Similarly, a coach should advise the singer to avoid singing any aria or song they aren't ready to sing to their best ability. The second-act aria "Voi, che sapete," for the character Cherubino

in *Le nozze di Figaro* by Mozart, is a standard audition number for sopranos and high mezzos. Dramatically it is almost an audition aria in the opera, too. It is easier to sing than Cherubino's first act aria "Non so più cosa son." In addition to the fact that this aria can go at a variety of tempos, some of which leave the singer breathless, it also has frequent high Gs. This is not a difficult note for most sopranos, but mezzos can find it tiring to sing.

Two other rules are of similar nature. The first concerns transpositions. Arias from operas should be performed in the original key. There are exceptions to this, but only for those arias that are frequently sung in higher or lower keys. A singer can bring a song to an audition in whatever key is best for them. However, a singer should never ask an accompanist to transpose literature at sight. This invites mistakes that can throw the singer. I always glance through the score before accompanying to familiarize myself with the key chosen by the singer and how this affects any unusual features of the song – such as any places where "out of key" moments occur. Some composers, notably Fauré, usually have such moments!

In like circumstances, singers shouldn't ask an accompanist to realize a figured bass at sight. Some accompanists may never have had to do so. In addition, the accompaniment singers will get will be different to anything they have rehearsed with, which can throw them. Companies producing operas that have figured bass usually try to keep one player for the duration of the run of a production.

I will be honest here. I can play from figured bass, but I prefer to play from realized piano-vocal scores. It isn't that I play exactly what is there, but playing figured bass does not come naturally to me. I can do it, but frequently I'll play, if not from piano-vocal scores, then from orchestral scores, particularly for earlier operas, where the harpsichord should play with the orchestra. This is because I don't want to clash with pitches in the orchestral instruments or anything else. I can still be inventive, but I don't have to rely on instant realizations, a task I use infrequently. More about figured bass follows in Chapter 3 on recitative.

Ignoring these considerations about repertoire can effectively shoot the singer in the foot before they step onto the stage. Throwing such curveballs makes the iffy moments in an audition far more prominent.

Auditions are not impossible to predict. They do not require guessing what will happen. The singer, despite nerves, is basically in charge. With a little forethought, the singer can even practice answers to questions and other non-singing moments.

At some auditions, advance coaching (brief!) is arranged with the accompanist. This means that an accompanist/teacher should make sure a singer has the music very well annotated, with all cuts, metronome numbers, deviations from straight tempo, etc. marked clearly. This is helpful for all concerned, but it should not be expected.

A few competitions forbid photocopies even for the accompanist. If the judges insist on having copies from which to judge (measures numbered throughout), the cost of programming certain pieces can be exorbitant, unless a well-stocked library is nearby. Those organizations don't always explain what to do if transpositions are required into keys that aren't available in print. If the music is in the public domain, the singer is technically not breaking copyright rules by having someone write out a transposition.

If photocopies are permitted, a coach, accompanist, or teacher should help the singer make an accompanist's folder, using a three-ringed binder. The music should appear with music on the left-hand and right-hand pages, facing each other, thus eliminating half of the page turns. The right-hand page should be backed by the next page and taped to it. This creates, in effect, an anthology of audition literature.

The music needs to be complete, with no notes missing on any of the borders. It can frustrate an accompanist trying to guess what the left hand should be playing at the bottom of a page if the

lower notes or stave have not been copied correctly. I shudder when I accompany and see a series of words at the top of the page, but the notes are not present. Reducing the music size to 93% (85% at the maximum) should make sure all notes – top, bottom, and sides – are present on the page.

The usage of a three-ringed binder allows the order of the numbers to be changed, or for numbers to be added or removed. Once in the binder, tabs should be affixed that indicate what each composition is. This may be done by title or by composer, but ensure sufficient information is given: "O del mio" could be either "O del mio dolce ardor" or "O del mio amato ben." Using a binder also ensures the music will definitely lie flat.

If published music is used, the singer should put sticky notes on the first page of a selection. It is wasting valuable audition time to leaf randomly through an anthology or score to find the audition number.

Accompanists might also be asked to make a recording for the audition – video now being the preferred medium in many places. Some colleges have resorted to this in order to reduce audition days to a reasonable length. Professional companies do not usually ask for these, preferring to hear the singer "live" in an auditorium or other larger space. Videos help ensure that there are no splices, and also show the committees the singer's posture and what acting skills are evident.

Coaches have one more thing to coach singers about prior to auditions: pronunciation and enunciation of introductions. These do not need to be rushed. Singers should say their name. They should say the name of the piece and composer they are about to perform. And then they should take a moment to prepare. Not like this!

> HellomynameisElizabethJonesandformyfirstselectionIwouldliketosingQuandomenvo.

What? Let's add some commas and spaces. Pausing slightly at each comma is important.

> Hello. My name is Elizabeth Jones, and, for my first selection, I would like to sing "Quando men vo" from *La Bohème*, by Puccini.

That is easy to understand. The home teacher and accompanist should rehearse the spoken introduction with the singer as part of the rehearsal process. Singers have been known to make more mistakes in the introduction than they do in the texts of the sung pieces. Speeding through the introduction leaves the listening panel more baffled than informed. Singers must also be aware of the need for precision in their pronunciation of foreign or unusual words, as mispronouncing them while speaking or singing can be embarrassing. "O mio bambino caro" is not correct – this aria is not about a little baby; it's about Daddy (Gianni Schicchi) or "Babbo" in Italian. "Babbino" means little daddy. "Schicchi" is pronounced Skee-kee, not She-She. This is an area in which coaches can help their singers to be well prepared.

Another standard aspect of auditioning involves questions. Although the singer has presented a repertoire sheet and an experience page, there can always be new questions that pertain to that experience. Here are two examples of answering questions – one not helpful and the other just right.

Version 1

> Auditor: Very nicely sung. Do you happen to know the other aria?
> Singer: The other aria?
> Auditor: The other aria that character sings in the same opera!

Singer: Oh, that. No.
Auditor: What else do you have in your repertoire?
Singer: Mozart, Rossini, Brahms, and Donizetti. A little French stuff.
Auditor: And have you had ballet, or do you dance?
Singer: No.
Auditor: What else do you have with you?
Singer: Oh, I don't know, uh … I guess I could sing the Gounod.
Auditor: No, that isn't what I need to hear. Well, I think, actually, that I have heard enough. Thank you.

Version 2

Auditor: Very nicely sung. Do you happen to know the other aria?
Singer: I am studying it, but it is not quite ready for performance today.
Auditor: I see. What else do you have in your repertoire?
Singer: I've been studying the arias from *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte* by Mozart. I've been looking at the *Barber of Seville* arias. I have worked on the aria from *Lucia di Lammermoor,* too. I've been preparing a set of Brahms lieder for a recital next month. And I have some Reynaldo Hahn mélodies for that same recital.
Auditor: Where is that recital?
Singer: At my old college. I'm returning as an alum to sing for them.
Auditor: That's a nice idea. And have you had ballet, or do you dance?
Singer: I've had only a little formal training, but I tap-danced in the show *Anything Goes* in college. I have also studied ballroom dancing.
Auditor: That's quite helpful. What else do you have with you?
Singer: I have brought with me the aria from Gounod's *Faust* and the aria from Massenet's *Manon.*
Auditor: Let's hear the Gounod.
After the Gounod is performed.
Auditor: Thank you.
Singer: Thank you. *Gathers up music and leaves the stage confidently.*

Other such questions can bring surprising answers, too. A singer should know they're coming and think on their feet. In the above exchange, having a recital in the near future, even at a "home" college, is important.

The idea of dancing or ballet is not an attempt to put the singer on the spot. Someone may think the singer walks quite well – or perhaps with a turnout of their feet. For the singer to answer "Uh, no, I don't dance" does not help those trying to find out more in-depth facts about the singer. If they have danced in a musical or performed waltzes and minuets in opera, the singer should say so. The coach can advise about these types of questions.

Unfortunately, singers sometimes say things they shouldn't. A coach might venture into coaching "What Not to Say" lessons. Becoming too chatty detracts from the sense of occasion that an audition should retain. If dismissed before the singer expects, it just might be that nothing else is needed. The judges/faculty/staff have heard all they need to hear, and don't need to hear more. That isn't necessarily a bad thing! A singer should say "Thank you" and leave the stage. No adverse comment is needed to express surprise. They should thank the pianist, too, no matter how they

might have played. They're doing their best and more can't be expected. The coach might also have a voice in the casting procedure, so don't offend them either!

One singer's real response to dismissal was, "I guess I know what that means." She knew it meant she didn't get the job. The reality was that, in making that remark, it meant she didn't get the job. As the director told her, "If you don't have faith in your ability, then neither do I. You were being considered. Now you aren't." *Ouch!*

A coach can also rehearse with the singer the best way to enter the stage and assume their singing position "in the crook of the piano." Assuming the grand piano is center stage, where it is most of the time, the singer should proceed to the left of the accompanist – also called the upstage side. This means they are not standing with their backs to the audience at any time. From there, they can point out cuts, indicate where they are doing something not printed in the piece, and give the tempo to the accompanist.

A singer should give the accompanist the tempo by lightly singing the first phrase. No clicking of fingers! No singing the accompaniment! And no conducting! Even singers trained in conducting have only a so-so chance of finding the correct tempo without actually singing.

Then the singer should walk behind the pianist, which means they are always facing the audience, and proceed to their spot in the crook of the piano, with no swirling 360-degree spins being needed.

After announcing what they are going to sing, the singer should then stand at a 45-degree angle, half to the audience and half to the accompanist. No immersion into the *brown fog of preparedness* should be necessary. But taking a moment is acceptable without totally shutting the audience out. Then a slight glance to the accompanist indicates the singer is ready. It also lets the singer know the accompanist is ready, too.

There is one important thing a singer should remember. However perfectly they sing, it will be much better if *they* shine through in their interpretation. Their personality is almost more important than the stellar rendition of the notes. In auditions it is more important to be *expressive* than to be *impressive*. If the singer is expressive, they *will* be impressive, guaranteed.

In some situations, a singer might remember something else: whether the audition is for a college entrance or for a company, the singer's audition isn't the only audition that's important. A healthy fit is required from both sides. The organization is also on trial with the singer. If not, misunderstandings and overlooked faults can lead to unhappy circumstances down the road.

Let us proceed from the standard repertoire of auditions to the work of preparing singers for roles. A coach can only prepare someone if the coach already knows the score musically, dramatically, and stylistically.

2

KNOWING THE SCORE

The Black and White – Notes and Rhythms

My mentor, the late conductor and teacher Tibor Kozma, used to invoke the wrath of God on poor conducting students by accusing them of breaking the eleventh commandment: *Thou shalt know thy score.* With him it was not just a matter of generally knowing the right notes and sound. He expected the conductor to know the notes completely, and he wanted that same conductor to understand the implication of shape and color of every note in the score. In other words, the conducting student needed to know not only the black and white of the score, but also the gray. This does not mean that he wanted every conductor to conduct scores from memory. He deplored that practice. But one had to know a score so well that one *could* do so. Having the score in front of you means that you can correct a mistake that appears in performance – and they frequently do – but which never happens in rehearsal.

The black and white of a score means simply knowing everything that is printed in the score from the first measure to the end. If the dynamics, phrasing, tempos, or basic shape of the performance are wrong, then the conductor does not know the score. The gray area includes the intangibles: knowledge of stylistic concerns and traditions associated with a given piece. They are just as important to the knowledge of the score as the black-and-white notes found on the page.

Coaches, even if they play almost exclusively from piano-vocal scores, need to be able to study the orchestral scores, and improve those piano-vocal scores with notations of what is not in the piano-vocal score. This may also mean learning which editions of scores to trust and which ones to avoid.

Around 1940, new editions began appearing that made a conscientious effort to correct the mistakes printed in earlier editions. The mammoth Mussorgsky edition, published by the State Publishing House in Moscow, was one of the first. Although it was left incomplete, it nonetheless made many people realize what mistakes had crept into prior editions. It also made clear the changes that were made by well-intentioned hands to many of Mussorgsky's original scores. The Mussorgsky edition shows us that, over the years, copyists have managed to omit or move critically important markings in the manuscripts. These include accidentals (sharps or flats), phrase markings, bowings, and even entire measures. The "critical editions" of the music of Mussorgsky, Wagner, Verdi, and many other composers try to correct these mistakes and omissions. Occasionally errors

still occur, but, for the most part, the problems have been minimized. Even standard repertoire works such as Puccini's *La Bohème* or Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* exist in critical editions. Their popularity may in fact have caused more mistakes to appear in their scores due to the repeated need for copyists to make new editions.

These editions are not end goals in and of themselves, but they are a wonderful aid in reaching the most expressive (and correct) renditions of a composer's ideas. They include orchestral and piano-vocal scores of operas, and they exist for instrumental music as well. They frequently include alternate passages where a composer may have changed his mind about the way the passage should sound. Libraries are now shelving the "critical editions" of the complete works of Mozart, Rossini, Verdi, Johann Strauss Jr., and many others.

Since the first edition of *Opera Coaching* came out, I have worked on a corrected edition of *Le philtre* (1831) by Daniel-François-Esprit Auber. The vocal score was difficult to read, and the orchestral score had many mistakes in it. I give two examples to show what type of mistake can be made. This opera has almost the identical libretto – except in French – as Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* (1832). In one place, a line given to Térézine (Adina in Donizetti), seemed oddly out of key. Comparing the orchestral score to the piano-vocal score showed that the notes had been placed on the correct lines – but they were in the wrong stave and clef. The line should have been for Guillaume (Nemorino) in tenor clef, rather than for the soprano.

Another mistake came in the first act finale. There were suddenly three bassoons! In the original score, the instrumental layout placed bassoons directly above the trombones, of which there were three. The sound of the trombones felt wrong, but there were, for certain, not three bassoons. I opted – without anything else to go on – to give the bassoons the first and third part, with a muted trombone on the more sustained second part. These are mistakes that may stem even from Auber himself. But they give examples of the kind of mistakes people make.

Some coaches can play at the piano from orchestral scores. Most coaches do not. In addition to the difficulty such an exercise creates, there are usually many more pages to turn in the orchestral score. Many coaches therefore choose to concentrate on learning piano-vocal scores. There are a few operas that can be played easily from full score, most particularly those from the baroque era. In fact, since the compositions consist basically of one or two violin lines and one continuo line, some people happily choose the full score for those works, feeling that they can play with a better sense of style knowing who plays what. Once beyond a work from the classical era, say *Don Giovanni*, most coaches gladly resort to the reductions.

EXERCISE #1 – First, play from score any aria from Handel's *Giulio Cesare*.

Second, take the opening of *Don Giovanni* and practice reading it from full score.

Third, take the first number of *Le nozze di Figaro*, doing the same thing. This is much harder due to the need for hand crossings.

Follow this by playing from Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* and Verdi's *Rigoletto*. This makes clear that different composers are not equally difficult.

Not for the faint of heart!: Try the opening scene of *Lohengrin*, or the opening of *Das Rheingold*, Scene 2, where the majestic sound of horns (transposing of course) can emerge from the piano.

This does not mean, however, that they must play only what is in the piano reduction. Listening to recordings and studying the orchestral scores can reveal major omissions in the attempt to

FIGURE 2.1 Verdi – *Falstaff* – Act 1, Scene 1 – Closing (excerpt): right hand only as usually printed; as one should play it.

reduce an entire score to something manageable for two hands. Careless copyists can make some mistakes while making a reduction from orchestral score to piano-vocal score. In the orchestral score to *The Medium* there is a place where the copyist copied notes from tenor clef (cellos) onto bass clef, making the notes a fifth too low. Other errors result in odd harmonies, peculiar counterpoint, and even a sense of power when this doesn't exist. In the fourth act finale to *Figaro*, reductions have the orchestra follow the Count on every note of his emphatic denial: "No! no, no, no, no, no!" However, the last note of the line ends on C natural, and the horns should have a D natural against it – quite a dissonance that shows the brutality of the Count, and also pointing to his undoing.

There are two types of reduction: reductions to what can be played, and a two-staff score that includes almost everything played – note stems up and down – on two staves. Some modern scores even spread out to four or five staves per system.

Studying the full score can reveal many amazing details not found in the piano-vocal score. One example is found in Verdi's *Falstaff* in the coda to Act 1, Scene 1. In the last page, as Falstaff finishes excoriating his companions, the piano score excerpt shown in Figure 2.1 shows many sixteenth notes. The violins seem to be boiling away, reflecting Falstaff's fury at his comrades' chaste "honor." As he is chasing them as well, it would seem to be a good reduction of what the orchestra plays. But even a cursory look into the full score (or a listen to any recording) will show that, above the hubbub in the violins, the woodwinds and a blaring trumpet dominate the texture, proclaiming a rhythmic variant of the "Honor" theme. A coach needs to write this into the score and play it instead of all those violin figures, as shown in Figure 2.1.

Another example might be found in the Act 1 aria "Non più andrai" from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro.* On the last page of the aria, approaching the playoff, most reductions give the alternating figure of a triplet in unison. But against this is a wonderfully military rhythm in the timpani. This can easily be inserted and played simultaneously with the triplets (see Figure 2.2).

Coaches may benefit in other ways from perusing scores. In addition to these types of figures, which can be added and played, one can make corrections to vocal rhythms, dynamics, and even text. The more a coach knows about good editions, the better it is. Some editions are excellent,

FIGURE 2.2 Mozart – *Le nozze di Figaro* – "Non più andrai" – excerpt from the close of the aria, as one should play it.

although expensive. Others, equally good, have a price that does not reflect their quality. For example, Dover editions of Mozart opera orchestral scores are reprints of the Peters publication edited by Georg Schünemann and Kurt Soldan and are quite serviceable. Some editions, even those costing a great deal, cannot be trusted for total accuracy. Even the best editions make mistakes, which is understandable when one realizes how many notes are involved and the difficulty encountered in reading the manuscripts of the composers.

One source of errors is the nationality of the publishing firms. The Italian operas of Mozart, as published in Germany, tend to have minor errors in the syllabification of the texts, errors that even some recordings follow. Two examples are found in *Le nozze di Figaro*, surely an opera that should be accurately edited by now. The first example occurs when Figaro is singing "Non più andrai," the closing aria of Act 1. The Neue Mozart Ausgabe (NMA) as published by Bärenreiter gives Figaro the syllabification shown in the top line below. The lower text is the corrected underlay – the word "solioni" is three syllables, not four.

> Editions Soldan and NMA: (/ = bar lines)
> Con le ne-vi_e_i sol-li/-on-ni, al con-cer-to di trom-/bo-ni, di bom-bar-de, di can-/no-ni.
> Corrected underlay:
> Con le ne-vi e_i sol-/io-ni, al con-cer-to di trom-/bo-ni, di bom-bar-de, di can-/no-ni

The second example appears when Antonio bursts through the door in Act 2. He complains that someone has jumped down from the window, landing on his flowerbed. The usual translation of the name of the flowers in the bed is "Geraniums." The appearance of geraniums is close to that of the Italian flower, and the word fits the notes. "Garofani" is the Italian name for the flower – it is indigenous to Italy. The critical editions (including Peters/Dover mentioned above) accent this as "ga-ro-FA-ni," following the usual Italian rule of accenting the penultimate syllable. However, the correct accent is "Ga-RO-fa-ni." This may be Mozart's mistake or a simple printer's error carried forward through various editions. Even so, an editor should correct it (possibly with footnotes).

Then there are those composers who set words oddly, leaning into seemingly wrong accents. This distortion is used on purpose, a quirk by the composer to give the passage an unusual lift. In Bizet's *Carmen* there are several such examples, accents that seem wrong, but which give the music a tiny nudge, smoothing out the normally clear rhythm. In the "Seguidilla" Carmen sings "bri-GA-dier" instead of the correct "bri-ga-DIER." The astute singer sings the correct accent, and the word emerges as floating across an otherwise rhythmic piece.

In Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* the composer shows an occasional uncertainty with English, setting words oddly either through accent or through emphasis. In earlier editions of the opera some words were even different, and were changed later to correct such improper accents.

Handel's original setting of the text for *Messiah* is frequently altered in performance to erase some critical errors in syntax and accent, brought on by his lack of speaking ability in English. Thus, "If God be for *us*, who can be *against* us?" is usually altered to "If God be *for* us, who can be *against* us?" The English syntax is thus correctly restored.

As with the above-mentioned quote from *Le nozze di Figaro*, some non-Italian editions don't get the elisions – of which Italian composers are quite fond – correct either. Coaches really do need to have strong instincts about correct accents. If you wonder how these inaccuracies occur, you need only look at original manuscripts of various operas, and their relative illegibility will explain everything. A simple self-test can also explain it.

EXERCISE #2: Take any page of an opera – orchestral or piano-vocal score – and hand-copy the music either onto manuscript paper or into a music-writing program on a computer. Then see how many note and marking mistakes occur.

Learning to play a score usually means also learning to sing a score. The reasons for this are clear. When a coach can sing a score, their knowledge of the score and the text are much deeper. A singer's mistakes, whether mistakes in the verbal text, rhythm, or pitch, will then jump out at the coach, because it is not what the singer has learned to sing. Coaches also must sing to toss out cues to singers during coaching sessions – this is the equivalent of "running lines" in a play. Learning the text and delivering it during coaching sessions with nuance and colors appropriate for the singer performing the role makes clear many shadings of text. The nuances clarify motivations, and this is a wonderful way to explore the deeper drama in the words. The singer being coached can learn to react to a line far more naturally if that line is delivered with the intended meaning, whether lighthearted or menacing.

I have found that, just because recordings phrase certain passages in the same way, this does not necessarily mean those recordings are all correct. A careful study of even the most hackneyed and familiar aria, such as "La donna è mobile" in *Rigoletto*, will reveal many smaller markings that are almost universally ignored. Grouping of phrases may also make more sense by following the indicated phrasing. In the *Rigoletto* aria, small portamenti in the opening phrases are frequently ignored, even though they add a lot to the Duke's casual *slancio.*

A coach should understand clearly in what style each opera should be sung. Mozart is controlled and reserved. Shouting as might be heard in Puccini should not be heard in Mozart – even when the Count or Figaro are angry. In Verdi or Puccini, however, the forceful nature of certain vocal lines might allow a modicum of shouting.

If, during study of a score, a marking seems odd – two phrases sung without interruption where this makes no sense, for example – it bears searching out other editions. Even critical editions of scores might be wrong. The joy in such searching is in the discoveries, not in the work it takes to find those revelations. If a photocopy of the original manuscript is available, that is always the best source, even though it can be difficult to read.

Frequently the score will also contain small (or not so small) mistakes that need to be considered and corrected. In Bizet's *Carmen*, the Card Scene is usually printed with the ensemble lines for Frasquita and Mercedes reversed – Mercedes should take the lower solo lines and duet lines. Many

conductors want to correct this so Frasquita sings the top lines, but others prefer to allow the early misprint to stand. A coach needs to know about this discrepancy and ask the conductor for their preferred reading for a given production. The Oeser edition, though controversial at times due to inclusion of early, eschewed melodic lines (changed soon after the premiere), sets the lines correctly.

In the same opera, Micaela has an aria in Act 3. In the middle of "Je dis," the tempo increases as Micaela becomes more emboldened. In many editions, however, a peculiar hiccup occurs at the word "artifice." The word should be accented "ar-ti-FI-ce," but Bizet sets it so "ti" sits on the beat, with "FI" being a higher pitch but off-beat. A singer can sing it correctly, evenly, and still accent the phrase correctly in the way Bizet set it. However, an early editor gave the "ti" a sixteenth note followed by a dotted eighth note on the "FI." This attempt to accent the word *correctly* makes the word jump unpleasantly.

If a language has some exceptions to rules for pronunciation, it is a good idea to indicate them when preparing a score. Even experts cannot always remember the exceptions, and they don't always agree on pronunciations either. In French, the "s" at the end of a word is not usually sounded. When the exception occurs, it is advisable to underline that "s" rather than trusting to memory the need to pronounce it. Write phonetically what should be sung if this flies in the face of normal reading.

Names pose challenges, too. A decision must be made whether to pronounce a name in the fashion of the language being sung or in the manner of the name's origin. Is Butterfly pronounced *Buh-ter-fly* as in English or *Boo-ter-fly*, the Italian pronunciation of an English word? Don José is usually pronounced with the French "J" – "Zh" – and not as in Spanish with an "H." Other words can also have different pronunciations. *Così* is pronounced with either a voiced "s" or an unvoiced one, an "ss" sound. It depends on where in Italy you turn for reference.

While studying a score, ideas will come to the astute coach. These may be musical or dramatic, but they should be penciled into the score. One such idea came to me from Act 3 of Puccini's *Tosca*. I have always felt that Cavaradossi is just as ecstatic about being set free as is Tosca. She tells him that Scarpia has signed the travel document, and Cavaradossi's political training kicks in. He knows that Scarpia just doesn't let his prisoners off that easily.

> Cavaradossi: La prima sua grazia è questa! [That is the first time he's ever been so gracious.]
> Tosca: E l'ultima! [And the last.]

Tosca sings her aria about killing Scarpia – surprising Cavaradossi that she could do that, but not reducing his political savvy. Then she slips in her small caveat. "Oh, yes, I almost forgot. He insisted on a mock execution – just to keep up appearances." Cavaradossi's vocal line becomes monochromatic – in effect a medical mainline in music. He understands that his "mock" execution will be real. The poignancy in his "Parlami ancor come dolci …" ("Tell me again how sweet …") is thus much more pronounced. A coach must understand moments like this, clearly indicated by the music and yet not stemming from any verbal indication that Cavaradossi gives. Conductors and stage directors may not agree with this assessment all the time, but the singer can allow the thoughts to color his vocalism anyway.

A singer may sing roles many times and yet be asked to change basic conceptions in a new production. A singer might come to a production ready to deliver their usual rendition, but a director may challenge them with new ideas. In "Se vuol ballare," from *Le nozze di Figaro*, Figaro might be a swaggering and boastful servant, sure of himself and his ability to bring justice to the Count, in one production; and he may be asked to have seething anger, and be emotionally wounded by his best friend, his "caro signor Conte" ("Dear, Mister Count"), in the next. If the tempo is taken at a

true minuet tempo, it may not be about stylish posturing, but it may become instead about an ego recovering its balance. A coach who has studied the verbal text can aid the singer's transition from one idea to another.

After studying a text, the process of learning the printed score should now turn to a pianistic work-through. Some scores have movements of great difficulty. Others are simpler, requiring only a little working-out. Strauss's *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier* are much harder than some of his other works, but the reductions are at least clearly written, and a pianist knows what to learn. However, *Rosenkavalier* has a place where four lines of music are in each system: the backstage waltz against the 4/4 music in the pit.

EXERCISE #3: Audition Material

Any potential coach should at some time tackle these piano scores as they are likely to come up as audition material.

In *Rosenkavalier*, begin at the first act (with prelude) or third act, which is where the double meters are found.

In *Salome*, I would suggest practicing from the Seven Veils Dance to the end. This includes the dance, Salome's final aria, and some atmospheric passages that are difficult. Also difficult to sing and play is the "Juden Chor," another audition moment.

Another vocal score that presents problems – in fact it invites some rewriting of the reduction – is Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress.* As stated earlier, even talented pianists shake their heads at the hand crossings and octave displacements required. It isn't just that the opera is difficult to play, which it is, but it is also awkwardly reduced. An example of the difficulty can be found where Baba the Turk throws her tantrum. Tom Rakewell isn't the only person happy when the tirade is cut short.

Performances of this work also include the difficult harpsichord part, usually played by a coach. While much of the harpsichord part is not difficult, the passage in the Act 3 Graveyard Scene is very difficult. Additionally, the almost unholy atmosphere of the scene comes in part from the wandering sounds of the harpsichord. (Piano is *never* used in this opera for that reason.)

Another intricate scene to play in rehearsals is the Basket Scene (Act 2, Scene 2) in Verdi's *Falstaff.* Playing that scene for three hours of staging is exhausting. It starts with sixteenth notes in a fast tempo at the entrance of Meg Page, and then gets faster when Ford is nearby. The Andante section comes as a moment to breathe deeply and build up endurance for the run-through.

In coaching sessions and singing rehearsals, a coach can resort to anything plausible at the piano to reproduce the score with flair. The coach may sometimes even sing lines that hands cannot cover. Finding many of these added notes, octave doublings, and mistakes to make the score far clearer might also make it more difficult to play. But finding them makes the sound coming from a piano much closer to what the singer will hear from the orchestra.

Playing and singing a score has its own difficulties. The late-Romantic era led to Berg's two big operas: *Wozzeck* and *Lulu.* The piano-vocal scores are "short score" reductions to basically two staves – with a third added occasionally. In these scores, a coach needs to decide what the singer needs to hear the most. The Richards (Wagner and Strauss) wrote scores that are equally difficult, albeit more tonal. It becomes necessary to find ways to play the *melos* – the essential feel of the passage – and leave some of the fancier passagework on the page, unplayed. As wonderful as it might be to hear a piano play every note of "The Ride of the Valkyries," it isn't possible. I once made a two-piano rendition of Act 3, Scene 1 of *Die Walküre* (up to Wotan's entrance),

FIGURE 2.3 Smetana – *Prodaná nevěstna – The Bartered Bride* – Act 3 – simplification of accompaniment (with the vocal lines shown only partially.)

and it was at least possible to get a much better feeling for the accompanying music. In staging and coaching rehearsals, that is impractical. (The scene also has music's most misplayed rhythms in abundance: dotted eighth, sixteenth, and eighth notes. In this scene and Beethoven's Symphony #7, the rhythm sounds over and over, and the last eighth note is frequently played too short.)

In the third act finale to Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* (*Prodaná nevěstna – Verkaufte Braut*), the music moves quite quickly. Kecal is furious, the chorus are laughing at him, and Mařenka and Jeník are singing their own line. When everyone is singing, Smetana takes the tonality from F major into a momentary D♭ major. Rather than play every note correctly (quite a feat in itself), the able coach should make the harmonic shifts prevalent, so the singers can hear what they need to hear (see Figure 2.3).

This score also exists in editions that need considerable editorial corrections. Vocal lines have been adjusted from Czech rhythms to German and then to English, with many specifics of Smetana's writing having been lost along the way.

Reductions aren't infallible even in operas that are easier to play. In the introduction to Nemorino's famous "Una furtiva lagrima" ("A furtive tear") the reduction most commonly used places the left hand – harp and pizzicato in the score – an octave lower. The opening passage as

FIGURE 2.4 Donizetti – *L'elisir d'amore* – "Una furtiva lagrima" – Introduction shown as it should be played.

printed makes the piece feel like a tragic song by Brahms, in B♭ minor no less! This leads singers to think of the aria as Nemorino reflecting sadly on his love for Adina. *That's not the case.* What he says is that, wonder of wonders, she saw him surrounded by the village girls, and allowed a tear to glide down her cheek. "She loves me, she loves me, I saw it." The introduction can be played correctly by placing the left hand an octave higher (the proper octave) and letting the solo bassoon line plaintively reflect Nemorino's awakening joy. The beginning of this passage is shown in Figure 2.4. Nemorino isn't sad, but he *is* in a post-buzzed state, having made a considerable drain on his second bottle of *elixir* (wine). But when he realizes that Adina really loves him, the key shifts to B♭ major, and the sun comes out from behind the clouds in Nemorino's mind.

A passage like the opening to Act 3 of Richard Struss's *Der Rosenkavalier* with its polymetric writing – the pit in 4/4 and the backstage orchestra playing an offstage waltz – taxes a coach about as much as any passage can. Both strata must be represented to some extent, so the staging cues can come from either. The offstage orchestra is a veritable second orchestra. There are cross-rhythms in Barber's *Vanessa*, too, in the introductory music to Vanessa's Act 1 aria "Do not utter a word, Anatol." The music heard has sleigh bells and a ringing chime (of some importance), and it all represents the turbulence in Vanessa's mind. Learning how to play these cross-rhythms is yet another example of the coach finding ways to uncover the essential aspects of the music so the singers can hear what they need to hear.

Speaking of offstage ensembles, in the works of Donizetti, Verdi, Bellini, and others the words *banda interna* are frequently used to indicate what looks like a piano score discarded in the middle of an orchestral score. Composers would write what the *banda* (band) is to play, but it was considered not necessary to show *which instruments* played it. Each company is different, and they frequently use different orchestrations for the *banda*, depending on which musicians are available. The backstage conductor for this group (or choral/instrumental ensembles in other operas) is usually a coach. They score the piece, conduct the piece, and, in general, must remain in sync with the conductor in the pit. (Backstage duties also include playing bells, playing drums, playing the organ, or honking horns.) Keeping in time with the pit is an acquired skill, involving either looking through a tiny hole in the set, or else following a TV monitor. The backstage beat needs to be a half beat ahead of the conductor to make up for sound lag.

In *Tosca*, I once had a near disaster when the Act 2 trio – viola, flute, and harp – were setting up. The viola tripped over a light chord. The flute and viola moved quickly and played from a spill of stage lights. The harp did not play that night because she could not see her strings. (The stage crew had not knotted the electric lines to ensure against such an occurrence.)

The Gray Area – Verbal Text – Dramatic Understanding

The black and white area is extensive, but the gray detail associated with a score is far more difficult to learn. It involves absorbing style, tradition, and different demands of historically informed

performances. It also necessitates understanding the differences of vocal production and ornamentation in styles ranging from Monteverdi (1640s) to Britten and Glass (mid- and late twentieth century). It's a very tall order, but one not quite as impossible as it seems.

In the late 1930s, Luigi Ricci published, through G. Ricordi, a series of three books entitled *Variazioni – Cadenze – Tradizioni per canto.* These books are divided into *voci femminili*, *voci maschili*, and *voci miste* (women's voices, men's voices, and mixed voices, the latter being more examples for both men and women, but including duets, too). Ricci's goal was to put in print variations (embellishments), standard cadenzas, and traditions (cuts, tempo modifications, and high notes) which Italian opera had accrued up to that time. Ricci covered only the standard repertoire in Italy of that era. Today, some of that literature has faded away, and more has resurfaced. The important things these books show are the principles followed by singers of the past. If you understand these carefully studied variations from the written text, you can understand *how* they were made or *why* they were made. After that, making decisions of your own on how to perform a section is not nearly as difficult. The volumes are generally comprehensive, although no French or German literature is included. Estelle Liebling also gathered traditional cadenzas (adding some new ones, too) for coloratura soprano arias.

Singers would historically have made their own embellishments to the vocal lines. Until recordings became the norm and a source, and until every embellishment was impressed onto vinyl, singers devised their own ornaments, tailoring them to their own voices. Some became the norm, but others were different for each singer. Now everyone tries to sing the same ornaments, whether they fit their voices or not. Worse, the audience expects the same changes, because they, too, have heard the recordings and consider them "authentic."

A revelatory exercise is to take various recordings of the tenor aria "Ah, si, ben mio" from Verdi's *Il Trovatore,* starting with the recitative directly preceding it. Begin the collection with Caruso and progress with as many examples as can be found up through Domingo, Pavarotti, and Alagna. You may even use recordings in French or German. The differences in the arias won't be extensive, but the recitatives are all quite differently paced, one from the other. Yet if you do a similar thing with "Una furtiva lagrima" from *L'elisir d'amore,* you will find the tenors all adding the high A, taking almost exactly the same cadenza at the end, and differing only in the choice of which words they use for the last two notes: "d'amor" or "ah, si!" – among others.

Sopranos singing "Regnava nel silenzio" from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* will sing some cadenzas differently, adding high notes here and there as they see fit, but major embellishments of the second verse of the Cabaletta (the fast aria after a slow Cavatina) will usually follow an identical path for singer after singer. (The aria is usually sung in D minor but was originally a semitone higher – E♭ minor.)

Baritones singing the famous aria "Bella siccome un angelo," from Donizetti's *Don Pasquale,* will also use the same alterations of the final cadenza, despite Ricci listing several alternatives. Most of them will also avoid many specific markings – accents, staccatos, and so on – which stem from Donizetti himself.

Another gray area coaches must understand is the tradition of cutting music. Composers like Gioacchino Antonio Rossini, Giuseppe Verdi, and Gaetano Donizetti followed certain strict forms. These forms were strict both in formal musical outlines and in the poetic scansion required. Today, though we sometimes acknowledge the strength of those original forms, we see many reasons for making the operas shorter. The first reason is that the length of some roles makes them difficult to sing. In *La traviata*, Violetta is on stage for almost the entire opera, and even technically secure singers have trouble with portions of the role. In Act 1 she is a coloratura, in Act 2 she is a lyric, and in Act 3 she is a dramatic soprano. Performed uncut, each aria has two verses, and the duets with Alfredo and Giorgio Germont have sections that are almost never performed

outside recordings. Performances with all the usual cuts included are sometimes trumpeted for that unusual aspect.

Similarly, the tenor role in *La traviata*, Alfredo, is a long sing for a lyric tenor. Although it's a good piece of music, retaining his second-act Cabaletta lifts the role into spinto (dramatic) tenor territory. "O mio rimorso infamia" ("O my infamous remorse") is seldom performed for that reason, even though a one-verse performance might be possible. To include it eliminates otherwise very good singers from playing Alfredo. Lyric tenors can't summon such power, and radio broadcasts have proven how ill-advised they are to try it – particularly with an added high C at the end. The traditional cut from just ahead of that aria to the entrance of Violetta (after Alfredo leaves) was devised by Toscanini, who added a long downward scale in C major into the next scene.

Cutting goes beyond just second stanzas. Duet cuts abound in the Italian repertoire. Some cuts, amounting to only two or four measures, seem ludicrous, but they are made to make passages musically stronger. Not cutting can make a passage flop around like a freshly caught fish, going nowhere. Ensembles, such as that which closes Act 2 of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, are so seldom given in their complete form that opera house choruses need to do major restudy of the choruses if those cuts are restored. A coach needs to understand these traditions, knowing the principle of the cuts if not the extent of the cuts themselves. Cuts have been made so a singer can remain quiet (saving up energy and voice) while the chorus continues. The above-mentioned cut in *Lucia* saves the chorus from standing around, swords drawn, swearing vengeance for page after page, but doing nothing.

Very few scores print the optional cuts. What is usually done is to identify a passage that seems to go on too long. Find a place near the beginning where the writing is less dynamic, and the cut can begin there. Then find a place nearer the end, possibly the beginning of the coda, and end the cut there. Of course, the beginning and ending keys must match, and the leap must make sense in all vocal parts, though even that can sometimes be written around by resolving a vocal line into the measure following the cut.

The best way to make a cut does *not* include blacking out all the music not to be performed. That doesn't help the pianist find the next section that is to be performed. Should the cut require restoring again, the score will be a gray mess. Find where the cut begins. Draw a bracket/line down through the music (possibly around a note of resolution) like this: [. Above this, write the letters: VI–. If the new music continues on the same or the facing page, draw a line to the corresponding bracket at the end of the cut. That bracket looks like this:] Above that bracket, write: –DE (see Figure 2.5). The eye can follow the line and easily find the corresponding place to continue.

If the cut requires page turns, paperclips might be needed to keep the cut pages together. When the cut begins, you might write something like: VI–163/3/5. This means cut to page 163, system 3, measure 5. On the page where the music continues, I put a star and write HERE at that place. Another method is to duplex photocopy (on both sides of the paper) the music, making the cuts, and then placing the pages in a three-ringed binder. The transition to that score could be made in *Lucia* immediately after the famous sextet.

With this method, whether playing for auditions or staging/coaching rehearsals, the cut can be made easily and fluently, without momentary guesswork as to where the cut ends. When coaching singers for auditions, if they can sing an aria with or without cuts, there should be two versions in the accompanist's folder – one complete and one that is cut.

At one time, Wagner operas were frequently shortened – for obvious reasons. Each opera is long, most of them over three hours (up to four-plus in length), and this means some singers are singing

FIGURE 2.5 Mozart – *Don Giovanni* – "Vedrai carino" – marking the audition cut for the postlude.

very long passages without pause. Today, complete or uncut seems to be the norm, but small cuts may still be made, particularly in scenes like the beginning of Act 3 of *Tristan und Isolde*, where Tristan must sing for a long time, every section becoming more and more taxing.

Recently an edition of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* was issued with cut material relegated to the appendix. This was also recorded as being "the way the composer wanted it" as it corresponded to the original performance material. The strange shifts of tonality in the cut version made it clear that, while it may be what was first performed (or performed after a few performances indicated that the opera was too long), it was *not* what Rossini wanted. History tells us that the rehearsals involved dealing with the overwritten score. The cuts were imposed on Rossini, whether he wanted them or not.

A further instance of the originally performed version perhaps not being the composer's original intention can also be found in a *Porgy and Bess* recording – again "as the composer wanted it to be performed." It was again based on the original performance material. In that version, "The Buzzard Song" was cut, as it is when a singer for Porgy doesn't have enough vocal stamina to perform it. A year after the premiere, excerpts were recorded with Lawrence Tibbett and Helen Jepson singing the title roles. George Gershwin oversaw – but did not conduct – the sessions. "The Buzzard Song" was recorded. So maybe "as the composer intended" isn't the best phrase to use.

Studying the scores with their traditional cuts can give understanding, too, as to why Toscanini and other conductors deemed the complete scores unviable. In operas like *Il Trovatore*, certain cadential or coda sections become excessively long-winded – too much of a good thing. Or perhaps one should say that much is good and a little is weak or repetitive. In cutting, these passages are shorn of the repetitiveness and are thus strengthened. Purists have been upset for quite a while about this, but audiences do not object at all to judicious pruning. Most of them don't even notice. And yet, restoring a cut now and then is delightful, because it is not music that is overly well known. It is a fresh approach to a familiar score.

EXERCISE #4: Take one of the following operas, placing them in the unusual locales suggested below, and decide why the story and music work or don't work in this setting. These examples are, in part, reflective of real productions, or else aim at provocative and, hopefully, intriguing ideas.

Carmen – Set in Cuba
Così fan tutte – set in Louisiana, 1880
Salome – set in Stalin's Russia, 1948
Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg – set in Minneapolis, 1950
Rigoletto – set in outer space
La traviata – set in Paris 1960
Die Fledermaus – set in Las Vegas

A difficult gray area to approach is that aspect of coaching which deals with some knowledge of vocal technique. If the coach knows the teaching style and methods of a given teacher, and the weaknesses of a given singer, he or she can reinforce the work of the teacher without dealing with technique per se. Vocal placement, breathing, and so on should be something a coach understands, but they should not mistake their job for being a voice teacher. A coach helps singers learn music, language nuances, and dramatic points, but does not teach singing technique.

Marking is a subject many singers do not understand, but a coach can suggest it for coaching rehearsals and, more important, for staging rehearsals; it means singing the music audibly, supporting the tone completely, but giving little real voice. It may involve taking high notes down an octave or omitting them. The important thing is to sing so others can hear necessary onstage cues. Dancers mark, too, by indicating they are doing cartwheels or whirling steps around the stage, without actually doing them. So why shouldn't singers? Some great singers do not like marking, fearing that, when they are tired in a performance, they will mark there, too. This will usually not be the case. Marking saves singers for the important moments with an audience and is a technique they should all learn. As some people say, "You only have so many high notes; save them for the paying public." Vocal marking does not equate to dramatic marking, which should not be done in staging rehearsals.

I once coached a singer learning the title role in *Lucia di Lammermoor.* We were rehearsing "Quando rapito in estasi" – the Cabaletta to "Regnava nel silenzio" – singing it in the traditional transposition. She went for the high D that everyone expects, attempting a diminuendo on the

way up. In doing so, the note did not emerge. I suggested that she sing the high note and diminuendo on the way down. Trying to diminuendo on the way up was like pulling a carpet out from underfoot just as you are about to leap. She tried the louder high note and subsequent diminuendo with instant success.

Coaches need to understand the reasons for added high notes – those not written but always sung. Omitting some optional high notes eliminates the climactic surge, blunting the effect of the entire aria. A coach should learn the specific high notes usually sung and analyze the reason they were added. Are there options that might fit a singer better? These can be found in the Ricci books mentioned earlier; careful study of recordings will also give the "usual" options. Some conductors insist on "come scritto" (as written). This is laudable, but it frequently highlights the reason the notes were added: an inadequacy in that moment of the music. It isn't just our consideration of what is normal; it is also a feeling that embellishments and high notes were added to heighten a dramatic moment.

Some high notes fly against the natural accent of a language. In *Turandot*, Calaf's famous Act 3 aria, "Nessun dorma," climaxes on the phrase: "Vincerò, vincerò." The rhythm written for both repetitions of the word is dotted eighth, sixteenth, and quarter notes. Tradition, however, indicates that, on the second word, the high B natural is sung, not as a sixteenth note, but with a brilliant fermata, this on the syllable in the word that should receive the least accent. A recent attempt to restore sensibility to the rhythm did not please the audience hearing it. Traditionalists are a stubborn lot.

Embellishments for the baroque operas of Handel, Alessandro Scarlatti, and Vivaldi are not included in the Ricci volumes. This is mostly because investigation and popularity of the operas of mainly Handel are from more recent vintage – roughly the 1960s forward. This is after the Ricci volumes appeared. The style of embellishments appropriate for the era can be found in a few original notes for the operas. They are different in style than those found in the music of the early nineteenth century. The best thing for a coach to do is to listen to various recordings of historically informed performers, and then help a singer find the embellishments that fit their voice and that style. These embellishments usually occur in the da capo arias – A section, B section – with some embellishments – and the return of the A section, this time with many embellishments. I find that an intricate run that turns around on itself can be made more expressive (and showier) by turning to scales that travel away from a central pitch. In a long string of sixteenth notes, changing one grouping of sixteenth notes to one eighth and two sixteenth notes can make things a little easier, clearer, and possibly more enjoyable for the listener.

Baroque operas will be covered in more detail in Chapter 7, but the coach and stage director must realize that these operas have a slow pace, which was acceptable in the seventeenth and eighteenth century but not so much by the middle of the nineteenth. I like to remember that operas started by concentrating on sung drama. The arias appeared as extensions to the short, rhythmic moments in Monteverdi (whose operas are mostly recitatives), and in the desire to enlarge a scene's strength by extending certain modes. These embellishments must aid the search for drama as well.

Occasionally a coach must help a singer find the endurance to traverse an entire role. Roles like Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Violetta (*La traviata*), Butterfly (*Madama Butterfly*), Gurnemanz (*Parsifal*), or Tristan and Isolde (*Tristan und Isolde*) are huge challenges. For some it is not so much a question of volume, but length becomes the main challenge. The coach needs to help a singer find places to give less, suggesting perhaps that they talk with a conductor about a tempo that is too fast or too slow. Some pieces can be sung at a variety of tempos, but for others a singer cannot always adjust. Phrases that are too long or that have awkward or no good breath breaks may require reconsidering the meaning of the phrase "ideal tempo."

Sometimes, it is a question of finding a place to breathe at all. In the second scene of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*, there is an ensemble that involves everyone on stage. The mezzo-soprano singing Ulrica sings in syncopation against the counterpoint of the other singers. In coaching rehearsals, an Ulrica I was coaching kept slipping *onto* the beat rather than against it. The suggestion I made was for her to breathe rhythmically *on* the beat, so she could always be ready for that next note in syncopation. Although this took two or three attempts, the result was accuracy and security about the solution.

Finding and solving problems for the singers is probably the most important aspect of coaching, particularly when the gray area of style, embellishments, and ensemble is concerned. Problems may stem from rhythmic complexities (as those described in the previous paragraph) or involve learning to spit out words fast enough. In *La Cenerentola*, which was sung in German in Hamburg, Germany, a singer with whom I worked mentioned that several pages of a large ensemble needed to go at a fast tempo so that many pages could be sung in a single breath. If the tempo is right, so is that performing idea. Working up to the tempo may take a few days. And the German language didn't help the singers do that. A bass-baritone singing Magnifico in Italian (again in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*) said he couldn't do the patter up to tempo in "Sia qua dunque delle figlie." I answered with, "Well, at least not yet." I suggested he could write the words on 4 by 6 cards and then repeat them while walking along downtown or across a tree-lined area. He was not to try the tempo at speed until his mouth knew the words. Then "muscle memory" would take over.

This holds true as well in the Act 1, Scene 2 ensemble of *Falstaff* by Verdi. It is very intricate writing and difficult to sing clearly. The Italian is sophisticated, too, and there are also polyrhythms. Added to that is a fast, conversational (arguing) speed that can trip up even the best singers. Done well, an audience might be able to follow five sentences simultaneously!

The same is true for many Rossini operas, and also for Gilbert and Sullivan light operas, where the famous patter songs can derail otherwise fine performers. Even the dialog must be crisp and pointed, but the patter songs are the test cases people wait for. Infamous among these are "My name is John Wellington Welles" from *The Sorcerer*, "Modern Major General" from *The Pirates of Penzance*, and the "Nightmare Song" from *Iolanthe.* In these, one is faced with organized nonsense that the brain cannot make sensible quickly enough. Each song has lists that, by themselves, are hard to memorize. Then the tongue must follow while the brain tries to make the audience understand them. Again, beginning slowly and speeding up is the solution.

Another part of the solution to all problems with patter songs is discouraging the tendency to make every syllable equal. We don't speak that way. Accenting each syllable makes everything equal, and we have trouble hearing the words. Here is an example in which the correctly accented words or syllables are in italics, meaning that those *not* in italics are given less stress: "I *am* the very *mod*el of a *mod*ern major *gen*eral." The lighter syllables must still sound, but the sense comes across better when they are given less importance.

Even speaking we sometimes leave out syllables – or "syl-bles" if you follow conversational enunciation. This tendency in our speedy society can really mess up rhythmic accuracy. It can also mean that important words, like Washington, emerge as "Wash-ih-tuh." Or "problem" emerges as "prollem." The daily laziness of speech must not affect performance diction.

When a singer tries to give too much voice at either the top or the bottom of his or her range, I frequently use the term "optimum roar range," which means that portion of the range in which the voice projects easily, with no apparent effort. A voice has certain natural places of focus and projection. At the bottom, most voices are weaker, with little or no presence. In the upper-middle range of a voice, it is easy for the singer to sing clearly and with a projecting tone at a comfortable volume. A high note usually does not require the amount of volume singers think to penetrate the orchestral fabric. Realize, too, the bottom notes cannot penetrate accompaniment with immense

volume, no matter how much effort is expended. They are below that "optimum roar range." This becomes important when coaching duets in which one singer is in better range than the other. One singer may have to adjust to the other singer (who is below optimum range) so the imbalance is not obvious. While the singers must make the balance work, the coach will have to help them realize the problem and find the solution.

These are all things that a coach might consider when studying the gray areas of a score. More problems and solutions will be discussed in other chapters.

It is not a fact that coaches need to be great singers or even to take voice lessons. You can only be proficient on so many instruments. But it is very helpful for a coach to know how to sing. With an understanding of vocal technique, a coach can actively help the singer explore beyond the notes and rhythms into the depths of the characters, the dramatic background, and even how to instill the notes a composer gives with the meaning he certainly intended.

A tiny example of *the microscope revealing dramatic moments in a role* can be found in Act 2 of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly.* The scene is that in which Sharpless, the consul, is trying to read the letter from Pinkerton to Butterfly. In frustration at her constant interruptions, he rips the letter in pieces and asks Butterfly: "What would you do if Lieutenant Pinkerton did not return?" After the strings and timpani literally knock the breath out of Butterfly, she begins to answer with short, uncertain phrases: "*Due cose – – – potrei far*" ("Two things – – – could I do"). The only note values she sings are sixteenths and eighths, until she sings: "*Oppur – – – meglio, morire*" ("Unless – – – better, to die"). The second syllable of "*Oppur*" is a quarter note – the only one in the passage. I might suggest it be a tenuto quarter note. The gravity of her situation has hit home, and, with that one quarter note, she looks to the end of the opera. It is answered, I might mention, by the most intensely emotional phrase Sharpless sings in the entire opera.

The most important aspect of the *gray area* of a score is that aspect of a passage which tells us things that a character feels or understands, areas that they do not dare to consider aloud.

Any coaching session might involve saying things like, "You need to have better support under that tone" or "You need to shorten that note, so you can get a good breath for the next phrase." While these are only vaguely technical terms, there are others that come about, such as asking for a slenderer tone, highlighting important words or the words with vibrancy in them. Sparkling, gold, slender, shining, moonlight, etc. are such words. They grab our attention amid standard nouns and verbs and make us turn our attention to a higher listening level.

A coach must realize when a singer is "producing tone" and not paying attention to projecting the words – the message of the opera – across. One might think that supertitles will take care of that, or that the audience "won't understand anyway," but they do, and they sense when a performance is not communicating with them. Diction of vowels and consonants – and of meaning! – must never be lost in the search for dramatic projection.

Occasionally a coach does ask for something specifically technical. Such a request can come in the ending of the aria "Senza mamma" from Puccini's *Suor Angelica*. The soprano's climactic high A is supposed to be piano, fading into nothing. Many singers are used to singing high notes loudly and initially find it difficult to sing that note softly. However, sopranos have a placement, a vocal pocket, above the second passaggio (roughly high G) in the higher register, where they can sing a high A which will feel somewhat small, but which will have spin and color, without much volume, but with incredible beauty. It carries perfectly and can be sustained softly for the length requested by Puccini. It is not important that the coach knows how to demonstrate it. For one thing, men don't have such a register, and women coaches may not have that area. What is important is describing it accurately, and that involves describing the high, almost nasal placement. The note is one a soprano can find easily.

Rapid passagework may involve discussion of support and the origin of good articulation. Many of these things a coach learns for him- or herself by doing it, and before that, from teachers for whom they accompany or with whom they take lessons. The goal is not to discover the next Manrico in *Il Trovatore* hiding as a coach. It is to bolster that part of being a coach which aids singers beyond simple plunking of notes.

There is one final gray area left to discuss: notation. In early music studies we are all told that a dot over a note means to play that note staccato or short. That's only true to a point and depends greatly on context. In Mozart's first piano sonata, for example, some eighth notes are marked as staccato and, in the next measure, the same notes are printed with a slur over them and no dots. Obviously the first passage is staccato and contrasts with the legato phrasing of the second phrase.

It doesn't remain that simple. The dot, in some literature (even Mozart), can mean an accent. In orchestral and vocal music, dots and slurs over a string of notes can mean legato *but* with each note nudged (see *La traviata* any time the word "misterioso" appears in the first act). That holds true for singing and for brass or woodwind. But for strings, it can mean notes played staccato on one up or down bow. The aptly named *ricochet* bowing indicates that the bow should bounce on each note even though the bow continues moving in one direction.

I was initially taught that the carrot accent (the longer mark above a note) meant a stronger accent, but again it might just be a definite short note.

Equally confusing is the nature of writing note lengths. In the German or Italian school of writing, a note is held the amount of time indicated. In 4/4, the whole note lasts the entire measure; quarter notes last one count. If a composer writes a dotted quarter note, it should receive one and a half counts. That much is clear.

But in Benjamin Britten scores, he frequently will write a note that is tied to an eighth note that is marked staccato. This does not mean that you sing/play the note the entire length and then lightly accent the staccato note. It means that the syllable being sung lasts the entire length of the first note, and the final consonant is (sometimes boldly) placed on the staccato note. Once you understand that, Britten's sense of rhythm and notation becomes clear.

French writing is yet another variant, although it is close to Britten's way of writing. Stage French used to dictate that the vanishing vowels (usually an "e"), which are not pronounced in street French, *are* given just a little sound when on stage. Not giving it voice makes the presence of the final consonant only slightly audible, which means it would not project to the audience even in the smaller opera houses or play theaters. Thus, when Faust sings his aria "Salut, demeure, chaste et pure", the underlined vowels are sounded, usually on an eighth note, and the elision is made between "chaste" and "et."

Even without a vanishing vowel, French notation indicates that a simple half note would last just slightly shorter than a full-length half note; tying it to an eighth note creates a note value of the entire half, but it does not carry over into the tied note. This is all a little like the French language (where final letters appear but aren't sung): we don't know why it works, but it is consistent, and it *does* work.

All these things, technical or musical, are useful in helping the singer find the black and white along with the gray areas of the score. The coach may not make the final decisions about these aspects of the scores, but he or she must know what the traditions are and how a singer must go about creating his or her characters in the best way possible: vocally, musically, and dramatically.

3

RECITATIVES

Variety of Recitatives

In over 400 years of opera, a wide variety of musical solutions to putting a drama or comedy across have been invented. The recitative is one which, judging by the variety of the mistakes people make with them, is misunderstood in its structure and in the best way to achieve maximum results.

Their purpose would at first seem to be utilitarian – get the most information out at any one moment so the performance can proceed to the next aria. That is not the case in composing, although it used to be very close to that during baroque opera performances.

The word "recitative" comes from the Italian term *recitativo* and refers to those moments of dialog in which the musical form and impetus is supplanted by the dramatic needs of the piece. Officially *recitativo* is pronounced "*reh-chi-tah-TEE-vo*", while some of us can't help accenting the last syllable in English, making it almost the same as the Italian form – *reh-si-tah-TEEV*.

A recitative is a piece of sung text in which the phrasing comes more from the word inflection and meaning than from a musical impulse. "Recitation" thus takes precedence over melody in either aria or arioso (short melodic sections, not organized by musical form). This does not in any fashion excuse bad enunciation of thoughts in arias and ensembles. It simply implies that in recitatives more attention must be paid to the words than to musical line or rhythm. Even the later operas of Verdi, Wagner, and Puccini contain measures or phrases that should be considered recitative in nature.

Mozart's opinion that Italian operas should never have dialog, only *recitativo*, and that German opera should use only spoken dialog, seems to have won general agreement.

There are several types of recitative to consider. We'll discuss the earliest form more when we get to Monteverdi opera in Chapter 7. In the beginning of opera, recitative did not lead to arias, which basically did not exist. There might be a lengthy monologue, called a *scena* (*SHAY-na*) in Italian. But the few scattered moments of melodic impulse did not last long, were not molded by a set form, and did not conclusively begin or end, instead emerging from a monologue or dialog naturally, extending a character's thought or mood.

The strictly utilitarian nature was occasionally highlighted by having the continuo underline an entrance or exit. In *L'incoronazione di Poppea* the first entrance of Ottavia, Nero's rejected wife, is given its grandeur or solemnity only by a rolled A minor chord. The primary difference between Monteverdi's recitative and that of the next generation of composers is that the early recitative

allowed time to say what needed to be said. The few Monteverdi operas we still perform today – *L'Orfeo*, *Poppea*, and *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (*The Return of Ulysses to His Homeland*) – are not comedies, and the weight of the storyline slows the tempo as it would in a Shakespearean play. Since Shakespeare lived in the early seventeenth century, this is an appropriate analogy. Any given lengthy solo – such as the above-mentioned first entrance of Ottavia – is different from anything that comes in later generations of opera. A singer must make sentences make sense in spoken translation, and then the Italian original can be spoken. The only real reference to the printed rhythm is when a composer, after pages of eighth and sixteenth notes, suddenly switches to quarter notes, because there is probably something in the text that needs pointing up. The acting beats – a theatrical term meaning the length of one idea before changing to another – are not always indicated. There are places where meter is implied, even though nothing in the notation so indicates. This occurs when a person is overly happy or spewing anger. In *Poppea*, Ottavia's first monologue has a passage where "fulmini" is repeated several times. This idea of meter gives these few measures a sense of fiery fury. Once these changes of focus and metric moments are determined, then it becomes much easier to transfer that knowledge to the written notes.

By the time the high baroque was reached – Scarlatti, Handel, and Vivaldi –arias were prominently formed, with only an occasional ensemble to break the tedium of one aria after another. Recitatives were frequently short but managed to maneuver from one dramatic point to another. These were mostly *recitativo secco* – dry recitation. This term means that the continuo would guide the singer's thoughts, punctuating the progress to the next number. Continuo at that time was cello and harpsichord. In the smaller opera houses of the time, this was quite adequate to project to the far corners. The modern opera houses of today must find a different approach, because a harpsichord is simply too quiet to project into a house of 2,000 plus people. (The Metropolitan Opera House has twice that capacity.) The continuo gives continuity to the sung dialog passages, keeping the singers in a definite tonality and guiding them forward through their changing thoughts.

Cherubino's precipitous leap from the window in Act 2 of *Le nozze di Figaro* is sometimes accompanied, after the leap, by scampering music in the harpsichord as he runs away unseen, and this accompaniment leads into the next recitative. While the harpsichord player should not sound like they are inventing a concerto, such inventions help the action *not* come to a standstill. The word *secco* means the same thing when applied to fine wines: dry. The singer sings the notes, but as indicated, they pay little attention to printed rhythms. The dry recitative allows the singers to sing at conversational speed, taking normal pauses for thoughts and reactions. Composers tried to write roughly the correct rhythm for the texts, but they were not intent on any steady tempo throughout a dialog scene. No tempo markings are given, nor are they needed. Flirtations, intrigues, calumny, frivolity, and countless other emotions can come and go as the drama demands. Only those recitatives that approach the accompanied variety – described in the next paragraph – have more instruments in the continuo. The freedom of the continuo in Monteverdi gives those operas the high drama they possess.

As early as Handel, some solo recitatives were gaining in importance. In *Giulio Cesare*, the recitative preceding "Piangerò" is a forerunner of the next kind of recitative – Recitativo Accompagnato. In this style of recitative, the vocal line follows more closely – though still somewhat freely – the rhythms given in the score. Instead of continuo, the strings of the orchestra play the chords and moving accompaniment. The accompaniment is not, however, molded into any musical form. One of the best examples of this kind of recitative can again be found in *Figaro*. Count Almaviva's aria begins with such a recitative: "Hai già vinta la causa." Then the formal aria follows. The Countess's aria has a noble recitative as well.

Recitatives in the great oratorios of Bach and Handel are usually played more strictly, but the tempo per se is still set by what is being said in the text. J.S. Bach wrote very few tempo markings on his music for solo organ, so he wasn't likely to write such markings for singers.

When opera reaches the early nineteenth century, continuo (harpsichord or piano) were used in comic operas, while the orchestrally accompanied recitative was reserved for serious operas. Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* has secco recitative, but *Guillaume Tell* does not. Late Donizetti, even though comic, turns more and more toward accompanied recitative, paving the way for Verdi.

We will discuss styles in all of these types of recitative when covering their places in opera, but now it is time to give some ideas on how to rehearse recitative in such operas. The Italian words have a rhythm, and the composer has done his best to copy this. As was said before, the tempo is dictated by the meaning of those words. Now, how does a singer perform them?

Rehearsing Recitatives

Once a good translation is decided on, the singer should learn all recitative scenes in English (or whatever the vernacular is). In this way, they inhale the emotions, making pauses and rests meaningful or else passing over them with vehemence. This allows for those ideas which must be attached to each other to become clear in the singer's thoughts. Once this is worked through and feels natural, then switch to spoken Italian, trying to keep the same feelings coming through the voice. When that feels comfortable, switching to the sung Italian is easier, continuing the feelings from before.

Secco recitative should never be sung legato! Take the linear singing out of the voice, but don't take the voice out of the recitative. Only the final phrases might be more vocal, leading to the next number.

Beneath this, the figured bass is played by cello and bass plus harpsichord, or organ (used in more solemn moments.) Even harps can *figure* the bass. The bass notes are not necessarily played for the entire duration shown. A whole note means that what is sung dramatically above the chord is sustained for that duration. But whether notes are short or long will depend on the nature of the drama. The continuo part frequently has the voice part printed above the continuo instrument parts. This helps the continuo musicians to stay with the singers.

S*peaking the text first* can also be helpful in later styles of recitative, even those that are not dry. If transfer from English to another language is difficult, try the half and half approach. For example:

> "Hai già vinta the case! Cosa I hear" or "You have won la causa! What do sento?"
> "Dove sono, i bei momenti?" – "Where sono, the lovely momenti?" or "Dove are they, i bei moments?"

In the above examples I make a point of using the closest cognates (words of similar spelling in each language) that I can. This makes transfer from "moments" to "momenti" easy. In the list below, it is easy to see that not all languages give up the same cognate, but just as obviously some are quite close from one language to another.

French	*Italian*	*German*	*English*
Fleur	*Fiori*	*Blume*	*flowers / bloom*
Lasse	*Lascia*	*lassen*	*let / allow*
Lettre	*Lettera*	*Brief*	*letter/ legal brief*
Commande	*Comandare*	*Kommandieren*	*Command*
Deux	*Due*	*Zwei*	*Two*
Mon	*Mia*	*Mein*	*My or Mine*

In case a reader thinks speaking the text in the vernacular is silly, I have coached operas like *Die Fledermaus* with good English translations, and when I go back to the German (in that case), I have

no problem picking up the sense and flow of the original language. And I do it far faster than if I started with the original and tried to make sense of it. The scansion of German matches that of English.

The required volume for recitative is not great – in fact, most singers tend to over-sing secco recitative. Even Mozart complained that singers "sang" too much, so the problem is not new. However, the solution is not talking on pitches, because a voice must be supported and produced properly in order to project to the back wall of a theater. When a voice is accompanied only by the continuo, great volume is simply not required.

For recitativo accompagnato, a little line *is* required – in other words, it is more sung. In the works of composers of the nineteenth century, as accompanied recitatives became the norm, they became more heavily accompanied. Wagner was not the first to blur the edges of recitative – arioso – and aria, but he sent opera onto a path that has been taken willingly ever since. Puccini, Giordano, and other composers of the verismo school carry this throughout their work, even though there are obvious divisions into arias.

In verismo operas, dramatic utterance is of paramount importance. Since "verismo" means "realism," this means that formal, musical concerns frequently take a back seat to the sweeping emotions of the piece. The *truth* of the dramatic situations blurs the distinctions made by earlier composers between recitative and the musical "number."

In a "number opera," arias and ensembles have a definite beginning and a clearly defined sense of close. Most of the operas of Puccini, Leoncavallo, Mascagni, and Giordano include passages of recitative. The opening of Act 4 of *Andrea Chénier*, for example, or of Act 4 of *La Bohème* are recitative passages. They are perhaps somewhat strictly sung in tempo, but they still retain the sense of real conversation. The musical numbers that follow, whether aria or duet, have a clear beginning and a clear close, obviously divorced from the dialog before or after them.

There are strange mixtures, too. In Smetana's *The Bartered Bride (Prodaná nevěstna*) there are recitatives that were originally dialog. When Smetana adapted the dialog into recitative, he wrote in an almost secco style, albeit accompanied by orchestra. Donizetti, in *Don Pasquale,* takes a similar course, though that opera never had dialog. This kind of parlando passage allows a little tempo freedom, but almost no rhythmic freedom. If singers take too much rhythmic freedom, they will find that, rather than clarifying the words and intentions, they will make things muddled. The singer needs to learn the passages rhythmically as they are learning the words and notes. This applies mostly to Smetana, but also to other recitatives of similar structure.

One question regarding recitatives that arises in music from Donizetti back through at least Handel and Vivaldi is what to do with appoggiaturas. If the composers expected appoggiaturas, why didn't they write them? The answer to that is that dissonance on the beat was anathema to music theory of the time. Rather than officially break rules, they wrote with appoggiaturas in mind, expecting them to be inserted as a performance option. There are certain rules concerning them and their application. The first rule concerns the written leap downward or upward of a third on a strong beat. When descending, the third should be filled in (see Figure 3.1a). If ascending, the third may be filled in, or the upper neighbor of the written pitch may be substituted (see Figure 3.1b). This may be done even in ascending seconds, in which the chromatic note between the written pitches may be substituted (see Figure 3.1c).

The other major appoggiatura to be dealt with is that of the descending fourth or fifth. The leap downward of a fourth or fifth onto the strong beat is frequently jarring, seeming like terrible voice leading. Instead, the upper note of the interval is repeated, and the descent is delayed by one note. This gives the strong beat emphasis, which the written pitches seem to avoid (see Figure 3.1d). The other method of dealing with this problem is to change several more pitches. This may seem

FIGURE 3.1 Handel – *Alcina* excerpts – stylistic changes of pitches.

like heresy, but many recitatives were written in great haste (and not always by the composer of the opera), and this larger change simply seems more natural (see Figure 3.1e).

Appoggiaturas are not usually performed if the drop is on a monosyllable word. Italian of course has some words like *mio*, which can be considered both mono- or bi-syllabic in nature. When monosyllabic words are given appoggiaturas, the resulting whine as the notes move seems wrong. A notable exception can be found at the end of "Comfort ye" from Handel's *Messiah*, where the word "God" is usually given two pitches.

A wonderful, but unusual kind of recitative is found in Benjamin Britten's *Albert Herring.* In that opera, there are places – notably in the first scene – where the conductor plays a piano in a given rhythm – perhaps a waltz – and the voices rattle off their opinions about people with no rhythmic regard being paid to the "continuo" or anyone else. There are also free spots in that opera where people overlap phrases that do not coincide with anyone else on stage. The musical chaos created is intentional.

Back in the 1930s, singers used to race through the recitative, much in the same way as can be heard in longer dialog scenes in movies of the same era. As we entered the 1950s, performance practice demanded a more reasonable speed. An early recording of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* by Walter Goehr, while orchestrated rather heavily for modern tastes, and with Romantic gestures here and there, is otherwise paced with the requisite freedom. In this current era of speaking on the street at a high speed, people tend to sing recitative too rapidly.

On the other hand, speed can be used to effect in recitative if done with care. In a production of *Le nozze di Figaro*, which was almost totally uncut, Figaro was expected to sing his entire Act 2 recitative about what he is planning. Justino Diaz, playing Figaro, raced through it, not to get it out of the way, but to show how certain Figaro was that nothing could possibly go wrong.

Coaches must listen carefully during coaching sessions to make sure singers make the words emerge with meaning. It is important to make vowels and consonants clear in diction, but thought diction is of equal importance and is frequently ignored. In thought diction, the speed is practical, and projecting the ideas in the recitative involves coloring words so they project the meaning to an audience.

In case a reader thinks speaking the text in the vernacular is silly, I have coached operas like *Die Fledermaus* with good English translations, and when I go back to the German (in that case), I have no problem picking up the sense and flow of the original language. And I do it far faster than if I started with the original and tried to make sense of it. The scansion of German matches that of English.

4

PLANNING COACHING SESSIONS AND PLAYING FOR STAGING REHEARSALS

Salieri's opera *Prima la musica e poi le parole* (*First the Music and then the Words*) covers one basic question quite well. Which should come first, words or music? In coaching, it depends! One singer will assimilate a role in a different way from the next singer. Some prefer working on notes, slighting words and rhythms at first, then picking those up completely in later sessions. Other singers cannot function well without the words being accurate. Care is needed not to ingrain wrong words or syllables into the performance. Wrong notes and rhythms are equally difficult to change. The experienced singer will know what he or she needs and can help plan a coaching session. But with younger singers (and with some professional ones) the coach is frequently the best judge of how to approach any given piece of music, including knowledge of those numbers or scenes that are certain to cause major problems in learning.

If the music is relatively straightforward, the coach might choose to go directly through one portion; an entire duet, an aria, or even a larger ensemble can be covered, with the idea of getting the singer used to the shape of the whole. Then the coach and singer work on specific errors or problems – things in need of work. These may include mispronunciations, incorrect rhythms and pitches, subtle nuances, and dynamics. It is at this time that recitatives are shaped, connecting the phrases to express meaning effectively.

Rhythms may need firming up. If performance tradition conflicts with the printed page, discussion should develop over which should take precedence. The composer's printed text is always the starting point, but baroque music includes passages in which the printed text is not followed. Such passages usually involve the singer's rhythms being different from those printed in the orchestral accompaniment: a melodic passage might be written in even eighth notes in the voice and dotted notes in the orchestra. Whether the voice should follow suit and also dot becomes the point of discussion (see Figure 4.1).

Curiously, modern popular music has many tunes where the written eighth notes are expected to be *jazzed*, otherwise called unequal (or "inégale") eighths, just as in baroque music. One famous embellishment in baroque literature that has also been taken over into jazz or popular idiom (not rock or rap) involves singing a note initially straight-toned, and then adding the vibrato. This works well in Handel or Dowland, but Frank Sinatra also used to do the same thing at the end of "New York, New York." More about this in Interlude 4: "The Issue of Straight Tone Singing."

FIGURE 4.1 Handel – *Alcina* – "Chi m'insegna" – shown as written and as it might possibly be sung.

Rhythms that need to be sung accurately may need correcting. This may be in arias and will certainly be in ensembles from duets to finales. Singers may not see a reason for even rhythms versus dotted rhythms, but the answer to their questioning a need for accuracy can always be that the composer *did* see a reason. The argument may pale a bit when dealing with translations, but the impulse of the rhythm frequently makes a big difference in the force of a piece of music. In Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, if Leonora does not scrupulously dot the rhythms in "Miserere," the effect becomes sluggish and boring.

Some coaches encourage not following the printed score. In "Vedrai, carino," from *Don Giovanni*, Mozart has Zerlina sing "toccami qua" several times. In the penultimate phrase, she ends with "qua" twice in a row. Some coaches and editions feel that this sounds too much like a duck, and they eliminate the last "qua." Since it *can* be sung beautifully, and since Mozart clearly knew what he was doing, my personal feeling is that it should be sung as written and as included in the critical editions. That is far more important than adding embellishments to Mozart's vocal lines, a practice which has come into vogue in the last thirty years but is still controversial. We will include that discussion when dealing with Mozart in Chapter 8.

Singers have an uncanny ability to mangle languages they don't know very well. It is perhaps understandable for a singer to insert inadvertently an additional "n" in the Italian word "costanza," making it into "constanza." This added letter is called a "false friend." The inserted letter is usually one appearing elsewhere in the word, and the singer simply repeats it, possibly being unsure of the exact spelling and pronunciation of the word. In this case, of course, confusion may also be caused by the English word "constant" and the name Constanze, Mozart's wife and the lead soprano role in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail.*

If a singer of the role of Adina sings "d'isparmi" instead of "d'ispirarmi" in the first duet with Nemorino (*L'elisir d'amore*), it is simply careless study and must be corrected. Corrections are necessary, too, where doubled consonants make a difference. In *Le nozze di Figaro*, if Cherubino (in "Non so più") sings "ogni dona" instead of "ogni donna," the difference is quite important. One means "every gift," and the other means "every woman." Cherubino may think of every woman as a gift, but it is still not what he is singing. In Despina's "Una donna a quindici anni" aria (*Così fan tutte*), she must be careful to sing the word "anni" with a double "n" and not "ani." The former is "years" and the second is "ass/donkey!" "*Fifteen asses*" is not her text!

Professional singers can make these errors, too. Part of the problem here comes from learning music by rote, with no sense of verbal meaning or continuity in the initial stages of learning. Even great singers have confessed that they, at one time, learned roles by rote. They learned how to accent certain words, also by rote, giving the idea they know what they are were saying, but not really doing so.

Richard Wagner, who was a coach early in his career, counseled singers to pay attention to the small notes, and the large notes would take care of themselves. His point is aptly taken. The main notes of a melody as sung are seldom wrong, but pickup notes and passagework frequently derail singers who learn haphazardly. Some of this faulty learning stems from studying roles by listening for hours to recordings, which are not infallible. Singers of great repute make mistakes right and left on our favorite CDs, and studying them will reinforce their errors in a new generation of singers. This occurs even when the composer is conducting. There is also the fact that singers don't hear accurately what is performed correctly on the CDs. Using recordings to learn notes is not a good idea; but listening to them for a study of styles, older traditions, and the like can be a wonderful idea. "Study recordings before or after … but not instead of" – this was a mantra from my conducting teacher, Tibor Kozma, and it bears being repeated. Before studying a score, listen to a recording to hear the piece as an entirety. That gives a sense of style. Then, once you have studied a score and learned the notes inside out, you can return to two or three recordings to get ideas for polish. Kozma eschewed the idea of studying only one recording, because you learn not only the flow of a piece, but also only one conductor's ideas for that work. No matter how valid the ideas of the conductor are, other conductors will be faster, slower, harsher, gentler, etc.

I mentioned learning mistakes from recordings. Mistakes happen no matter how carefully one tries, and, once set in the performance, those mistakes are difficult to remove and relearn correctly. The operas of Rossini or Handel, even Mozart and Beethoven, all have passagework that must be clean and accurate. A singer should never have the idea that no one will notice. The compositional style of those composers is so clean that everyone will know if something is smudged. I once gave both a compliment and a dig to a baritone after a rehearsal of *Così fan tutte.* I told Don Alfonso that his diction was so good that we all knew when he was not certain of the words. He was perfect the next night. In more modern operas, the chromatic twists in the vocal line can also be learned incorrectly, and these mistakes are just as hard to correct as those of the bel canto era.

During even the earliest stages of coaching, dynamics are vitally important. For a few years, the great singers seemed to sing in dynamics ranging from forte to fortissimo. The softest dynamic sung was no less than mezzo forte. Having to sing in huge auditoriums accounts for some of that. Now, with the return of ensemble operas to the repertoire and stronger-willed conductors (and more conscientious singers!), dynamics are being enforced. Even the works in the standard repertoire, which used to be bellowed to the rafters, are now tailored to the printed dynamics. This saves singers in ways they can hardly imagine, and it also gives wonderful shape to every number. When the dynamics are restudied, ensemble operas, like *Così fan tutte* become much easier to understand and follow. "Solo operas" like Verdi's *Otello* become only difficult, not career-shortening.

One colleague commented that in the first edition of this book I was hard on singers, making them out to be unintelligent. That is not the case at all. I once sang some rather large and famous roles – before becoming a full-time coach – and I never thought any of my colleagues were unintelligent at all. Singing presents singers with such a huge array of problems, it is easy for them to get caught up in one thing and forget something else. The coach is there to make them aware *again* of the things they may have overlooked. I have said this elsewhere in this book, but it is a solemn

thought to remember: Singing is the only profession where a person must act and react, learn difficult music by memory, and all of this in a language frequently not their own. And they must learn the music vocally, which can be a task as hard as all the others put together.

Coaches must urge proper note length. Unaccented syllables are sometimes held meaninglessly far beyond their printed values, proving that the singer either does not know the language well or does not care. They are thinking vocally. The error is almost never the result of compositional excess but stems from the singer landing on the syllable and simply not thinking about the natural inflection of the words. I've heard more than one bass begin Leporello's aria: "Madaminaaaa, il catalogo è questo-ooo."

I've also heard many singers sing with good diction, but project nothing about the meaning of the words. A coach must listen for this, too. An example of this comes when we attend a performance, hoping to be moved, and yet we come away having felt only a little of the emotion in the plot, in fact not "getting" the plot much at all.

In short, planning sessions with singers must acknowledge some understanding of their weaknesses and/or the difficulty of the music to be learned. What is tackled first depends on the music at hand and the ability already shown in previous coaching sessions. Sometimes, this is best described by the German word: *Soloprobe*. I like the word "Probe" (pronounced with two syllables) because a coaching session is systematic probing of the music.

These are of course not all just one-singer-at-a-time rehearsals. Ensembles can be rehearsed, too. Duets, trios, quartets, and other ensembles do exist, so coaching sessions must address these ensembles in groups. An ensemble must be sung with good diction, all consonants exploding together, all vowels matching, and with all passages exactly together. Inaccurate notes or rhythms must be corrected to ensure the true meaning of the word *ensemble.* In addition, solo sessions should never concentrate only on the solo numbers, important though they may be. Inner voices in ensembles must be rehearsed carefully.

Articulations in ensembles must be enforced and balanced. Many composers wrote with different articulations for the various characters in an ensemble. This helps to delineate one character or group of characters from another. An ensemble such as the "Awakening" section of the Act 1 finale of *Così fan tutte* is just such an ensemble.

When two or more texts are sung simultaneously, it will help immensely if singers point phrases to the important words. The coach will sometimes have to help the singers find words that are not accented at the same time as the next character. Then the shifting focus of important words from one singer to another makes much more of the text understandable. Ensembles like those found in Act 1, Scene 2 of Verdi's *Falstaff* can be made clear in this fashion. This is despite polymeters and several texts being sung at the same time. It may not be possible to follow all five texts at once, but something like three texts will emerge clearly enough to follow.

The coach in an opera company is frequently called upon either to arrange ensemble rehearsals or else to indicate the need for them – where a master schedule appears each day or two. These rehearsals will include whatever ensemble needs to work on – including some full-cast rehearsals (minus chorus). A scene like the auto-da-fé in *Don Carlo* by Verdi is a mass of shifting rhythms, tempos, and emotions. Even without a music director/conductor present, the coach may need to hold sessions to put these disparate elements together, explaining the piece occasionally measure by measure so that everyone understands its shape.

None of those love duets (over which audiences swoon) fall together by themselves. It is not only a matter of making notes fit together. Questions arise of tempo, mood, shape, and balance, and both volume and structure. The Duke and Gilda in *Rigoletto*; Carlo, Eboli, and Posa in *Don Carlo*; the three ladies or the three genii in *Die Zauberflöte*; the rustics in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by

Benjamin Britten; and the quintet from *Carmen* are but a few examples of ensembles needing considerable practice.

The latter quintet also brings up a rehearsal device. The speed required for the *Carmen* quintet is incredible, yet noted singers have said that, once the number is learned, the diction and speed are not so terribly difficult to achieve. One cannot start rehearsing at full speed! Each member of the quintet must start slowly, getting the words into his or her mouth. It may be necessary to begin using only words, and no notes. Then, as speed is gradually increased, the notes can be added, too. The quick interchange between voices is yet another part of the problem in that famed number. In initial rehearsals, the coach needs to have everyone practice it mechanically; the meaning and inflections of words can be dealt with later. Starting too soon on the "drama" of the piece will probably mean the singers will never be musically secure.

In *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, the Figaro who starts acting his way through "Largo al factotum" before gaining vocal control of the piece will run into the same problems. Once the physical efforts needed for this aria are mastered, the subtleties of the words can be addressed, including attitudes like sarcasm, flattery, amorous intentions, or anger. The fun in the *Carmen* quintet and in this great aria is the acting, but both must be well sung.

Another number like these is the delightful argument in Act 2 of Sondheim's *Into the Woods.* "Your fault" is best rehearsed as rhythm divorced from pitches. Every time the words "So it's your fault" appear, the singer must point to the person being blamed. When the notes (and they are not difficult) and the staging are added, this type of preparation will serve to make the number more secure.

There will, of course, come the day when the conductor enters the picture. The coach, in anticipation of that day, should rehearse quicker and slower tempos, keeping the singers flexible until the maestro sets a tempo. Setting a tempo or delivery of a line too soon may inhibit musical or dramatic exploration of the score; the conductor will probably have slightly different ideas to the coach, as will the stage director. Conductors are the guiding light for any production. If that light is sometimes dim, it is not for the coach to say. The conductor enters and begins shaping the whole opera as he or she sees fit. They have presumably studied musical styles and the thrust of the drama, and they must help make the stage director's vision come to life. At this point a good coach is absorbing as much as possible the exact tempos the conductor sets, getting those tempos into their body for those later rehearsals when the conductor may not be available. The coach may even write into the score "a little faster" or "more sustained" just to remind themselves what to expect and to enforce. This only means that, for that coach, the conductor is taking a slightly different tempo than the coach expected.

Let us discuss playing for rehearsals when the conductor is not there. Initial staging rehearsals can be tedious and long. Such rehearsals generally run for two to three hours. Some scenes in operas are not difficult to stage. In *Rigoletto*, the jester's outburst "Cortigiani, vil razza" begins with his entrance and builds to his reaction to the coolness of his "friends," the courtiers. Then he lashes out at them. Most of the action is his. It might take only 90 minutes to stage, leaving the entrance of Gilda and the duet (or part of it) for the last 90 minutes of the rehearsal.

By the time initial staging takes place, musical considerations should be set. The coach plays the music correctly, and the singers try to act and sing simultaneously. Mistakes will be made, and the coach – with whatever hand they can spare – might need to cue or even conduct to keep ensembles together. The piano playing for these rehearsals might need to be overly rhythmic – clear to a fault.

It is also a very good idea if the coach writes things into their score that might involve waiting for or observing stage movement. (This is covered more completely in Chapter 6: "The Stage

Director's Perspective" by Dr. Vaughan.) I once saw an intense performance of *Pagliacci*, where, in the *commedia* section, after Canio's outburst of "No, Pagliaccio non son," the pause was incredibly long. Nedda stood, staring angrily at Canio, and then she ascended back to the small stage before regaining the character of Columbina and beginning her lighthearted music. That pause was incredibly dramatic. Sometimes it isn't so much a given staging move, but it might, instead, be a gesture or even auxiliary sound, like a laugh. Once these notes are made, the coach can pass them on to the conductor at the next rehearsal the conductor attends.

Notation about choreography is also possible; that does not require studying Arbeau's Orchesography or ballet notation, but it might involve notation as to who dances first, where, and with whom.

Let us now progress to the next chapter, where I will detail points about following a conductor.

5

FOLLOWING A CONDUCTOR

When the conductor enters the picture, the coach becomes the orchestra, doing what the conductor indicates, following the conductor even if he/she makes an error. That's not being malicious – usually – but it lets the conductor know that perhaps they aren't being clear. The coach shifts a little at this moment from coach to "orchestra," because it is no longer the coach's job to shape the singers. The conductor is there for that, as is the director. The coach now must follow every tempo change as expertly as possible. Listening to the singing is no longer the coach's responsibility (at least in theory). The coach is now supposed to reflect to the best of their ability the sound that emerges from the pit.

Following the tempo set by a conductor is not really such a difficult task. The coach keeps that tempo, watching the conductor peripherally until he/she changes that tempo. Dynamics may come from the conductor, but they are also printed on the page. Careful reproduction of those dynamics will help reinforce in the singers what they will hear from the orchestra and what dynamics they should be singing. At this stage, it may become clear that certain singers are having problems that are not due directly to the presence of the conductor or the staging. If a singer has pitch concerns, the coach needs to point those out. It is not that the conductor is incapable of hearing such things, but the conductor's focus may be on a different musical area at that moment. The coach can take a singer aside and point out pitch problems without undue attention being drawn to the singer. For certain entrances, if singers have difficulties in dealing with the pitch or rhythms, it may be incumbent on the coach to find a solution. One very good solution to some rhythmic entrances is to use the rhythmic subtext.

In drama, a subtext might be defined as a text being thought while other words are being spoken. In opera, there are frequently melodic and rhythmic passages leading into a vocal entrance. These reflect the ideas the singer should be thinking at that moment. If the singer will give those melodies a text that leads up to their entrance, they should have no problem singing the tricky entrance accurately. This text is thought rhythmically but not sung. A good example comes from *Don Giovanni* in the aria "Vedrai carino." Zerlina is asked to wait two measures between her phrases "sentilo battere, sentilo battere" and "toccami qua." Many singers try to sing one measure earlier than they should. The very next phrase is exactly like the first one, except that the two empty measures are now sung with the text: "sentilo – battere." If Zerlina simply thinks that text during the first phrase, she won't make the mistake again. Similarly, Zerlina's first aria, "Batti, batti," has a

passage leading into the return of the main melody that frequently makes sopranos stumble. This can also be fixed by using a rhythmic text that is not sung but thought.

During piano rehearsals, conductors sometimes stop conducting in order to make notes, but this does not mean the coach should stop playing. The coach must follow the conductor explicitly when he is conducting, however. In rehearsals the conductor may make mistakes, and may not follow the singer as the singer might like. The coach should follow the conductor and not the singer. The conductor may not be following the singer on purpose, trying to get the singer to follow the baton. If the conductor makes an error due to a distraction, rather than let a rehearsal come to a screeching halt, the coach is advised to help a little, although this kind of help must be momentary.

A coach may have differing ideas on how to improve any given number, but it is not the coach's job at that moment to put forth his or her ideas. During a break in a staging or musical rehearsal, the coach might raise a question or give a suggestion, but the conductor may have very good reasons not to do certain things. Even if the conductor's refusal to take a suggestion is based on their lack of knowledge of the score or their own insecure paranoia, it does not matter: A conductor rules the music. If a tempo is too slow or too fast, it is the director's job – and not the job of the coach – to make suggestions.

One conductor, who shall go nameless, was once conducting a production of *La traviata*. During the Violetta/Germont duet in Act 2, at the words "Ah, il supplizio è si spietato …" the conductor took the *Ancora più vivo* with emphasis on the *vivo*. The director and singers all complained that the tempo was too fast. When the coach mentioned the same thing, the conductor asked, rather belligerently, *why* it was too fast. The coach pointed out that, at that tempo, the dissonances, which Verdi places in the orchestra later in the passage, go by so quickly that they don't register. Rather than creating more tension, the quicker tempo lessened the tension. The conductor agreed with this evaluation and slowed the tempo to the one traditionally used.

Coaches take note: It is not always just the suggestion that is made, but it may be, in part, the tone used in making the suggestion, that is important. The stature of the conductor may make a difference, but the best conductors are "best" because they don't *usually* make such drastically different choices.

EXERCISE #1: Take the score of *Rigoletto* or other scores that have metronome numbers – scores you know well through recordings – and test each and every metronome suggestion. When a discrepancy occurs between the "normal" tempo and the metronome mark, decide which one makes most sense. This can also be done when listening to recordings.

6

THE STAGE DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Victoria Vaughan

The coach accompanist is a vital member of any opera staging rehearsal and is often the primary link between the musical staff and the production team. Staging usually begins once the coach has already worked with the singers and has briefed them on the tempos, rubato, and nuances of the conductor's interpretation (if there has been a chance to liaise with the conductor on this beforehand), in addition to stylistic considerations and other musical preparation. Generally, the coach accompanist plays the piano (or harpsichord) for stagings, with the conductor or chorus master/mistress present to establish the contact between the "orchestra" (piano) and the stage. Sometimes a coach will be required to play the piano without a conductor present, and occasionally several members of coaching staff will be involved, so that, for example, one coach might conduct while another plays the piano.

The following sections cover the process of opera stagings and suggest how the coach accompanist can best prepare for these rehearsals.

Production Personnel

The **stage director**[1] works with a design team to create the production *concept* for the piece and is involved with talking to the singers about their individual characters in light of this concept. He or she uses the staging sessions to give singers their *blocking*: where to be on the stage at any moment in the opera and how to motivate their movements onstage dramatically. Additionally, the director will help the singers to relate to each other's characters.

The director's main responsibility is to tell the story to the audience, and this is the primary goal of the staging rehearsals. Because each scene has a different level of dramatic intensity (though this does not necessarily coincide with the musical score), the director is the person who plans how each rehearsal period will be used. Staging sessions vary in length but are typically three hours long. It is worth remembering that recitative takes longer to stage than arias or ensemble pieces, because recitatives present considerably more dramatic material to the audience. More staves on each page may give the impression that more pages will be covered in each staging, but this also does not follow, especially where a large, bustling chorus is involved. As a rule, ten pages of recitative and aria will take up one three-hour staging session. This time period could include:

- A musical run-through at the start of the rehearsal, to remind the singer about the conductor's interpretation of the section to be staged.
- Basic "blocking out" of the scene. Initially, this will probably be done without music; then sections of the music will be added and may be repeated.
- Reviewing the blocking and running through the scene with the music.
- Final alterations of the stage "picture" by the director.

The director relies on the coach accompanist to provide an accurate indication of the tempos and dynamics, so that they can use this to determine the dramatic pace of the opera. Generally, a staging covers consecutive pages of the score, and the coach will usually begin at the top of the section and play it in segments until the assigned pages have been blocked. This often involves playing the same section of the opera over again and again; such repetition should be expected, as it is a vital part of the process for the singers, who are learning the director's interpretation for the very first time.

Although the director is the person who decides on the content of each staging session, the **stage manager** (SM) and **assistant stage manager(s)** (ASM[s]) are in charge of the actual execution of this time. Rehearsals in opera houses where contracts are created in accordance with union regulations are the strictest about the use of rehearsal time, and the SM is responsible for facilitating this. Much of the SM's work is done ahead of the stagings. Initially, he or she will be given the scenic details in the form of floor plans, to be used to "tape out" the floor of the rehearsal studio to represent the final stage setting. This can be a complex task, because scenery often has several different levels. There may be steps up to different "floors" of a building, or sections of the set that move on wheels (wagons).

The SM may share with the director the responsibility of presenting visual materials to the singers, such as pictures of the scenery and sketches of the costumes, and explaining the colored tape on the floor that denotes acting areas. SMs also help the singers with the practical elements of staging, by providing them with the necessary props and costume pieces. Many companies will use "rehearsal props and costumes" – that is, props that represent the item but are just for use in rehearsals. Examples of these include scrolls of paper, where using the real item would damage it long before the final performance. The most common rehearsal costume items are rehearsal skirts, which allow the singer to get the feel of wearing a long skirt while traversing the stage. Singers particularly like to work with rehearsal corsets if they will be wearing them in performance, because it is important for them to become accustomed to the restraints on the ribcage. Male singers will often wear rehearsal jackets, such as tailcoats and vests, for a similar reason. Sneakers are not useful rehearsal shoes because the wearer tends to move very differently in them (normally with added bounce). Women may wear "character shoes" (shoes designed for use on stage by actors and dancers) and men often wear an old pair of formal shoes. Footwear affects stance and vocal production in addition to movement, which is why singers like to wear appropriate styles from the first day of staging onward.

The stage management team works in close contact with the coaching staff, especially in the final stages of rehearsal. The most common interaction is with regard to starting places in the score during rehearsals, so that the stage management staff can follow the stage action closely and make notes of entrances and prop use. This is especially important once the rehearsals have moved to the theater, when the piano is in the orchestra pit and in close contact with the maestro, while the stage manager is on the side of the stage and effectively out of contact with the musical staff.

The **assistant director(s)** (AD) spends much of the early rehearsals taking down notes about the blocking, so that he or she has a visual record in the score about where each person is onstage, which props they are holding, and other important information about the staging. Later in the process it is not unusual for the AD to work individually with certain singers on elements of dramatic detail. This may happen in a different location from the main staging, and a coach may be assigned to work with the AD on these occasions. The AD of a new production is invariably the person who restages the show to go on tour or for a change of venue if the original director cannot restage it. If there is no AD, the stage management staff will absorb these responsibilities.

A **choreographer** will probably be involved with any opera that has even a small amount of dancing. The choreographer might have his or her own troupe of dancers, or perhaps a single dancer to perform to a small instrumental section of the piece. Sometimes the choreographer is employed to work with the chorus members, either to teach them a dance (such as a waltz for *Die Fledermaus*, or a mazurka in *Yevgeny Onegin*), or to instruct them in posture and stylistic necessities. Some companies will employ a pianist who works only with the dancers, but many will use a coach accompanist for short choreographed sections. One important thing to note here is that dancers are not usually versed in the same musical vocabulary as singers and pianists. For one thing, counting "beats" tends to occur in divisions of eight (rather than four) and often choreographers will group two or more measures together for the purpose of creating their dances. In other words, dancers will feel a sixteen-bar phrase as a unit of eight beats. If you are in doubt, play the music on the piano or sing it to the choreographer to clarify where it is that they want you to start or stop playing. In doing so, you will also help any singers who are involved in the dance to know how the musical parameters tie in with the footwork. As always, be sure to keep detailed notes about tempos: If you play at a tempo that is too fast for dancers, they might injure themselves. An excessively slow tempo is equally dangerous, especially if there are lifts involved in the routine.

The Rehearsal Process

Each rehearsal is planned to make best use of the time and resources available. Scheduling for the rehearsal will therefore be based on room size and availability, which scenes need blocking according to which singers are available and when, the needs of the maestro and chorus master, and technical considerations such as whether it is practical to move from one scenic setup to the next in order, or if it is better to take scenes in a different order to speed up the set change. When you arrive early for the rehearsal, make sure that the piano is in a sensible place for you to be able to see both the action and the conductor.

At the start of each staging session, the maestro or the maestro's assistant may request a musical run-through of the pages that are being covered for that rehearsal. This is most likely for a first staging of a given scene, but does not normally happen for review sessions or a full run of an act. If the singers are not already familiar with the stage design, the scenery will be explained, often with photographs of previous productions if "in repertory" scenery is to be used. Drawings of the floor plan will show an aerial view of the stage, while renderings will illustrate a frontal-view picture (sometimes in color with characters drawn in) to show how it looks from the audience's perspective. This might all seem unimportant for the coach accompanist, but there are several reasons to pay attention to these details. Singers on high platforms onstage will react very differently to the conductor than if they are downstage in front of his or her nose, and it is part of the coach's job to be aware of this. Familiarity with the set will help you when you need to assist the musical preparation of difficult staging elements.

Vocabulary

There are a few words and phrases that you need to know before we get to your first imaginary staging session. Production staff uses many of these words as if they are part of normal English parlance, which can be frustrating to the novice coach accompanist. After a few weeks you will find yourself using them fluently, but the explanations below will give you a head start.

"Cross Stage Left" or "Stage Right"

This refers to the direction in which an actor walks, as seen from his or her perspective while facing the conductor. When the audience sees the singer "crossing stage left," it means that the singer is going to the audience's right-hand side. If you need to refer to the stage manager's score for a singer's blocking, you will often see XSL or XSR written as shorthand.

"He Crosses Upstage and She Counters Downstage"

A bit of history here, from when stages were higher at the back than they were at the front (before the audience seats were built in tiers). In this example, if the male actor "crosses upstage" and away from the audience, the female will "counter" (go the other way) by walking toward the audience. A sloping stage is called a "raked stage" and is made wedge-shaped by constructing a large platform that sits on top of the actual stage.

Legs, Wings, and Cycs

The legs are the long curtains of black fabric that hang on either side of the stage. The gap between each leg is called a wing and is numbered by the SM, with the lowest number being the furthest downstage (called L.1 or R.1 for short). A cyclorama (or cyc) hangs along the back of the stage and curves downstage at the sides. Rather than being painted (as a backdrop in the same position would be), this screen has lights projected onto it, and the lights or image comes from behind. If it is flat rather than curved, it is called a rear projector (RP) screen. A scrim is a huge piece of fabric that often covers the entire proscenium opening at the front of the stage. Up close it can be seen that the fabric is one piece of seamless netting that has one particularly useful property: If the lighting is turned on behind the scrim, the fabric "disappears," but if it is lit from the front, you cannot see the stage behind it. This allows the scenery or actors to move behind the scrim undetected by the audience. Despite the physical barrier, the singers will hear the coach or orchestra perfectly well from behind a scrim, and they will have no problem seeing the conductor. Other common scenic elements include raised platforms, step units, and flats (walls made by stretching canvas over a large wooden frame).

There are several excellent books that cover technical stage terms in detail. Ionazzi 1992[2] has a good dictionary of terms for all theatrical use, while Clark 2002[3] is designed specifically for advanced opera students.

Anatomy of a Staging

Scene Synopsis

Carmen has been warned by her gypsy friends that Don José, her old lover, is in the area and has been behaving strangely. Defiantly, she chooses to meet him outside the bullring, where her new

lover, Escamillo (the Toreador), is winning a bullfight. Don José has a fiery temper and cannot believe that Carmen has betrayed him. He tries to remind her of the love they once shared and convince her not to leave him, but Carmen declares that she will live and die a free woman. The offstage chorus then sings of Escamillo's impending victory, and Don José realizes that Carmen is truly in love with Escamillo. He confronts her with this accusation until she admits that it is true.

Staging Approach

The following is an illustration of how a director might approach staging part of the final scene of Bizet's *Carmen*, as described in the above synopsis. Most scenes are considerably longer than this example, but it shows you the level of detail that needs to be covered for a potentially frenetic segment of action. This particular excerpt involves only two characters onstage, and there are not usually any large scenic units onstage due to the required size of the chorus/parade at the start of this scene. Let us imagine that there is a door at the rear of the stage leading to an imaginary bullring, but that otherwise the stage is bare.

During a staging, the director will normally indicate where each dramatic moment starts by referring to the text or the musical material. He or she may ask for the accompanist to play a segment of the music on the piano, especially if it is to be finely choreographed, or if there is any stage combat where the precise timing of the action is vital for safety. The phrases are staged individually or in clusters, then strung together, and finally the entire segment is rehearsed fully a few times. Considering that this is a one-minute musical example from a three-hour opera, you get some idea of the level of repetition that can be required. A staging of this scene would take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete, including questions from the actors and musical comments from the coach or maestro.

Take a few minutes to look at the example in Figure 6.1, and perhaps play the piano-vocal score before and after reading the stage directions, to see how it all fits together. You might also listen to some recordings to see how the offstage choral elements are closely tied in with this particular staging. Nineteen sections are labeled on the score; these correlate with the numbered items below and illustrate how a director might break the scene into dramatic phrases. Each staging direction is followed by comments in italics that suggest how the action may affect the musical presentation.

Measure 3. Don José stands between Carmen and her exit (through the door to the bullring). She looks for a way to get around him but cannot find one. *Luckily, our bullring door is upstage; this is helpful when the tenor is hoping to catch a musical cue for his first note, as Carmen will automatically be downstage of him.*

Measure 7. Don José looks into Carmen's eyes, but she turns away to avoid eye contact, which might give away her secret love for Escamillo. *Free tempo here allows the actors to create tension as she looks away from his gaze.*

Measure 9. She walks around him to try and exit, but he grabs her arm. *Again, recitative timing allows them to maneuver the grasp safely.*

Measure 10. He grabs her other hand, so that she stands directly in front of him for the fermata *(allowing for connection with the pit).*

Measure 11. She pulls away from his grasp. *This might occur at any time in the music, but if it happens on the word "jamais," it will add strength to the text.*

Figure **6.1A** Bizet – Excerpt from *Carmen* (Act 4).

Measure 14. She begins to walk around him; she feels very self-assured about the ease with which she is leaving him. *She will walk upstage of him so that she can face downstage and sing out.*

Measure 16. They both stop moving at the sound of the fanfare and the noise of the chorus who claim Escamillo's victory. They both look in the direction of the sound. *Eye contact between soloists and conductor is not required during the offstage chorus. This facilitates their turn upstage and allows them complete freedom of movement for the next three dramatic "beats."*

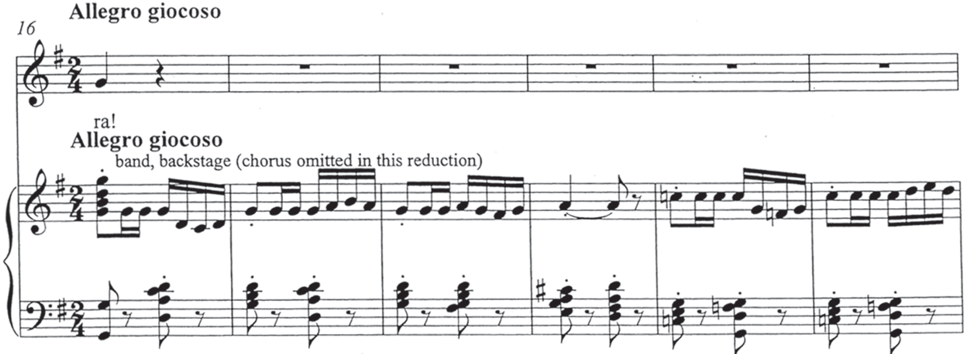

FIGURE 6.1B Bizet – Excerpt from *Carmen* (Act 4) (continued).

Measure 20. Carmen looks at Don José with an expression of smug pride; the chorus is singing about her lover.

Measure 24. Don José realizes that Escamillo is Carmen's true love. *We see it in his eyes, expression, and body language.*

FIGURE 6.1C Bizet – Excerpt from *Carmen* (Act 4) (continued).

Measure 30. Carmen sees that Don José now fully understands about Escamillo and that perhaps she has pushed his patience too far. She sees that he is both furious and desperate.

Measure 36. She tries to exit again, this time knowing that if he is desperate, he might become violent. José rushes up and grabs her wrist. *He has almost two full measures of the new tempo before his musical entrance, but due to the cross-rhythms and lack of clarity in the orchestral accompaniment, he will need to catch the conductor's beat.*

4

FIGURE 6.1D Bizet – Excerpt from *Carmen* (Act 4) (continued).

Measure 38. He spins her around to face him (as before).
Measure 39. As she faces him, he grabs her other wrist (as before).
Measure 41. She struggles, pulling backward.
Measure 42. He pulls her up close to his face; she tries to avoid his stare. *In avoiding his stare, she can either turn downstage to draw his gaze forward to the audience, or she might choose to face the other way because she does not need to sing.*

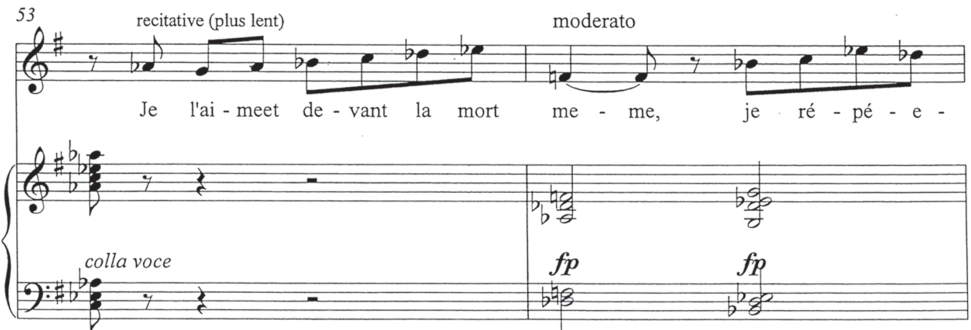

FIGURE 6.1E Bizet – Excerpt from *Carmen* (Act 4) (continued).

Measure 46. Carmen struggles and manages to pull away, making José fall to the floor (perhaps to his knees) in the process. *More triplets against duplets ("laisse moi") illustrate her frustration with being captured by José.*

FIGURE 6.1F Bizet – Excerpt from *Carmen* (Act 4) (continued).

Measure 48. He reaches up and grabs her skirt as she tries to leave. *During this act, the gypsy girls usually wear traditional Spanish costume, including a lacy headdress, and each carries a fan.*

Measure 52. She pulls the skirt away and turns to confront the sprawled José — she feels empowered once more, as he lies there at her feet. *Again, she can make eye contact with the maestro as she stands still above Don José at the fortissimo tremolando.*

Measure 54. Tauntingly, she repeats that she does indeed love Escamillo. She patronizes him with the phrase "je répéterai."

Observations and Explanations

This example is perhaps excessively detailed, and more closely resembles the level of explanation required when working with student singers than in professional opera. It shows the breakdown of dramatic phrases (sometimes called "beats") quite clearly, however. In addition to the considerable moving around that the actors need to accomplish while singing, it includes references to their expressions and some indications as to the motivation behind the stage movement. Often it is directly driven by the text (as in Measure 54, which uses the repetition of Carmen's declaration as a form of taunting), but it can also be linked with the musical material. The sounds from the *banda interna* and offstage chorus allow the stage action to come to a halt as Carmen and Don José stop to listen. This helps intensify the moments of action, much like a measure's rest of G.P. can alter musical tension. The offstage music also allows for the director to add to the dramatic material given to him in the libretto. While this example uses the musical "soundtrack" to show José's realization of Carmen's love for Escamillo, it could have been used in a variety of other ways, such as for a fight sequence, or perhaps with some chorus members rushing across the stage as they arrive late for the bullfight.

Of course, not all scenes are like this, and not all directors require this level of attention to detail (though some prefer more). But several facts still remain about this small section of music. First, it is important that both Carmen and Don José pay attention to the directorial detail, not just for their own characters but also to learn about the approach that their colleague will take in creating the role. If nothing else, it ensures the physical safety of the singers during conflict or fight sequences. The AD will be taking copious notes to ensure that the director's vision and details of the blocking are recorded for later rehearsals. Similarly, the coach accompanist should pay attention to these details, so that they can support the singers as they rehearse any difficult blocking during the initial staging process. If the director has told Don José that he is psychopathically deranged by the

end of the opera (rather than driven by envy, lust, love, or despair), this will alter the way that the actor creates the role, which will in turn alter some of the timbral elements of the vocal production. If the coach accompanist can incorporate the director's vision of dramatic structure into their coaching, they may become an indispensable addition to the production team.

Notes

1 In Britain, the director is often called the producer. In the United States, the producer mostly deals with the uppermost administrative details of the production and oversees the budget.
2 Ionazzi, Daniel A. *The Stage Management Handbook.* (Cincinnati: Betterway Books, 1992).
3 Clark, Mark Ross *Singing, Acting, and Movement in Opera: A Guide to Singer-getics.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

INTERLUDE 1 DO'S AND DON'TS IN REHEARSAL – DECORUM

In this book, Interludes are brief chapters that deal with small aspects of coaching – important, but not deserving huge research beyond personal experience and advice received.

Webster's Dictionary defines "decorum" as 1. Whatever is suitable or proper; propriety; congruity; 2. Propriety and good taste in behavior, speech, dress, etc.; 3. *often in pl.* an act or requirement of polite behavior. In conducting and coaching, this means taking a somewhat stiff stance toward the people with whom you work. For example, a conductor should either memorize the name of every orchestra member, or he should refer to them by the position they play (i.e., first trombone, first stand viola, piccolo, etc.). The concertmaster may be addressed by their first name, but it becomes awkward if the conductor refers to the third horn by name and addresses the first horn by their position. The conductor or coach must keep all activities on a professional basis. The unforgivable slip in decorum that is most frequently committed is the personal attack, frequently combined with sarcasm.

As John Donne put it so eloquently, "No man is an island." For that reason, it is important to realize that music is reflective of life. Both are ensemble efforts and cannot be accomplished well without the input of other musicians. With the isolated exceptions of electronic music, all other music making is a collaborative effort. The compositions of electronic music raise the distaste of some people in part because it is a fixed art form with no possibility of spontaneity.

With this collaboration in mind, it is important for any musician to realize that, unless a person is not even trying to be a good musician, patience should be the overriding factor in all rehearsals. It may, of course, be necessary to apply professional pressure in order to get things accomplished. Some pieces and people need extra effort to reach acceptable performance levels. But assuming a musician is working at his or her capacity, it is not a good thing to become impatient with a colleague. Such impatience leads to tensions and impedes progress toward the ideal goal.

When working as a coach or conductor, it is important to keep things on a positive and professional level. The effort of putting music together may occasionally make things difficult, particularly in music of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It serves no one, however, to allow those tensions to degenerate into snide sarcasm and petty comments. Saying things like "I'm not used to working on this level" or "I was expecting to work with musicians not children" (I have heard both!) serves only the ego of the one making the remark, and generates terrible feelings and higher tensions as a result.

At some point it may be necessary to discuss problems being faced privately, either with the individual in question or with collaborative colleagues. But such sessions are about finding solutions to

impediments to perfection in the music making; they are not about personality slander. The coach who is unwilling to work with a singer because he or she is "stupid" will find that the real problem lies more with the coach than with the singer. Some of the greatest singers in opera have a difficult time learning music. And some music is quite difficult to learn.

Finding a way through a singer's protective armor may take greater effort than expected, but any musician will bristle if attacked personally rather than on a professional level. In music rehearsals, coaches and conductors must always remember to work with the problem and not to denigrate the person trying to create music. I have learned that finding a way to make things correct can open the door for a singer to be a far greater artist than early coaching sessions might indicate. I have also learned that sinking to sarcasm creates only hard feelings.

There may come a time when it becomes obvious that a singer just does not have the musical knowledge and background to learn a specific role in the allotted time. Then it will take great tact to rectify the problem by replacing the singer, because such efforts can lead to hard feelings and personal confrontations. Other cast members may have built friendships with the replaced singer and feel threatened by the replacement. The more professionally the musical staff reacts, the more comfortable the transition to a different singer will be for all concerned.

INTERLUDE 2
DEALING WITH THE DIVA/DIVO

Into the lives of every coach occasionally must step the high-strung diva (female) or divo (male), and they can be extremely difficult people with whom to work. Telltale signs of being a diva/o are the phrases "I know that already," or the equally telling "I prefer to do it this way." When they begin correcting your foreign language knowledge, then you know you have an ego standing before you (unless you need to bone up on your languages!)

Very strong-minded singers who are not divas or divos exist, of course, and they can express (or argue) their points with equally strong conviction. But the true diva or divo takes her or his opinions and desires for expression as the only way, sometimes in the face of very strong reasons why such ideas are not viable. Their ideas frequently have a ring of unmusicality about them. The problem is sometimes not so much the ideas but the dogmatic way they choose to enforce them over even the most cogent reasons for proving them wrong.

The point of coaching is to instruct a singer in the correct ways of approaching the music. Correct means, in this case, stylistic, dramatic, and musical accuracy and shape. So, when singers choose their own course and emulate their favorite recording rather than taking the coach's suggestions, the coach must decide how to deal with this. The problem may involve something as basic as when to hold a high note – or not – and whether in fact to sing a high note (that does not stem from the composer's pen), or even the basic tempo itself. The fact that there is a precedence for someone doing it that way on a recording is not a terribly valid argument for its being correct.

The first problem arises usually when there is a desire to show off an isolated note, but the composer has given such an accompaniment that holding the note becomes impossible. It sometimes takes great determination and patience to explain the reasons why a note cannot, with any taste, be elongated. This same patience must be employed in dealing with the desire to add unwritten notes. Traditions must be met, of course, but singers are not always as adept at singing the added notes as they assume that they are. A coach must be tactful – but sometimes quite firm – in finding other options that are possible.

An example of selecting the "correct" tempo can even arise in an aria as familiar as Liù's "Tu che di gel sei cinta" from *Turandot* (already mentioned in the Preface). Puccini has set a tempo somewhat more flowing than is sometimes taken. Even well-schooled coaches love to stretch the basic tempo of the aria out to something much slower than Puccini's careful markings. This affords no room for the stylistically correct expansion at the high notes or dramatic phrases. A singer must

be made aware of not only the correct tempo, but of the reason why it is correct (and the marked metronome number itself may not be enough of a reason for some singers.)

Conversely, in Gounod operas the coach may have to stress that Gounod's metronome numbers are almost universally too slow. No one will ever sing Marguerite's Jewel Song (from *Faust*) at the tempo Gounod indicates. The singer playing Marguerite would die – and so would the music. On the other hand, it is good to realize that a slightly slower than "usual" tempo affords the singer the possibility of singing the repeated "Réponds, réponds, réponds vite" without a drastic ritardando.

Another important possibility in handling the diva/o is to dive into the language and its implications, including the stage directions (in their original language if possible). This makes the singer realize that they must work and not throw attitude. If Verdi uses the term "un fil di voce," the coach must find out if the singer understands what that means and discuss how to achieve it. (The phrase is in *Falstaff*, and it means "a filament or strand of voice.")

It is easiest to deal with the eccentricities of the singer by taking a no-nonsense approach to what goes on in the coaching and by showing them that their attitude, so carefully constructed around their persona, does not faze the coach in the least. Flattery is wonderful in its place, and compliments should be used when work is truly good. But the coach who does nothing but pass out the compliments is serving neither the singer nor him or herself very well. Most singers, even those in question, want to learn the music correctly, and they will respect the coach for being honest and thorough. They are paying good money for exactly that. Empty platitudes are not helpful. If the singer does not wish to follow the coach's advice, and the coach's point is valid, then the coach can always refuse future dealings with that singer.

Italian opera houses have always had prima donnas – and primo uomos, and seconda donnas and secondo uomos. It is historically part of the Italian opera house structure and tradition. But the slang version of that position is a diva/o, and they might just as well be referred to as a prima donkey, for they are just as headstrong and stubborn, frequently knowing even less than that animal.

Excuses over not learning a piece of music are nothing beyond that: excuses. The fact remains that the singer has failed to meet a deadline in memory. Attitude does not solve the fact that they are behind. When a singer lags behind the rest of a cast in preparation and memory, it affects the entire cast, not just the single singer.

None of this impugns the singing ability of any singer, only their attitude. Why these attitudes exist can stem from any number of factors. Perhaps a singer is ill at ease and having problems with a role vocally, emotionally, or dramatically. The coach, in taking the no-nonsense approach, can get through their "defenses" and find the real heart of the problems. It is for that reason that coaches must consider in each coaching session how to solve vocal or musical problems. They must also decide how to ignore the image the singer tries so hard to maintain. It may make working relationships difficult, but it may also make the singer realize that the coach, who deals with these attitudes, is the best friend he or she can have outside of a vocal teacher. Polishing a rough musical gem into a sparkling creation takes time and talent from both singer and coach.

PART II

Considerations

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INTERLUDE 3
COMPARING COMPOSER STYLES

Many chapters in this book compare various vocal styles with another, in a sense pitting composer against composer. What makes each composer individual? Every coach must decide these things for themselves and must codify the differences that are acceptable in the work of one composer and forbidden in the work of another.

These include orchestration, vocal gestures, vocal forms, and even the kind of libretto used. For a good example of this, one might compare Wagner and Puccini. The slight sob in the voice, possibly appropriate in works of Puccini, would seem out of place and stylistically incongruous emanating from a Wagnerian hero. Even in Act 3, Lohengrin should not allow a sob to inflect his cries of "Elsa." That will sound weak. Conversely, an acting style that might suggest the grand gods and goddesses of Wagner would be quite wrong for the realistic characters of Puccini. There is subtle common ground, but only in the way that emotions are real.

Similarly, a metronomic pace might be perfect for an ensemble from a Mozartian opera, but a similar steadiness in Richard Strauss would kill the beauty of the work. Strauss himself said that a tempo marking is only good for four or five measures at best.

The main differences are usually found in the way each composer treats the setting of words. In Chapter 12 on Mussorgsky and Russian opera, we will find that the pacing of the music depends heavily on the dramatic pacing of the words. Sometimes what seems as though it should musically proceed at a steady pace will require breaks, all dependent on the flow of the words.

In preparing a score, a coach must know traditions and languages, but he must also understand the different ways in which each composer treats diacritical markings, dynamics, ritardandi, and the like. If Puccini neglects to write *a tempo* in the score (as he frequently does in the first act duet of *Tosca*), this does not mean that he expects one ritardando to increase on the last one. If so, the music would come to a complete standstill. In these instances, coaches must use every tool possible to get at the truth: recordings, source books, tradition books.

Even composers of seemingly equal style have major differences. Salieri and Mozart would seem to be quite similar, but they are not. Due to the strange way Salieri uses cadences (as compared to Mozart's impeccable sense of musical punctuation), the recitatives written by Salieri are much more difficult to bring off than Mozart's. A coach expecting to work in exactly the same way with any two composers who at first glance seem to be similar will find himself facing those differences within minutes.

Another consideration is found in the harmonic differences between generations of composers. Singers today are not attuned to the meaning indicated by the chromatics of Mozart. These pass by unattended due to exposure to the harmonic language of Wagner, Berg, Britten, and others; singers are simply not aware of the importance of Mozart's chromatics. Looking at the end of the sextet in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* will show how chromatic Elvira's part is compared to the other characters. Her character is truly in anguish, trying to stand alone against their force, while the others are merely angry or haughty. Singers who perform Elvira are usually struggling to cut through the textures and are not thinking about the anguished line Mozart has given them. Each phrase is also twice the length of those sung by other characters. When singers are made aware of this, they begin to understand the nature of the ensemble and this character much more.

In the same opera, in the famous "La ci darem la mano" duet, Zerlina's infamous chromatics as she wavers, not being "forte" enough to withstand Don Giovanni's advances, tell reams about her character. They also can tell reams about the intonation of the singer.

A well-sung portamento is quite acceptable in Puccini. He even asks for it, as do Rossini, Verdi, and Bellini. Mozart almost never asks for such things, and to place one within a Mozartian phrase frequently seems just as out of place as an unwritten ritardando.

The hardest thing for a coach is to keep the differences of composers in his mind, and to keep looking at music with fresh eyes. Things we all overlook, either through too much familiarity or through musical saturation from other styles, are frequently things the composer considered quite important. This is true of fermatas as well, both those printed on notes and those written (or implied) on rests. In *Rigoletto*, in the famous aria "Cortigiani, vil razza dannata," Verdi gives Rigoletto the words "Tu taci?" ("You're silent?"). He follows this with a fermata and then the sighed "Ahime!" Few baritones take the time to allow Marullo *not* to answer the question. They plow ahead into the vocally resplendent "Ahime," but they inflect it with only some of the pathos it needs, because they took no fermata. This is something Mozart would not have done, and which Puccini would have made more obvious. Such comparisons are essential in coaching.

7

BAROQUE OPERAS

In the first edition of *Opera Coaching*, I paired baroque opera and Mozart. My thought was that much of the vocalism is similar. However, both have so many issues that, in this edition, I am separating them. I will, however, retain discussion of vocal style in the lieder of Franz Schubert in Chapter 8 on Mozart.

The baroque operas encompass a wide range of styles. In a sense, including Monteverdi and Handel in one grouping called baroque is like putting Puccini and John Adams together today. In both cases, the composers are separated by about one hundred years and share few stylistic traits. This period also embraces early operas in England.

Monteverdi is such an important composer that his operatic style needs some detailed discussion. Despite a prolific operatic output, only three of his operas come down to us and are regularly performed today. *L'Orfeo*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (*The Coronation of Poppea*), and *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (*The Return of Ulysses to his Homeland*) are the only surviving operas we have from him. Though they are not identical in style, the differences stem as much from the story each tells. Most scenes in these operas are constructed of alternating passages of recitative and arioso (brief passages where a definite meter is felt.) While some passages might be called monologues, there are few outright arias as we know them from the later baroque period. The recitatives must be treated somewhat freely, but with rather strict observance of note values. It is the tempo that alters, not the rhythm. The arioso sections frequently are in triple rhythm or in a march rhythm. The key to these passages is found in the "swing" of the section. Monteverdi may have a lullaby (Arnalta's "Oblivion" in *Poppea*), which rocks in a gentle two to the measure, or he may have a dance feeling akin to a modern (nineteenth-century) waltz.

One practice found in Monteverdi that lasted all the way through the bel canto period was the use of the symbol C to indicate recitative. Though in later years this became synonymous with 4/4 time, in recitative passages these measures have, in effect, no meter at all. They usually contain four quarter notes' worth of rhythm, but they may just as easily expand to include five, six, or more beats. This is not a mistake. In Monteverdi, the measure lengths have more to do with phrasing or verbal nuances than any musical impetus.

In order to study Monteverdi in greater detail, let us choose *L'incoronazione di Poppea.* In the Prologue, the usually employed Overture has many hemiolas, but still has either a majestic pace (bars 1–17) or a dancelike rhythm (bars 18–33). The Leppard edition repeats certain sections of

the Overture to give it more length, but such repeats are not necessary. It is curtain music and not a formal overture.

I must mention that what the original orchestration was cannot be devised with any certainty. Unlike *L'Orfeo*, for which the orchestration is complete, *Poppea* comes to us in figured bass and vocal line only. While it can be assumed the orchestration may have been lighter than *L'Orfeo*, exactly what was played is not a given. As beautiful as the Leppard edition sounds, it is stylish without being stylistically right. It was, however, an edition which may have rescued *Poppea* for modern audiences. The Walter Goehr edition, mentioned earlier, is written for mid-twentieth-century ears, and, although effective, is colored with the palette of the Romantic age.

Fortuna begins the Prologue. Her lines, snide and dismissive, are delivered with self-righteous pomposity. This means that the speed must not be too great. The measures should be "conducted" or felt with large beats for each half note in the measure. At the words "Dissipata, disusata" ("dissipated, abandoned"), the "meter" becomes triple, moving along at a simple, flowing pace. With such syllabification, it is not necessary to be smooth. The desired effect is relatively legato, but the singer must point words up for meaning. "Sempre," though repeated three times, must not allow the quarter note on the second syllable to be full length. The syllable is touched on, nothing more. At "Già regina" ("Once an empress") the recitative returns. This pattern continues until the words "Chi professa virtù" ("Who professes to be virtuous"). The Naples edition of the opera calls this an aria. It is in 4/4 time and has wonderful word painting on "richezze" ("riches") and "Gloria," of which the singer must make use. Modest embellishments can also be inserted. The last word of the aria is the character's name – Fortune. This requires some embellishment on the "-tu" syllable. In early Monteverdi, the trillo or nanny-goat trill would have been used. Some feel that *Poppea* is already at the end of that era, and a small flourish above the note might be more in order (see Figure 7.1).

Virtù answers with a tirade of her own. It is strictly recitative and includes some wonderful moments of word painting. "Sommergiti malnata" ("Submerge yourself, bad born") is depicted in such a way as might indicate that Virtù drives Fortuna back. The later word "ascende" literally does ascend. But Virtù's entire vocal line has a different character from that of Fortuna. Where Fortuna is hectoring and somewhat aggressively pushy, Virtù uses shorter phrases, seemingly indicating a stately (stodgy?) character. Note, for example, the repeated ego boost at "Io son … Io son la tramontana" ("I am … I am the guiding wind"). She's either puffing herself up or terribly insecure. The rising vocal line indicates the former. Her greatest self-congratulatory gesture is her ascent to Olympus. As the phrases beginning "Può dirsi, senza adulazione" ("one can say, without

FIGURE 7.1 Monteverdi – *L'incoronazione di Poppea* – Prologue – excerpt shown first as written and with two possible embellishments.

adulation") indicate, Virtù can be just as catty as Fortuna. Her first mention of her rival includes the vocal put-down of the flatted E, a note that is almost bluesy in nature. It is dismissive in its own right.

Amore's entrance is wonderfully impudent, but also is mostly recitative. The Leppard edition gives a long flourish to underline the entrance itself. (He also transposes Amore up to emulate the bright nature of an impudent boy.) The reply Fortuna and Virtù make in their duet is snippy and fully sarcastic. All of this comes across only if the diction is clear. It also helps if emphasis is given to "colorful" words. It is worth remembering that the first opera composers considered the words to be of great importance. This was a conscious return to the ideals of the Greeks (as interpreted by Italians) in the plays they wrote. (Some believe that the Greek plays may have been sung in similar fashion to earliest Italian opera.) For the singer to color words with scalar passages, leaps, or descending/ascending word painting was quite accepted as the way to underline the text.

The second scene I choose from *Poppea* is the first monologue of Ottavia. It begins with "Disprezzata regina" ("Rejected queen"). Although she repeats this phrase several times, only once attaching herself to Nero, it is curious that the first *paragraph* ends with "afflitta moglie" ("afflicted wife"). Then she changes from dejected woman to one thinking about what to do. She blames women for being weaker than men. She can *just see* Nero in the arms of Poppea, happily enjoying his pleasure. After that her self-sadness overtakes her. She calls on destiny to send down lightning bolts to punish the emperor. The repetitions of "fulmini" speed up, the fast scales being a musical depiction of the lightning bolts. Her anger then slowly subsides. When the nurse enters, trying to be helpful, Ottavia is rather short with her. She is quite subdued upon hearing Seneca's subsequent advice. (Her modest range seems to say, "You aren't being helpful, philosopher!")

In this monologue, the coach and singer need to find which phrases fit with which other nearby phrases. It is for this type of scene that speaking the text in English is helpful for organizing the thoughts. It is as important here as in Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" speech.

The later argument between Seneca and Nero can and should be paced not as singing but as a real argument. Each is arguing his own ideas about honor, and that is vitally important.

In the French opera of the period, the words require even more pointing. Rameau and Lully are a far cry from the Italian waltz and march rhythms that invade Monteverdi. They are almost courtly or balletic in their majesty. Yet difficulty of singing these works in the correct fashion and the scarcity of editions have kept them out of the active repertoire; this is changing slowly. The audience, however, has not learned to appreciate this repertoire yet. Perhaps the rare performances that are given would do well to keep the drama to the fore, not slighting the correct stylistic elements, but also not creating a museum style so stilted that few modern singers or audiences will "get" it. Some recordings emulate the style well but have singing that is unpleasant to hear.

Little seems to have been done in Germany in the German language in the field of opera; at least no German baroque opera is in the current repertoire. However, with the works of Scarlatti, Vivaldi, and Handel, the Italian baroque took a new turn. The plots of many of those operas are long on complication and number of characters, while some of them are short on what we call good character development in the later nineteenth-century sense. This makes the coach's job quite difficult.

Helping a singer find the basis for a character is pulled down by irrelevant numbers for the secondary characters. Even a relatively strong dramatic structure, like Handel's *Giulio Cesare* (*Julius Caesar*) has moments of considerable stasis or *longueur.* In addition to the quest for a dramatic structure, though, is the need to have the singers sing with great intensity and beauty. That is the point of baroque opera. The purity of singing must never be sacrificed to the nineteenth-century "god" of

high drama. Yet high drama must be conveyed with singular intensity, an intensity that is conveyed through word pointing and not demonstrative "acting."

Then there are those da capo arias! Alessandro Scarlatti is said to have originated these; he certainly used them extensively. The accepted dramatic idea is simple. The singer sings the A section (usually rather long, in two or three sections). Then the ritornello finishes the piece in the original key. The B section follows and is about a third the length of the A section. The key for the B section is frequently the relative major or minor, though it may be a third or a fifth away. The singer may add some embellishments here, particularly in the later portion, where frequently the words from the first few phrases of the B section are repeated. Then the singer returns to the A section. The dramatic revelations from the B section are supposed to affect the meaning of the A section. Hence, to highlight this changed perspective, the singer embellishes the notes – changing what is written to a fancier, stronger, and possibly different dramatic stance from the first time. This practice is as much a vocal embellishment as a dramatic one, but the problem for the coach and singer is to find embellishments that fit the particular singer and the particular "revelations" from the B section. It is appalling how many singers listen to recordings to get ideas and end by copying the ornaments sung by Renée Fleming, Beverly Sills, Joan Sutherland, or Natalie Dessay. These probably will not fit their voices well, but the singer would rather risk a bad impression vocally than invent a set of ornaments devised to suit their own voices. Few, if any, singers today can or should try to invent spontaneous ornamentation through "inspired" improvisation. And some famous singers admit to employing conservative solutions. It is still the drama that must be served, not just the purist's need to hear added notes.

The singing style must be expressive, though in being expressive some singers become too Romantic. The volume required for nineteenth-century repertoire is not necessary here. The theaters of the baroque era held only 250 to 750 people, and their very intimacy (with two or three balconies) aided the singer in putting the nuances across. What is required is a style combining nuance and great technical display in singing. The written scales, arpeggios, and cantilenas (legato melodies) require perfect technical poise, and the added embellishments make the music even harder. The good coach must be helpful yet strong-minded about the purity of singing. Due to the kind of leisurely pace and the dramatic form of the works, the modern stage director will find them more difficult to stage than a Shakespearean drama. The opera coach will find it equally taxing.

But how to ornament? In Figures 7.2 and 7.3 the reader will find some examples of works printed with first the vocal line as written by the composer (Handel), and then with an ornamented version. These are but examples. The ornaments employed can only hint at the variety possible. None are taken from recordings!

Dance rhythms tend to appear frequently in baroque arias. These aren't the waltz, but they are minuet, gavotte, sicilienne, and others. This was the music of the time, and these dances were the most popular, so composers were sure to employ them. The lift and buoyancy of various dances helped to keep the arias moving. Since dancers do not usually slow down while dancing, neither should singers, cadential points notwithstanding. Once set, a tempo should proceed along at a very steady pace, not yielding to the singer's penchant for holding notes or expanding phrases. The chosen tempo should accommodate the most difficult portion of the music.

While embellishments may be extreme, many scholars say that moderation is the key ingredient in changing notes or in cadenzas at the end of sections. The highly emotional adagio arias of some of the baroque operas can embrace some slight elongations of rests for expressive reasons, but, in these instances, the composers clearly indicate the possibility for this by interrupting the constant rhythm in the accompaniment.

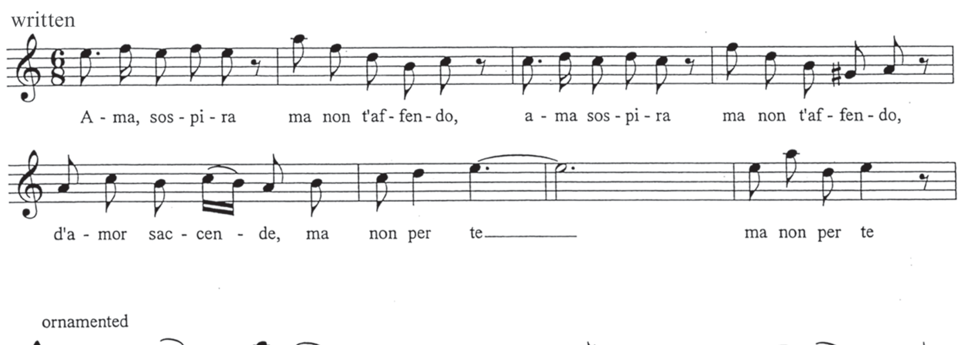

FIGURE 7.2 Handel – *Alcina* #20 – excerpt as written and with a possible embellishment.

FIGURE 7.3 Handel – *Alcina* #22 – as written and with embellishments.

FIGURE 7.4 Handel – *Alcina* #23 – as written and with embellishments.

Some passagework within a steady tempo may have some "inégale" sixteenth notes. Stressing the first note of a group of four sixteenth notes not only helps the singers know where they are in a scalar run, but also gives shape to the passage, making it flexible and beautiful rather than a machine on automatic pilot. The tenuto first note must not be too long, but it must be elongated just enough to give that shape.

Similarly, it is in the baroque era that the problem mentioned in an earlier chapter appears most frequently – that of writing rhythms of similar passages differently. Printed in Chapter 4 (Figure 4.1) is a passage from Handel's *Alcina*, written first as it is printed and second as it might be performed. The changed rhythm might be considered an embellishment, but there are conductors who consider that Handel intended both passages, orchestral and vocal, to be performed in the same rhythm (see Figure 7.4.)

One wonderfully confusing passage, shown in Figure 7.5, comes from a number Scarlatti cut from *Griselda*. The written rhythms seem quite strange, but playing them erases the problems at once and shows that they should be performed as in the second example.

One important facet of playing and singing baroque opera is the specific embellishment of rapid decrescendo. This embellishment has been given a name by members of Apollo's Fire, the

FIGURE 7.5 Scarlatti – *Griselda* as it is printed, and (in reduction) as it should be played.

Cleveland Baroque Orchestra. Jeannette Sorrell, its music director, says that they call this embellishment a "whale tone." With apologies to the leviathans of the deep, it has nothing to do with them except for their physical shape. Drawing the shape of a whale facing left (with no tail fins!) gives a perfect image of the shape of the longish note. A "soft" attack followed by a quick but long decrescendo creates a separation quite light and flexible, without great effort for the singers.

Since coaches will be asked (or forced) to coach oratorios of this era, a few words are necessary in this area as well. It is generally accepted that the natural flow and freedom one finds in the Mozart recitatives (to be discussed in the next chapter) are somewhat more restricted in Italian baroque opera (though the difference is not as great as some scholars might make one believe). Oratorio is even more restrictive. The recitatives are short and usually are sung with more emotional weight than that found in operas. They carry also the weight of symbolism. The "halo" around the voice of Christ in the Passions comes from the sustained strings. That halo isn't the only symbol in those passages. It is a typically baroque way of viewing things to note that strings on a violin are made of gut or flesh, and they are stretched across a wooden bridge. This symbolism of

flesh across wood is a baroque creation. The voices usually retain all correct rhythms and a relatively slow tempo. Bach Passions have some solos that are inordinately difficult to sing. Each Evangelist passage, for example, is written high and exposed, the recitatives sitting quite high for the tenor's projection of text. (Baroque pitch helps this.)

There are also, of course, the secular cantatas of Bach. Any good performance of Bach's "Coffee Cantata" or Telemann's "Canary Cantata" must bring out the humor inherent in those delightful works. The woman's insouciant need for coffee – "Coffee muss ich haben" – "I must have coffee" – is a far cry from the arias of the Passions. Yet attention to shape and words in these works is just as important.

There are only a few English operas of the period, and Purcell wrote most of them. Some of his operas are more theater music – *The Fairy Queen* and *King Arthur* are incidental music to theatrical presentations more than operas. Their music is beautiful, colorful, and yet seldom performed. *Dido and Aeneas*, however, is a full-fledged opera. While it is only an hour long, it is dramatic and covers the Greek tale quite well. The style is reserved – read into that, no real embellishments – and there are scenes that are not monumental. The ending is, for this early in the history of opera, a scene of great intensity. Save for a few titles from *The Fairy Queen*, it is also the earliest aria that sopranos/ mezzo-sopranos excerpt for recitals and contests. The following choral ending is breathtaking.

INTERLUDE 4
THE ISSUE OF STRAIGHT TONE SINGING

The most controversial vocal question of the baroque and Mozartian era is that of singing with what is called "straight tone." By Mozart's time it was far less a concern; but in the era of Bach, Scarlatti, Handel, Vivaldi, and before that with Dowland lute songs and Monteverdi, it was and is a major point of discussion.

Straight tone is, as the name would imply, singing with no vibrato. Such singing is used at times in nineteenth-century lieder and twentieth-century opera to indicate emotions ranging from weary to deranged. It is sometimes called for with indications like "tonlos" – literally "without tone." A perfect place for such a coloration would be at the beginning of the Schumann lied "Ich hab' im Traum geweinet" ("I've wept in my dreams."), from *Dichterliebe.* There the world-weary, lovelorn singer is in deepest despair, and straight tone conveys this easily.

Before proceeding further, I will say that lots of the singing in today's popular music is sung with little or no vibrato. Unfortunately, we have no recordings of singers of the eighteenth century, and few composers wrote about the voices per se then. Only when we get to Mozart do letters and comments say much about the singers for whom he wrote specific roles.

The baroque treatises make mention of a kind of embellishment in which the singer starts a longer tone with no vibrato and adds the vibrato as a coloration. Some musicologists and conductors have taken this to mean that the normal singing style was without any vibrato. That ornament is used today in popular music, too. Frank Sinatra used this emotive "embellishment" in songs like "New York, New York," starting the last note straight and adding the vibrato to increase the dynamic rendering.

Singing with a straight tone in solos or in a chorus has merits, of course, but when sopranos sing high notes with straight tone, slightly pushing the note for volume, the resulting straight tone is surely not what the composers wanted. It is unpleasantly pointed and frequently sharp.

The truth is that singing without vibrato means either that the singer is "holding" the tone straight (forbidding vibrato), or else is using no support. With intricate vocal passages such as those given to Bradamante and Ruggiero in Handel's *Alcina*, "holding" the tone makes such fast passages impossible. If diaphragmatic support is not used, the passages will lack clarity and projection. A singer performing Bradamante could never penetrate the textures of the orchestra in her aria "Vorrei vendicarmi" if she was not supporting her voice well.

The question of just what support entailed in the baroque era has even come into question by some who believe that the "modern" idea of support was a thing unknown in Handel's time. Vocal writing in *Alcina*, *Giulio Cesare*, and many other Handel or Scarlatti operas shows that some support had to be used. Besides, the operas of Mozart were less than fifty years away, and arias like "Come scoglio' or "Hai già vinta la causa!" cannot be sung without good support and modern vocal technique. Otherwise, the orchestras would cover the voices, and the voices would have no spin to them.

The Manuel Garcia family, father and son particularly, who were active in Rossini's time, taught voice and began the scientific study of vocal production, but it is certain that they did not invent it. Far more likely is that they perfected what needed to be improved. Their vocal teaching indicates that a well-supported tone has freedom to it, with a light vibrato warming the sounds produced. This vibrato adds to the spin and projection of a vocal tone.

This modest vibrato is not to be confused with the rapid tremolo that inflicts some singers today, nor can the style of vocal production required in baroque opera be equated with the "tutta forza" (full force) singing found in Verdi or with the long, sustained lines found in Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss.

Choral singing in baroque times must just as surely have included this kind of easy vibrato, as did the solo singing. The straight tone might have been used, as in solo lines, for coloration, but choruses today, when asked to sing with a totally straight tone as a general course, tend to sound flat in pitch, shallow, and colorless. While this can be a wonderful effect, it severely limits their vocal appeal. A straight tone will hinder the chorus rendering of fast passages such as "And he will purify" from Handel's *Messiah* as much as a vibrato-ridden one will. A flexible voice needs support or the notes become sketchy and unclear. That was not Handel's goal.

I have always considered vibrato to be a result of body rhythms. A clear example of body rhythm can be seen when a pianist without sight plays the piano. They sometimes bob and weave forward and back in a rhythm not related to the tempo they're playing. They do that because the movement does not bother them in terms of reading the music. It is a natural rhythm that all people have in their bodies. It will give a voice a warm vibrato that is not intrusive to intonation and is easy to control. It isn't a fast vibrato – the kind that is close to bleating. Nor is it a wide and slow vibrato – what we more frequently think of as a wobble or straining sound. That is why, when a singer wants to sing straight tone, it is an added embellishment; they must do something unnatural to acquire it. The lack of vibrato in children comes at least partially because they are not a smooth flowing body yet. What will become a natural range for women will be larger and possibly higher, and for boys will drop an octave or two.

Some solo singers still perform coloratura passages in a sketchy fashion, slipping over the notes rapidly but without sounding them clearly. If this is the only way singing with straight tone can produce the passages, then it is further evidence that such singing cannot be authentic. Singing with straight tone is not necessary for achieving intonation in choral singing. Verdi and Wagner choruses must be sung with the same attention to intonation as a Bach chorale.

Another issue in singing related to straight tone is the question of what constitutes singing in tune. Pianos, harpsichords, and most organs are tuned in equal temperament so that they can play comfortably in any tonality. However, some organs are tuned in different tuning scales, so that the pure chords sound clearly in D major or C major, but they sound quite odd indeed when D♭ major or B major is attempted. At least one of these tuning options is called Kirnberger 3. Recently I demonstrated this to a boys' chorus that was visiting my local church (where I am the organist). I played "Amazing Grace" in F♯ major, and the look on their faces was priceless. They knew something was wrong, but what? I then played it in G major. It was like high humidity suddenly became cool and arid.

One of the joys of orchestral music is that the orchestra can tune to the various keys in which they play, moving the thirds wider or narrower to make the correct tonality sound out clearly. Indeed, this is one of the main differences between well-trained orchestras and the student orchestras found at the high school level. Singers also adjust naturally to sing in any given key; equal temperament is not innate with singers. Achieving the "ring" of the barbershop quartet is based on this intentional adjustment. They, too, sing with a very modest vibrato, at times making their tones straight in order to increase the vibrant ping.

It is true that orchestras in baroque and classical times played with no vibrato, or at least far less than they do today. This information comes from the treatises on string playing published by various teachers along the way (including Leopold Mozart). But this does not necessarily transfer to solo singing. It might just be that it was felt that vibrato would get in the way of fast string passages (as it does in rapid vocal passages). The beautiful lines heard in string writing from baroque and classical pieces for orchestra may have also been expected to receive the warming influence of an easy vibrato, just as surely as it was expected in vocal writing. (A valid point to ponder is that straight tone in orchestras was employed because problems with keeping the chamber orchestras in tune back then made achieving the cleanest tone possible a necessity.) Woodwinds and brass in ensembles do not usually play with vibrato even today, but their pitch is more fixed than that of strings. Hearing a recording of Wagner where the horns have vibrato is quite disconcerting!

In orchestral writing, considerable points for debate arise concerning the use or not of straight tone. For those who understand vocal production, consistent singing with a straight tone is considered a mistake, based on misinformation, antiquated thinking, and a lack of the knowledge of what constituted good singing back in Handel's time. A vibrant tone comes from good support, and this includes some vibrato. I would shudder to hear the glorious cantilena of "I know that my redeemer liveth" from Handel's *Messiah* without a light, fluid vibrato giving the phrases warmth.

An important point for all coaches would be that volume is not the goal in baroque singing. Colorful usage of the language, plus well-modulated dynamic range, and well-produced singing must carry the day perhaps more than in any other era to come.

8

MOZART AND CLASSICAL SONG

Turn on a classical radio station, and you can tell a piece is baroque, but knowing which baroque composer wrote it is more difficult. Bach is monumental and wonderfully contrapuntal, while Handel is more lyrical – real melodies. Alessandro Scarlatti and Vivaldi are harder to pick out, but that's because they are less frequently played. Domenico Scarlatti, Alessandro's son, wrote mostly for harpsichord, and his works helped to establish idiomatic writing for keyboard.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, in contrast, has an isolated style, immediately identifiable on the radio. He is the only composer to have conquered every musical form he tackled. Masses, symphonies, piano sonatas, violin sonatas, serenades, string trios, ballet (in *Idomeneo*), and opera all thrive. He is also the most successful composer to have written operas in two languages – Italian and German. In short, he set the standard for classical perfection. It is easy to identify works by Mozart compared to those, say, by Haydn. And his keyboard writing took the Scarlatti precedent forward confidently, no matter how early the piece. His operas, even *Bastien und Bastienne*, written when he was a young teenager, show the musical identity that is immediately identifiable. It may be naïve, but it is Mozart, and it doesn't wear out its welcome in the first ten minutes.

The early operas of Mozart are similar in structure to those of Antonio Vivaldi, Alessandro Scarlatti, and G.F. Handel. A frequent device found in baroque operas was to begin and end the entire opera in the same keys. Scarlatti did that consistently, while Handel did not. Mozart, whose sense of key was extraordinary, was as consistent as Scarlatti.

Mozart's operas, even the early ones, are filled with personality, and the characters act naturally. The reactions they show may be those of a character caught off guard, or they may be filtered through courtly manners and mannerisms. But how astute of Mozart to give us the flesh and blood of Don Giovanni and Leporello; the Count and Countess Almaviva; Figaro and Susanna; Osmin, Papageno, Tamino, the Queen of the Night, and a whole roster of others. Each role shows flashes of real humanity, nobility, foolishness, pride, and evil residing side by side.

Vocalization in Mozart (as in baroque operas) requires careful dynamic shading. It also demands a purity of vocal line – full and clear but never forced. Mozart operas have vocal lines that hark back to Handel. While it might be tempting for a baritone performing the Count in *Figaro* to explode various words in his recitative and aria "Hai già vinta la causa," the moment "perfidy" jumps out of the vocal line, the singer sounds stylistically out of place. Verdi and Puccini do not

allow for such excess either, but these excesses do not seem quite so out of place in their works as in Mozart's works. The portamento, while appropriate for the works of later composers, is equally out of place in Mozart's works.

Mozart's recitatives are amazingly facile. The advice in Chapter 3 on recitatives is very applicable to his style of writing. No less an authority than Riccardo Muti has expressed his astonishment at Mozart's ability in writing recitatives. He said that the harmonic shifts, cadences, and shaping of vocal lines in Mozart recitatives are so apt that they become uncanny. This makes the argument that Mozart did not write the recitatives for *La clemenza di Tito* the more cogent, since they are inferior to the bulk of Mozart's output. In that opera, the recitatives seem awkwardly phrased and flow badly from moment to moment. Even the recitatives (usually jettisoned in favor of the commonly used dialog) in his first opera *Bastien und Bastienne* are well written. (Mozart wrote recitatives for only part of this opera. One wonders if it was during the composition of that opera that Mozart decided German language operas should have dialog and not recitatives.)

In his Italian language operas, Mozart occasionally indulges in an "incorrect" accent just to be more expressive. Again, it is vitally important for a coach to listen carefully, or a singer might accent metrically rather than naturally. Recitatives never have triplets! When Basilio in *Figaro* sings the clause "senza di me," the word "me" falls on the downbeat, with the preceding two words being three eighth notes as a pickup. In "senza," the second syllable falls on the fourth beat, but it should never come out "senZA di me."

When a coach works with singers on Mozart recitatives, they must make certain the singer knows what they are saying and take the time to say it. As mentioned much earlier, it was once common to race through recitatives at top speed. Then people began to realize the wonderful "thoughts" that precede a line. In the first scene of *Le nozze di Figaro*, Figaro tells Susanna that he is preparing the room to be their sleeping quarters. Susanna needs to take an intake of air before singing, "In questa stanza?" ([To sleep] "in this room?"). She is incredulous because she knows the Count's intentions, and Figaro obviously does not. That pushes the recitative toward the second duet.

It is, however, in the musical numbers that a coach must take the most care. Particularly in the ensembles, it is necessary to have not only the notes together, but the words as well, balanced so that each strand of voice and text comes through clearly. Each consonant must *pop* at the same time as those of the next singer. The Act 2 trio and finale from *Figaro* or the great sextet in Act 2 of *Don Giovanni* show those problems quite well. Poised, modulated singing as a unit must carry the day, even as disparate characters emerge. The singers who, even for a moment, try to outsing each other in a work like the "Farewell" trio in act one of *Così fan tutte* will sound loud and ungraceful. In the comic effect of having Fiordiligi and Dorabella slightly try to outdo each other, the effect must not be too overt, or it becomes ugly. Nothing is wonderful about ugly singing. The coach's job is to balance such ensembles vocally, dramatically, and musically.

In one part of the above-mentioned sextet from *Don Giovanni*, most of the singers sing in two-bar phrases, their music being diatonic. Against them, musically and dramatically, Donna Elvira sings in four-bar phrases, and she sings a more chromatic line. Astute singers can make sense of this distinction and use it to illuminate the differences between characters.

The generally accepted range of tempos in Mozart has expanded in recent years (usually to become faster). The coach must have a good idea of the usual tempos and a passing understanding of the newer trends. Portamentos, cadential ritards, and held notes are simply out of place in Mozart's musical fabric. Vocal flourishes at fermatas are possible, however, and they can add flavor to the moment. (We will discuss embellishing the vocal line shortly.) The coach needs a firm idea of good Mozart style and must enforce it.

Due to the range of accepted tempos, a good method for rehearsing arias and ensembles (duets, trios, etc.) is to take a slightly different tempo at every rehearsal. This keeps the singers flexible – that is to say: *not counting on performing at one given tempo.* Later, the conductor can set the tempos and give the shape they desire for the pieces. Always bear in mind that some conductors take extreme tempos, both slow and fast, and it would be wise to give singers some indication of what the "norm" is. A friend of mine gave me a listing of metronome numbers used by singers and conductors in various recordings of "Ach, ich fühl's" from *Die Zauberflöte*. The range was mostly from eighth note equals 48 up to 72. But one recording, Roger Norrington's, took 106 to the eighth! You are never certain what tempo to expect.

During coaching sessions, some discussion may be necessary to make singers aware of the implications of exactly what they are singing. To generations brought up on Wagner, Berg, Stravinsky, and Schönberg, Mozart's brief excursions into chromatics can fly by unnoticed. But to Mozart, a moment of chromaticism is important. He was brought up on baroque examples, where even a half-step might carry dramatic significance. Consider the duet "La ci darem la mano" from *Don Giovanni*. When Zerlina wavers in her resolve to deny Don Giovanni's advances, Mozart gives her a progression in descending half-steps, which brings out her indecision quite well.

Chromatics are not the only feature with implications. Today an aria like "Vedrai vedrino" (also for Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*) seems innocuous enough. Yet the delicate and sensual insouciance of the piece is quite bold for the late eighteenth century. The subject matter, always tastefully handled of course, borders on the personal and very private. How else to cure Masetto's wounded pride (and body)? But few sopranos realize the boldness of the concept. It may not greatly change the way they sing the notes of the aria, but an awareness of the sensual subject matter is important, nonetheless.

The symphonic background and form of Mozart's music helps hold his larger operas together in other ways, too. Trios, like the ones from Act 1 of *Figaro* or from Act 2 of *Idomeneo*, are all built around non-vocal forms. It is the music, rather than formal considerations, that seems to dictate the unfolding drama. How else to explain numbers like the second act finale from *Figaro*? The key progressions and incredible build – basically slow to fast – make this one of the great finales in all opera. These symphonic movements bring up a controversial point in Mozart's writing: the presence of tempo relationships.

A tempo relationship can be defined as two sections of music that have different tempo indications, but where there is some relationship between basic pulses. A prime example would be the first three sections of the second act finale of *Figaro* mentioned above. The *Allegro* launches the finale in a headlong rush in cut time. The half note equals approximately 96 beats per minute. This section continues up to the moment when Susanna steps gingerly (and impudently) from the "gabinetto" (closet) as a Cherubino replacement – usurping B♭, which has become a key associated with the boy. A case could be made that the pulse of the minuet section continues at 96 per eighth note. Susanna's very proper attitude makes the Count furious. As he enters the closet to make sure the pageboy is not still in there, the beat switches again to cut time, still at the (now breathless) half note equals 96. This tempo continues until Figaro makes his entrance, in effect beginning another scene, and the tempo changes to dotted quarter note equals 84.

An even more obvious example occurs in the aria "Parto, parto," in *La clemenza di Tito.* Here the faster section must be twice as fast as the first. Mozart does not say so, but he proves it because music from the first section returns, albeit with larger note values. Since the music can't proceed at two totally different tempos, the second tempo must be related to the first. The coda seems not to be related to either previous tempo – the pulse quickens, as tends to happen in codas.

A case might be made that whole scenes in Mozart's operas, including separate numbers, are related. If all the numbers from the first scene of *Don Giovanni*, for example, were taken at tempos chosen with an ear for these relationships, the unit of the scene might be felt. This sounds, on paper at least, as if a conductor might be trying to straitjacket things into a preconceived mold, but that's not the case. "Ideal" tempos vary from production to production, and these tempo relationships might seem within the realm of possibility. More clearly, this means that all of the following numbers (and sections) would have some kind of pulse relationship: Leporello's opening muttering to himself ("Notte e giorno") – pulse in half notes; the furious pursuit of Donna Anna (without the usual and unwritten accelerando at the entrance), the sword fight, the death of the Commendatore – pulse in quarter notes; and the body of the vengeance duet – pulse again in half notes. A new pulse begins at the scene change and Donna Elvira's entrance. Some of these tempos might seem too fast or too slow if such relationships are held rigorously, but the possibility still exists that they were intended, and the idea is put forward only for serious consideration, as some people believe quite strongly in the theory.

Despite even the examples of the most obvious numbers like "Parto, parto," some esteemed musical experts insist that tempo relationships do not exist, feeling that this binds all musicians into mechanical bondage. Whether a conductor or coach wants to follow these relationships or not is unimportant; it is still a valid point of discussion. And to ignore them on principle is, to quote Meredith Willson's *The Music Man,* "closing your eyes to a situation you do not wish to acknowledge!"

Another question that needs to be discussed in a Mozartian context is whether to ornament Mozart's music or not. Some conductors vehemently insist that Mozart should be sung "come scritto" – as written, just as many – or more – insist that embellishments are correct. The current vogue is to add ornamentation to the vocal line as in baroque operas. Earlier conductors of the 1930s through the 1960s would have shuddered at that suggestion, some of them even eschewing appoggiaturas. It is clear, particularly in the *opera serie* (serious operas) of Mozart, that cadenzas at final cadences were expected. This discussion is not, however, about occasional cadenzas or appoggiaturas. It is about actually changing the vocal line by adding passing tones and other such devices. While these are perfectly in line with baroque practice, and they recur in the bel canto era, Mozart's music does not seem to need such changes. When a conductor asks a singer to ornament an aria such as "Or sai chi l'onore" (Donna Anna's first aria in *Don Giovanni*) that is already difficult, one should start to question the whole ideal of such changes. But it is also a valid argument that ornamentation did not simply drop off the face of the earth during Mozart's time. For a coach, the best advice would be to add things only in extreme moderation. A little graceful addition in something like "Se vuol ballare" (*Figaro*) might be appropriate. But asking Despina (in *Cosi*) to sing "Una donna" using the violin figures instead of her own much clearer notes (measures 39 through 44 – "voglio farsi ubbidir, e qual regina col posso e voglio farsi ubbidir") flies in the face of Mozart's genius. This actually appears on a recording, that will remain unnamed here.

Mozart also requires vocalism free of unwanted portamentos. A few are possible, usually in emotional phrases like the Countess Almaviva's "Fa – mmi or cercar, da un mia serva aita" ("Forced to seek the aid of my maid") from *Figaro.* But sloppy vocalism in Mozart is as unforgivable as faulty intonation. Mozart robbed the singer of these liberties simply by writing the way he did.

One point about alteration does require comment, however. In several operas Mozart seems to have written with minor (and some major) inconsistencies. The orchestra will play a figure dotted, and the singer or singers will answer with no dots. There can be no single answer to this problem. Instead, one must study each measure and make a decision for that moment. An example can be found in the first phrase of Don Ottavio's "Il mio tesoro" (*Don Giovanni.*) The orchestra has a

dotted figure, but when the singer answers, his words "mio tesoro" are not supposed to be dotted. Some conductors find this to be a glaring and obvious error. Others argue strongly that "tesoro" means "treasure," and that tossing away the first syllable of "Tesoro" trivializes the gentle emotion Don Ottavio is expressing, flying in the face of the meaning of the word. In the Act 1 finale of *Don Giovanni*, the orchestra clearly dots its fanfares, but Don Giovanni (and the others after him) sing "Viva la libertà!" without dots. Can this be right? The decision must be made by the conductor as to how strictly he wants to follow what is written.

In these two instances, I would not have Ottavio dot. I *would* dot "Viva la libertà!" – mainly because the latter comes out in that rhythm when spoken brashly, as it is sung in the opera. Each case will be different.

Così fan tutte is quite another case altogether. The score shows many instances of being written in haste, two of which are given here. In the sextet, measures 38 and following (Dover/Peters edition), Ferrando and Don Alfonso are shown singing as a pair, while Guglielmo sings a different rhythm below. This does not make a whole lot of musical or dramatic sense. Many people switch the baritone lines, allowing Don Alfonso to answer alone, while the young men are paired.

The other example of "haste makes trouble" appears in the Duetto between Dorabella and Guglielmo. Dorabella's vocal line is "shadowed" by the first violins from measure 9 through measure 15, with only one or two pitches not played. But in measure 13 the last thirty-second note is different. This makes no sense. The NMA changes one to coincide with the other, but in so doing, did they need to make a choice? It is illogical that the two notes should coexist! The score has many more examples too numerous to confront in the restricted space here.

Mozart could organize his operas with amazing tonal security. Studying the tonality outlines of *Figaro*, for example, shows repetitions of keys, pairing of tonalities, and indeed an order of key progression not experienced in any of his later works. And some keys even take on a character identity. As mentioned previously, Cherubino and his "substitutes" frequently sing in B♭).

In his later operas, Mozart began simplifying his musical forms. *La clemenza di Tito* has many numbers that are formally far less complicated than big numbers like "Parto, parto." The nature of the music seems quite easy, but, upon study, the singer will find it requires considerable vocal poise. This simplicity is a key to the later works of Mozart. It makes the larger numbers for Sesto and Vitellia even more impressive, while the duets between Annio and Servillia, or Annio and Sesto are musically simple – their textures are much less contrapuntal. The music here also sounds like a close cousin to the opera written simultaneously with it: *Die Zauberflöte*. The textures allow words to come across with much greater clarity and emotion. Such simplicity occurs first perhaps in the "Farewell" trio in *Così fan tutte*. There the simplicity is akin to the songs Mozart wrote, and his songs lead to Schubert.

Although this chapter is about Mozart, I would point out that his contemporary, Antonio Salieri, did not write recitatives as easily as Mozart did. Salieri's recitatives for *Prima la Musica e poi le Parole* (*First the Music and then the Words*) are frequently awkward, mostly because they don't cadence – which is to say they don't punctuate a paragraph. When a chord progression should land on a point of importance in the verbal text, it does not do so and keeps on going. This makes things difficult for both the singers and for the audience. His musical numbers show real form and poise, even some sense of humor, but do not evince the secure invention that Mozart shows in every page.

Opera coaches are required to coach song literature, too, particularly if they are in scholastic institutions or in private practice. Opera singers need to prepare song recitals, and they frequently lean on their opera coaches for help. Mozart's songs are, one may think, straightforward, with little

drama in them. Yet his song "Als Luise die Briefe ihre Liebhaber gebrennt haben" ("As Louisa the letters from her lover had burned") is a mini-drama.

Schubert songs are not opera either, and singers should not sing most of them as if they were. This is not to say his songs are not dramatic. They are, but in a much different way from opera. His songs require a restrained rendition, with heightened awareness of verbal nuance and drama. Where arias exist on a larger dramatic beat (possibly no more than two or three "dramatic beats" per aria), a song can change such "beats" quickly. This is done with far more coloration of the vocal production and with dramatic underpinning of the text. One must not forget, however, that Schubert is the Romantic classicist. He is classical, but leans toward the Romantic spirit.

Some of his songs are dramas all by themselves. "Gretchen am Spinnrade" is a whole monologue, a solo drama, written out with every nuance given to the voice, but with every click and whir of the spinning wheel also clearly audible. In the accompaniment, no pedal is necessary until the portion where Gretchen becomes dreamy, thinking fondly of Faust's stately bearing and manners – and his *kiss!* There I let the piano blur, as her dream sees images and not just a whirling wheel. "Erlkönig" is no less vivid. These two songs are overt, early lieder. Even "Auf dem Wasser zu singen" carries its own kind of drama. And full-throated singing, which successfully conveys the emotion of Romantic arias, must be tempered with a much wider dynamic palette.

Schumann or Brahms are much more Romantic in their approaches to lieder. They allow more drama to emerge, sometimes reveling in the self-pity of their poem. Schumann's Heine settings convey the bitter outbursts and harsh irony of forsaken love to its fullest. But in his restrained and classical way, Schubert harks back vocally to the earlier composers covered in this and the previous chapter. There is unfortunately no way to cover all song composers and their differences in this volume.

In passing to the next chapter, it bears noting that Beethoven and Weber operas require singing similar in clean lines and form to Mozart, but they additionally require more vocal heft. They point the way to Richard Wagner.

INTERLUDE 5
THE "PARK AND BARK" DISCONNECT

Before entering the world of bel canto and Verdi, I feel we should touch on the singing style jokingly, affectionately, and accurately referred to as "park and bark." What is it?

There are moments in operas when people, usually alone, stand centerstage at the footlights and sing an aria. It is their major moment of the night. In some productions this aria is "delivered" in an uninvolved fashion, generically phrased in such a way as an attempt to please the audience in the rafters. This tends to come across as a show staged for those in the nosebleed seats, and it has minimal effect dramatically. Why? In essence, the singer "parks" him- or herself in the most important part of the stage and "barks" the music. Obviously "barking" is an overstatement, but there is an element of vocal display and disconnect from the meaning of the words. In other words, he or she doesn't sing it very well musically. Barking of dogs has no musical line or meaning, and neither does the delivered aria. The words are not colored or made meaningful.

This term can also be used for major ensembles. Even in good performances, numbers like the sextet in *Lucia di Lammermoor* take on an aspect of park and bark. This is unavoidable in such numbers, since their whole purpose is to show that something "restrains" the ensemble from action at such a moment. Pieces like that become an exercise in outsinging in volume every other singer on the stage – if possible. Everyone can smile at this terminology, and yet we all recognize its presence in certain performances. The faster ensemble after the sextet, as mentioned earlier in this book, involves a lot of standing around, swords drawn, and singing nasty thoughts but doing nothing. How do we counteract the negative aspects of such a performance style?

The coach is the first place where an antidote can be found. In *scenas* (pronounced ***shay**-nahs*) – a solo scene with both a slow and a fast aria – the coach can help the singer to tear apart the text and make the most of it. It is the operatic equivalent of a soliloquy. This will help the singer gain the specificity of the music and the text. It will also help to mold the larger forms into a meaningful unit. Since park and bark implies an element of "sing loudly, and forget the dynamics," the coach can help to reinforce the written dynamics, thus helping the singer to find new shadings of musical expression.

Equally important is hard work on the diction. I always feel there are two kinds of diction. Vowel and consonant diction is the first of these. One conductor friend of mine pointed out that good diction is not just about stronger consonants, although there are some that steadfastly try to vanish. It is also about correct and unaltered vowels. In the word "hallelujah," how many singers allow the final "ah" to emerge "uh?" When a song becomes difficult, such as the American National

Anthem, the vowels are frequently under-articulated or changed completely. This happens in foreign languages as well as English. When a mezzo Hänsel sings, "Mutter, Vater," it too frequently emerges as "Moo-**tair**, Fah-**tair**," when in reality it should be much simpler: "Muh-tuh, Fah-tuh." This is evidence of the slack nature of street talk creeping into what needs to be projected over much further distances.

The consonants do tend to disappear. A famous phrase like "O Holy Night" should not emerge as "O Ho-l(ih) Nigh." Tamino's "Dies Bildnis ist bezaubern schön" should not emerge as "Die Spillnis is betsauber Schöh."

Another aspect of diction, however, is what I call "thought diction." As an example of this, take the old Italian warhorse "Caro mio ben." When a singer sings it, does it sound pretty but blank? Or does the singer have a plaintive sound in her/his voice that says, "My dear, believe me at least, without you, my heart languishes." I once coached a young singer on this song, and, when her rendition sounded uninvolved, knowing that she was homesick and missed her boyfriend, I suggested she look to the far wall of the room, put her boyfriend there, and sing to him, with the intention of making him come to her and give her a warm hug. She knew Italian, so the difference in specific word pointing and phrasing was wonderful. Similarly, if the song "Se tu m'ami" does not sound coquettish, the singer has real problems.

EXERCISE #1: Take three different arias: one French, one German, and one Italian. Listen to three recordings of each, and lightly mark in the music what words do not come across. Or do the words come across but not the meaning? As an added exercise, make a word-for-word translation.

Recitals involve usually only one singer, and it is amazing how well they can sing while saying nothing. Song cycles are frequently narratives; the singer needs to tell the tale. A singer also needs to know where a song cycle climaxes, just as surely as they need to know what scene in an opera is the most important scene dramatically. (Clue: it will probably also be the biggest singing moment in the score for that character.) I did this once with a woman singing Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben.* Finding the climactic song (not the loudest one) helped set the entire cycle on edge for the audience and singer.

The vocal teacher and coach can work on musical line, too. Oversinging usually affects a singer's ability to sustain beautiful cantilena (*sung line*) and both teacher and coach can work with the singer to keep or to restore the line to the voice. Some of the greatest singers of the past could sing Verdi with impeccable line, and yet they had little sense of the phrasing in French music. Oddly, those singers most successful in Verdi seem ill at ease or less committed in Puccini, and vice versa.

The conductor can aid the counterattack on the park and bark disconnect by working through arias and ensembles carefully, making sure that text comes through with as much clarity – both kinds of diction – as possible. They can also judge tempos to keep them from getting too fast or too slow. Singers are not always the best judge of tempo, but some conductors don't realize the effect a tempo that is a little extreme on either side of perfect can have.

The downside described above can appear in the operas of Wagner, Handel, Tchaikovsky, and any other composer, too. Monologues and da capo arias, along with scenes like "The Letter Scene" from *Yevgeny Onegin* by Tchaikovsky, invite the same errors.

The grander operas of the mid-nineteenth century will always have an element of stand and sing (park and bark), but with a little care, those moments will become highlights of drama and singing, as are intended, and not just moments to endure crowd-pleasing bombast.

9

BEL CANTO

There are three composers we primarily associate with bel canto: they are Gioachino Antonio Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, and Vincenzo Bellini. There are others, notably Daniel-Francois-Esprit Auber and Servio Mercadante, but it is the Italian trio that rules the era. Bel canto means, literally, beautiful singing. This involves more than just producing a nice vocal tone. It involves the coloring of words, the embellishing of vocal lines, and a purity of vocal production peculiar to that age and to these composers. These three composers are linked so closely because, although there are great stylistic differences between each of them, they were all born within ten years of one another. Rossini, the first born (on February 29, 1792), outlasted the others by several years. And Auber was a contemporary of Rossini, albeit slightly older and always overshadowed by him.

Difficulties found in Rossini's operas stem from three primary features: coloratura, speedy patter, and the seemingly endless energy of the music. The vocal lines are almost instrumental in their structure. A violinist could play Cinderella's last Rondeau with just as much flair and virtuosity, and sound more idiomatic doing so. But Rossini writes for singers, and there are many singers today who can sing the scales, trills, arpeggios, and other roulades with almost frightening ease. It seems the trouble in the coloratura comes not so much in the execution of the notes but in learning them. When a singer learns any passagework incorrectly, it takes a long time to unlearn the mistakes. The coach must carefully help the singer to learn the right notes in the first place. Grouping notes into patterns helps the singer grasp the concept of the passage. Then the singer must learn to phrase the passagework so that it does not come out as mechanical note-by-note articulation. Such musicality is extremely important because, without it, the music has no beauty. Even though we think of Rossini as having lots of frills, an aria such as "Sombre forêt" from *Guillaume Tell* ("Selva opaca" in the Italian translation) is equally difficult due to the incredibly beautiful long lines.

Patter is another matter. Rossini's Figaro, Dandini (*La Cenerentola*), and indeed whole casts must learn passages that fly by verbally with great speed. Consider the Act 1 aria of Doctor Bartolo in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. The aria "A un dottor della mia sorte" ("To a doctor of my kind") begins simply enough. But beginning *allegro vivace*, the difficulty of performing speed steps to the fore. Bartolo cannot begin singing "Signorina, un altra volta …" up to speed. The only way to learn such passages is to write the words down (with all repeats), and then, while walking to a rehearsal, while shopping, doing laundry, or any other mundane thing, say the text clearly over and over, gradually increasing the speed. Muscle memory must be brought into play here. The physical act of

producing the words is what must be learned. The words also come too fast to think much about what words come next – and the meaning, too. The bass-baritone must know the meaning and project as much of it as he can, but the sheer physical act of singing the words is quite difficult. Besides, it can be argued that Rossini wrote, as he sometimes did, with a verbal effect in mind. Bartolo splutters and splutters, but we, the audience, want to know that the singer is really singing the words and not just faking them. (The same learning technique is useful for Gilbert and Sullivan patter songs and ensembles.)

It is important for the coach to realize that these passages must be sung absolutely in time, without rubato. That is the only way to get the rhythmic precision into any passage. But not every syllable is equally important. Consequently, the only way for an audience to get "every" word is to allow some syllables to be softer. In that way the important words and syllables come through, but the precision remains.

A famous example of patter singing from *The Pirates of Penzance* by Gilbert and Sullivan will serve to demonstrate what I mean more easily than an Italian text:

> I AM the very MOdel of a MODern major GENeral
> I've INformation VEgetable, ANimal and MIneral.

This will sound out to the audience much more clearly than singing every syllable with equal weight and importance. It isn't that the unaccented syllables vanish; they just aren't as assertive.

Clean singing is imperative in Rossini due to the boundless energy his music seems to have. When a passage is sung or played very cleanly, it seems much faster than it may in fact be. The final stretta in the Act 1 finale of *Il barbiere* shows this quite well. When all the dotted rhythms dance along together, and when the triplets fly from the orchestra strings, the whole piece seems light and full of energy. If any element is lacking clarity, the whole thing just seems muddy, and a faster tempo only dulls the effect. However, a tempo that is too slow will kill the piece almost as soon as it kills the singers.

Rossini could also write beautiful cantilenas, but they are not his normal milieu. "Lyric" for Rossini is usually typified by something akin to the "Cujus animam" in the *Stabat Mater.* Truly lyric music, like the soprano's "Sombre forêt (Selva opaca)" in *Guillaume Tell*, is quite special and just as difficult to limn well as any Rondeau from the earlier operas. One problem these lyric movements call up is the necessity of finding places to breathe. Sometimes the easiest place musically is impossible because the words do not break there. The coach must be adept at finding the best places.

In Rossini's comic operas, the recitatives chortle along more rapidly than Mozart's usually do. He seldom pauses to let a point sink in. But there are many traditional additions, both dramatic and musical, which are made. These usually involve acting through the dramatically awkward moments. Added pauses, hesitations, chuckles, and the like are all traditions. To learn these, the coach must resort to studying a variety of sources like Ricci (discussed in Chapter 2), recordings, and older coaches. A few of them are printed in the back of some scores. The director or conductor will add others. Though the recitatives can stand handsomely as written, these added interpolations are quite within the spirit of the libretto, and they add immensely to the audience's enjoyment of what is going on.

Rossini, more than perhaps any other bel canto composer, invites added embellishments. These are almost all codified in the Ricci books, but many can also be found in other publications. The embellishments may vary, but they remain surprisingly limited to a traditional few. Sopranos and mezzo-sopranos do far more embellishing than tenors, baritones, or basses. Men cannot usually move their voices fast enough for many alterations of the notes, so their changes usually consist of

added higher notes. The more a coach knows about these changes without always looking them up, the better it is. (*Guillaume Tell*, being one of the first grand opéras, does not invite embellishments, and is, in fact, already hard enough to sing as written – for any character.)

No singer should expect to improvise these embellishments on the spot. One suspects that, even in the baroque era, possible embellishments were worked out in advance. According to Richard Bonynge (in an interview during a Metropolitan Opera broadcast that I listened to some years ago, although I don't have the details to hand), this was certainly the case with embellishments used by his wife, Joan Sutherland. When he was conducting, he was never sure exactly which embellishments she would use in any given performance. Most artists find it necessary to know exactly what notes they plan to use. Those who wait, expecting some divine spirit to guide them, end up obviously floundering in performance, with conductors trying to follow them. Opera is not a game of chance.

Another aspect of Rossini's style is what is called the Rossini Crescendo, aspects of which can be heard even in his first opera, *La cambiale di matrimonio.* The orchestra usually starts a small, motoric theme (in *allegro* tempo), with singers scurrying along above it. Gradually new patterns are used as singers join in. The effect can spread over several pages, but this must be carefully rehearsed, or the crescendo will become too loud too soon. This kind of crescendo is not exclusive to Rossini. A perfect example also appears in the first act finale of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore.* However, Donizetti's style in general leans forward to Verdi, with fewer major ensembles such as those just described.

Rossini's contemporary, Daniel-Francois-Esprit Auber, was sometimes called the French Mozart and the French Rossini – until Rossini moved to Paris. His music brims with dance forms, and it does not include nearly as much *fioritura* (literally: flowery-ness). His career stretched to the mid-nineteenth century. His operas are attractive, but they are mostly ignored by opera companies. His style includes mostly lyric lines, and the ensembles are chordal rather than contrapuntal. He had one unfortunate aspect to his career: he wrote operas that other people copied. His opera *Le philtre* (1831) has almost the same libretto (except in French) as Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore.* (The original cast of *Le philtre* had sung together in the 1829 premiere of *Guillaume Tell*, and Henri-Bernard Dabadie, who played Sgt. Jolicoeur in that production, would also create the role of Belcore in the Donizetti opera – a first and only for opera.) Auber also wrote *Manon Lescaut*, whose prominence was usurped by both Massenet and Puccini. Auber's *Gustave III, ou Le bal masqué* was the source for Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera.* So, despite great successes with the public in Paris, Auber became a footnote in opera history.

In addition to the baritone Dabadie, an astonishing career was had by Adolphe Nourrit, who premiered the tenor leads in *Le Comte Ory*, *La Juive*, *Guillaume Tell, Le philtre, Gustave III, ou Le bal masqué,* and some of the Rossini operas when they were premiered in French.

Despite being a bel canto composer, Vincenzo Bellini has a much different musical style to coach from Rossini or Donizetti. For his operas, the lyric cantilena is of paramount importance. Think only of the incredible beauty of "O quante volte" from *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* or "Casta diva" from *Norma*, and one knows immediately where the extreme difficulty lies. Such legato singing is quite difficult to achieve, and any imperfection in technique shows immediately.

Yet, within this lyric singing there is verbal strength, pure lines giving way somewhat to the pointing of lines toward strong words. Bellini is compared with Chopin with good reason. Their melodies have a similarity of arch and poise. The fioritura that glides from the fingers or the throat during those melodies is of a similar chromaticism and is difficult to negotiate. Any coach will have to have some knowledge of voice and vocalism to help singers learn how to traverse these passages with ease. As with Mozart and Rossini, any intonation issues in Bellini are immediately audible.

The subtle rubato and line in Bellini are also possibly misconstrued to slight the diction and make the sung line less effective.

Bellini, as with Chopin, seems to call for great elasticity in tempo. After comparing performances where such facile shifts of tempo are the norm with those in which a more Beethovenian strength and rigor is employed, it becomes clear that too much pulling and pushing of the tempo for every difficult piece of passagework only unravels the musical tapestry. This is only the blooming of the Romantic age, after all, and the melodies retain a classical purity.

For a coach, however, the two most difficult problems to address are tempos and the intense recitatives. Some pieces from Bellini are so well known that the tempo springs to mind almost without consideration of other possibilities. In a scene such as the first duet between Roméo and Giulietta in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, the tempo indication can lead any musician into tempos that are either too fast or too slow. Too fast means the music doesn't sound right. Too slow means the singers struggle to sustain the musical line. Some conductors solve tempo problems by shifting gear in mid-movement, adjusting the tempo when the music becomes more difficult, or when they believe they can "say something new" without resorting to embellishments. This might be viable were it not that such adjustments also tear a music fabric apart by making too many small divisions. Finding a generally correct tempo first, one that fits all moments, then slightly pushing the tempo slower or faster seems a better option.

EXERCISE #1: Take the above-mentioned duet and, without listening to any recording, decide how the piece should go. Then compare your ideas with two recordings. Assuming the recordings might be different to your ideas, don't immediately assume you are wrong! I suggest using this duet because the opera is less familiar than others of the era.

There are also, as with Rossini, some traditions that have become part of the Bellini fabric. Since his operas, other than *Norma*, have become mainstream only in the last few years, these traditions are fewer and less well ensconced in our minds. One such tradition comes from the stretta to the duet "Mira, o Norma." In the second verse of "Si, fino all'ore" at "per ricovrarci," some conductors (notably Richard Bonynge with Joan Sutherland and Marilyn Horne) inject a massive ritardando for about four measures. This is not written, and its inclusion seems rather willful. Neither the verbal nor musical text point to such a tempo shift. It is certainly a tradition, as it is heard, although not quite so extremely, in earlier recordings as well, but it should be subject to scrutiny and reconsideration. Another recording makes a noticeable shift of dynamics to piano for four bars. Tradition does not mean that a passage must be done exactly the same way every time, only that it might.

Perhaps the greater challenge for a coach and singer, however, will come in the recitatives. Even in his lighter operas, such as *La sonnambula*, Bellini has an ability to instill his recitatives with great intensity. He does not allow his singers to toss off lines simply, as do Rossini and Donizetti. Almost every line carries with it some depth of feeling. This is even more true in *Norma*, where the subject matter involves jealousy, her past affair with Pollione, and the possibility of Norma killing her children. Bellini expects the singers to be able to invest lines like "Oh, rimembranza!" ("Oh, remembrance") with great emotion, whether elation or depression.

Gaetano Donizetti is perhaps the easiest of the three to bring to life. His recitatives sing so naturally, and he captures subtle shades of meaning somewhat more easily than Bellini. Donizetti is less artsy in composing than Bellini, though, and he is not as glib as Rossini. What he can be is seemingly long-winded. Studying the ensembles in *Lucia di Lammermoor* or *L'elisir d'amore* reveals

ensembles that build beautifully from small solo lines to tutti outbursts. The trouble is that they sometimes go on too long. As mentioned earlier, the great stretta after the sextet lasts for pages, swords drawn, and no one doing anything. The formal needs of the stretta are met, but the dramatic need is achieved by cutting. The director must find methods, either by cutting or by inventive staging, to keep such ensembles alive and interesting. (The other such ensemble that is also frequently shortened is the first act finale from *L'elisir.*)

At this point I must introduce two musical forms that occur regularly in Donizetti and Verdi, and with less precision in Bellini and Rossini. The first is the *scena* – solo scene. The complete form is this: Recitativo accompagnato – Cavatina (slow and graceful, possibly with two verses) – Tempo di Mezzo (literally "middle tempo") which makes a transition to the Cabaletta (fast, two verses). The second verses in each part are embellished. For a very clear example of this type of solo scene, see *Lucia*, and the Cavatina "Regnava nel silenzio" followed by the Cabaletta "Quando rapita in estasi."

The second form is much like the *scena*, except that the Cavatina is replaced by what is called an Adagio (although it may be Andante or even Moderato). It is slow, with solos or pairs and then groups entering one at a time. The ensemble can become quite grand. This is followed by the Stretta instead of a Cabaletta. It is a fast ensemble, frequently with two verses, and it even seems at times to become a contest to see who can sing higher. The first act finale of *L'elisir* follows this form quite closely. A combination of the forms is found in *La fille du régiment*, where a Cavatina, "Il faut partir," is climaxed by the entrance of the Regiment, and then the Stretta involves everyone protesting Marie's leaving the Regiment.

In both forms, the recitative is *not* secco. It is what is called tempo d'attacco (tempo of the attack). This name is a little misleading. The music has a constant pulse, sometimes with a dancing violin line lightly lying at the top of the staff. The "dialog" lines are sung in strict rhythm against the metrical underpinning. This same sort of writing comes at the Tempo di Mezzo. The light texture moves the drama along and can become lighter or heavier in an instant. It also transitions to the next major section of the form with no effort.

EXERCISE #2: Take the operas of Donizetti and Verdi and find each of the parts in solos or duets. They occur in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Don Pasquale*, *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, and *La traviata.* In the latter, the huge duet between Violetta and Germont only reaches the "Adagio" at "Dite alla giovine."

Cuts are not only imposed because the drama comes to a halt. Some roles are written in such a way that they are tiring. Even great singers can't always get through roles without help from the scissors. The Cabaletta to "Prendi" in the last act of *L'elisir* makes demands on Adina that not every soprano can endure. Lyric sopranos might be very successful elsewhere in the opera but find that they do not have the dexterity to maneuver the triplets of that aria. The tiny cuts of four bars don't make much sense to purists, who believe complete and uncut is the only way to go. But those short snips sometimes make it possible to be fresh enough vocally to sing right to the end of a role.

Cuts in codas come for a different reason. Some composers get carried away as they want to extend and build the ending section of arias and particularly duets. These sections occasionally receive two-bar or four-bar cuts just to eliminate those passages that don't seem to go anywhere, tire the voices, and sap the otherwise strong ending or forward impulse.

FIGURE 9.1 Rossini – *Il barbiere di Siviglia* – "Largo al factotum" – with added metronome numbers to show the ritardando tradition.

One such cut occurs in Rossini's *Il barbiere.* In the "Zitti, ziti" trio of the final act, there is a place where Almaviva and Rosina sing thirty-second notes in thirds, while Figaro is trying to get them out of the room so they can elope. He starts to step out of the window only to find that the ladder Almaviva and he used to enter the room is no longer there. When rehearsals prove that the thirty-second notes aren't going together, this passage frequently jumps to Figaro's cry of surprise at the missing ladder. If the singers can sing the passage well, it can be delightful. When they can't, it is better to cut it.

Although in Donizetti's serious operas he opts for accompanied recitatives, in his comic operas he uses continuo – except that, by the time he wrote them, the harpsichord was giving way to piano. Either sounds fine, but a piano can be a little louder (in the theaters that were then gaining size), and, besides, there is very little secco recitative even in his comic operas.

FIGURE 9.1 (continued)

Donizetti's melodies carry with them a stronger profile than those of either Rossini or Bellini. The conception of melody seems to be both fuller and simpler, pointing in many ways to the stronger tunes of Verdi. His immense appeal probably stems more from his memorable tunes than his dramatic convictions, even though these were very good. A coach must help singers keep those robust melodies providing the best that bel canto can offer. The term "can belto" is an indication, however jokingly used, of improper force behind Donizetti's music.

One other important thing to consider is that the bel canto composers frequently give a musical signal that should be followed even when the word "ritardando" is not included. This is found in those passages where the music goes along at an even pace and then comes to a central cadence. The accompaniment stops, but the vocal line continues. The next measure may have an isolated chord or short figure and the voice continues. This is found in the middle of Figaro's "Largo al factotum" in *Il barbiere* (see figure 9.1).

One caveat must be made for the three bel canto composers discussed. Their operas exist in many bad editions. The faults range from important material being cut, to faulty dynamic and articulation markings. This is more extensively covered in Appendix B, but it is something of which all coaches need to be aware, and it is why critical editions have been appearing. For example, the above-mentioned aria "Largo al factotum" has wrong notes in older editions.

It remains to finish this chapter with a return to the words "bel canto." The expectation of the composer was that the singer, through enunciation of the text, minor vocal embellishments, well-modulated volume – extremely soft up to healthy *forte* – and, yes, a beautifully produced tone,

would bring the text and music to life. In this they hark back to the baroque era, and look forward, particularly in Donizetti, to Verdi. It might not be an exaggeration to say that the famous "silence from Paris" of Rossini, the period of nearly forty years before his death when he wrote no operas, might have been brought about by the change in vocal styles as much or more than by the change in compositional styles. With the purity of vocal emissions giving way to the *tutta forza* (everything strong) singing of later Verdi, Rossini may have just opted to bow out gracefully.

10

VERDI

No composer can claim to hold a larger percentage of the operatic repertoire securely in his grasp than Giuseppe Verdi. Even his third opera, *Nabucco*, is highly popular in Europe. Most of his popularity comes, however, from the period of composition after 1850, with each one of those operas remaining a mainstay in almost every opera house. *Les vêpres siciliennes* is the only opera in this time period that remains seldom performed. Since the 1950s, *Macbeth* and *Luisa Miller,* though once universally ignored, have also gained the popularity enjoyed by these middle period works.

An opera coach must study Verdi's operas to see how he differs from Italians of the bel canto era and composers in France and Germany. His vocal demands are easier to understand, because we have a plethora of recordings that ably demonstrate what good Verdi singing is all about. We even have recordings of a few singers in the Verdi roles they originated. Since Verdi is so popular, this means that a coach must objectively study the style and know exactly what those great singers are doing in order to separate style from tradition.

Some aspects of style are bound up in tradition, but others are not. The added high-note endings of many arias are tradition, though one might argue that they are stylistically correct, too. Style involves the approach to singing itself, while traditions are answers to problems that have arisen where the music seems to call out for help – added high notes, cuts, and so on. In Verdi, style and tradition are so interwoven that differentiating between the two becomes difficult. The style of singing is strongly limned, with clear diction and emotional stances *that are not quite realistic.*

Verdi's characters are of the grand manner, larger than life and filled with intense emotions. The simpler characters found in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* or Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* are nowhere in evidence in Verdi, for his operas include counts, Ethiopian princesses, jealous moors, consumptive courtesans, a protestant minister, a crazed gypsy, and even a hunchback. And none of them are in normal, everyday situations. The great characters demand a dramatic conviction that many singers today cannot muster easily. As befits the acting style of the day, Verdi's characters can take up poetic stances, act heroically, and fly into rages quite easily, usually with wonderfully grand arias to help them.

The famous drawings and descriptions of Delsarte outline the grand gestures that were used consistently at that time. Delsarte demonstrates a kind of codification to the acting that was normal in the nineteenth century. In the twenty-first century it seems artificial and stilted, but, if used with total conviction, this blueprint for acting can become quite powerful and shows just how effective the combination of the gestures and the music of the era could be. Verdi loved sudden contrasts

of music, and, if combined with these gestures, the music takes on a height of emotion that still works today – as long as we modify it a little. Listening to Verdi operas, however, makes clear that "restrained" reactions are not expected.

This explains why Verdi became one of the composers to set the plays of Shakespeare to music most effectively. Shakespeare's dramas contain emotions that are just as monumental as Verdi's music. Play actors of the time used to use those gestures and overblown ways of speaking to interpret the high emotions of Shakespeare, too. A simple listen to older recordings of actors performing some of the Shakespearean monologues will show an acting style that sounds remarkably close to operatic singing and an uncanny ability to "ham it up" in the most obvious way.[1]

One of the most prolific dramatists and librettists of the time was Eugene Scribe. Auber, Meyerbeer, and even Verdi used his libretti. The young Henrik Ibsen, the dramatist who almost single-handedly changed the face of drama, was known to complain about Scribe, bothered by the preponderance of chance meetings, purloined letters, and mistaken identities. These devices did not bother Verdi greatly. If the drama was strong and clearly moved forward, those improbabilities only added to his sense of drama. His usual librettists, Piave or Cammarano, followed this mold well.

Verdi's melodic lines are grandly long, emotional, and of wide dynamic shape. A singer can let a line dance along ("La donna e mobile" – *Rigoletto*) or brood ("Ella giammai m'amo" – *Don Carlo*) with equal ease. Verdi loved the high emotions in the stories he chose. Reading his letters reveals some other aspects of his writing. He loved sharp contrasts: dynamics that go from soft to extremely loud, or emotions that shift violently from one to another. A famous example comes in Act 2 of *Otello*. There, the Moor is listening to Iago's soothing dream – "Era la notte." Iago leads the subject of the conversation back to the handkerchief as he quietly lets fall the words, "Quel fazzoletto ieri, … certo ne son … lo vidi in man di Cassio" ("That handkerchief … yesterday … I'm pretty sure … I saw in the hand of Cassio"). Verdi indicates that this line falls almost inaudibly from Iago's lips – this despite the massive crescendo many baritones employ. Verdi writes *pp, cupo* – a covered tone – and a casualness that totally disarms Otello. Otello's reaction – "Ah, mille vite gli donasse Iddio!" ("Ah, if God had but given him a thousand lives") literally explodes from Otello. This is followed by the great duet: "Si pel ciel." A coach must find the way to help a singer mold such scenes, understanding that the contrast, whether going from soft to loud or the other way around, is effective only if it is set up carefully. If Iago soothingly spins the tale of his dream correctly, Otello will be hanging on every word, and the casual (almost hissed) mention of "Cassio" will quite adequately trigger the reaction.[2]

Throughout Verdi's compositional life, he made great usage of rests. "Silence is golden" became "Silence is dramatic." In some cases, the rests can say as much about a character's state of mind as the words and the music. Many singers do not understand that, when Verdi stops the accompaniment, he is also giving the singers license to have some freedom. Instead, many singers rush through the rests in tempo, continuing with the singing earlier than indicated, whereas Verdi clearly expected a slight lengthening of the rests. The rests are, in dramatic terms, an indication of the pensive thoughts that lead up to the aria. The rests may be the great breath before the aria is launched into. In any case, the coach must make the singer aware of the purpose of the rests, and then they must be worked through to ensure that their correct purpose emerges in performance.

EXERCISE #1: Listen to various recordings of Verdi arias, paying attention not to the aria but to the recitative which precedes it. A good first choice is from *Simon Boccanegra*: "Il lacerato spirito."

This freedom stems from the very founding of opera, with Monteverdi and his friends. The importance of the words is always paramount in Verdi's mind. He does not trudge through the recitatives unthinking. They are vocally and dramatically as important as the arias.

A coach must also find ways for singers to let "terrible" emotions out without hurting their voices or without losing control. Emotive moments, such as Manrico's fourth act confrontation with the dying Leonora – "Parlar non vuoi? Balen tremendo! … Dal mio rivalo! Intendo, intendo! Ha quest'infame l'amor venduto…" ("You won't speak? A terrible thought! … from my rival! I understand, I understand! This wretched woman has sold her love …") – can bring out dangerous levels of forceful singing. A good coach can aid the singer in realizing the highest level of outburst without approaching the level where harm to the voice occurs. This is done in part by using a very focused vocal placement in preference to a wider, open-throated technique. Franco Corelli and Mario del Monaco were noted for that full *tenorial squillando* (the tenor's ability almost to cry or scream, but always on pitch and at a feverish level), but for most that kind of singing is difficult to sustain for an entire aria, let alone an entire role. Other tenors, such as Jussi Bjoerling, Carlo Bergonzi, Luciano Pavarotti, and Enrico Caruso, have used a narrower approach to the upper-middle range, the high notes relying more on "ping" than brute force. Using the verbal nuances can also help make dramatic points without relying only on vocal heft.

Diction is very important in projecting Verdian drama. Shaping musical phrases is only part of the Verdian style; the other half is shaping and enunciating the ideas that make the drama propulsive. Luciano Pavarotti was criticized at times for "not acting," but, instead of overtly acting out emotions and situations, he let the well-articulated text speak for him.

The vocal technique able to cope with Verdi must also possess a good sense of cantilena – singing line. This is that kind of singing in which the notes seem to be bound to one another. It goes beyond simple legato and includes phrasing and coloration of the voice. Even those passages that might be called recitative require a stronger sense of line than similar passages in Donizetti. Though volume is not the goal per se, it is sometimes necessary to sing rather forcefully in order to project well against the orchestra or to reach the dramatic level Verdi intended.

Verdi's orchestration can occasionally be heavy, an influence left over from his earlier education in orchestrating for a wind ensemble. Trumpets are used in places where Donizetti (not usually accused of scoring lightly) would never use them.

The vibrant singing voice in which vital vibrato plays a role is a necessity in Verdian singing. The kind of vibrato employed, however, must not be too wide, nor should it be too quick or too slow. The vibrato bordering on tremolo is frequently considered quite unattractive. Yet a voice that takes on the heavier repertoire too early will gain a slow, wide vibrato and seem worn out before its time. A careful study of the few recordings of Victor Maurel and Francesco Tamagno (the original Iago/Falstaff and Otello respectively) will show somewhat the kind of voice Verdi knew and expected. The recordings show voices that have bright focus and size, but the sensation of size comes from the bright focus, not from the pushed timbre. The opera coach will not be teaching voice to the singer, but knowledge of the voice will help the coach understand just who should sing Verdi, and this knowledge will also deepen their ability to get the best results from a singer with minimal effort for them.

Using Verdi's own words, there is something that he consciously placed in every opera: *Tinta*. As one might surmise, it has to do with the "tint" of the opera; the color of orchestration, vocal lines, story, and more that makes *La traviata* sound different from *Don Carlo* (other than the fact that *Don Carlos* was originally in French but is frequently sung in Italian). *Il Trovatore* has a certain sound that stands forth whenever the gypsies are on stage. Listen to the Anvil Chorus and "Stride la vampa," Azucena's big aria at the beginning of Act 2. That sound does not occur anywhere else

in Verdi's output – except when the men and women in Act 2, Scene 2 of *La traviata* are trying to act like gypsies and toreadors. In *Don Carlos*, there was once a section of lament after Posa dies, which became the Lacrimosa of Verdi's *Messa da Requiem.* Listen to it, then go to the introduction to Phillip's aria "Elle ne m'aime pas" (Ella giammai m'amo). In both cases, we hear a repeated note preceded by a grace note. This occurs elsewhere, too, though less conspicuously. This ties the opera together, making it sound like no other Verdi opera. Only Benjamin Britten, a century later, was quite so careful to be specific about the colors he used.

If you tear apart the composition of Verdi's style, it is based closely on the same model as Monteverdi. There is a bass line, chords above it, and the vocal line, which is always dominant, no matter how strong the accompaniment. An intriguing task might be to take Monteverdi's *Poppea* and recompose it in the style of Verdi, not changing the notes so much as changing the propulsion of those notes.

Though Donizetti and others are known to have taken great pains with the structure of their libretti, Verdi went so far as to dictate specific poetic scansion of verses, number of lines, and emotional framework. Reading any of his letters reveals this in depth. The later the work of Verdi, the more letters about it can be found. Similarly, the later the opera, the longer the *Disposizione Scenica* (the detailed directorial book of the first production). Reading such letters and books can sometimes reveal what Verdi thought about the characters (and the singers!), the phrasing, and the dramatic focus. He was never shy about telling librettists what he wanted, or singers how to sing his operas! A coach might do well to study structures of drama to aid in understanding Verdi's operas.

Verdi was quite adept at using the *scena* format described in Chapter 9 on bel canto. One important difference between Verdi and, say, Donizetti, is that Verdi made the Cavatina (usually an introductory aria) quite special – a quiet moment for a possibly volatile character. Then the Tempo di Mezzo (tempo of the middle) made the transition to a much stronger emotion in the Cabaletta. The prime example of this in Verdi is "Ah, si, ben mio" and "Di quella pira" from *Il Trovatore.* For the record, this form was still prominent in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* and *La Bohème.* In *Il Trovatore*, the famous choral "Miserere" is, formally speaking, a Tempo di Mezzo to Leonora's Cabaletta, which is frequently omitted.

Cabalettas in Verdi frequently have two verses, possibly with a brief chorus in between. A modified *scena* appears in *La forza del destino.* Don Carlos begins his recitative with "Morir, tremenda cosa – Urna fatale del mio destino" ("To die, tremendous thought! – Urn fatal of my destiny"). This leads to his finding out that the tenor is Don Alvaro, and this leads to the Cabaletta, except that it only has one verse. (It was during this scene that the great baritone Leonard Warren died on stage at the Metropolitan.) Another Verdi strong point is his conversational duet: Azucena and Manrico (*Il Trovatore*), Alfredo and Violetta, Germont and Violetta (*La traviata*), the whole scene leading up to "Si pel ciel" in *Otello.*

Verdi is also one of the first composers to use countless markings, dictating how singers should sing his melodic lines. These were not in evidence in the early operas, but he added more and more of these as he kept writing. Puccini and Massenet went even further! The coach must help the singer realize these dutifully but with understanding. There are tenuto marks and staccato marks under a phrase marking (indicating that each note with a staccato should be nudged slightly). When this is carefully completed, half of the characterization is complete, too.

To make this clearer, we might study the markings in the Act 1 duet between Violetta and Alfredo in *La traviata.* This perfectly follows the duet form described earlier. The tempo d'attacco is the exit of the chorus, Violetta staring at herself in a mirror, and then realizing Alfredo is watching her. She mocks his faithful determination to stay with her, and she asks him if it is true that he has

loved her a long time. He responds with, "Ah, si, da un anno" (Ah, yes, for a whole year). When he begins his slow verse "Un di felice eterea" ("One day, happy, ethereal"), he is uncertain of himself. He has blurted out that he's loved Violetta for a year, and now he must explain. Verdi adds rests in the vocal phrases in order to make Alfredo consider every word. When the same phrases recur, the rests are no longer there – he's gaining self-assurance. At the words "misterioso, misterioso altero?" ("Mysterious, mysterious and aloof?"), Verdi places the staccato marks above each note, with the legato phrase mark overhead. Alfredo should nudge each syllable, not so much breaking the legato line, but giving it character. Violetta's *risposta* (response) is light and frivolous. In fact, it is too frivolous; she "doth protest too much." She is greatly affected by Alfredo's protestation of love. The slow part involves some singing together, with "croce, croce delizia" being stretched as being the height of emotions between them. They quietly end the duet together.

Suddenly the *banda* plays and Gastone makes a very brief entrance. (Remember that a *banda* is never orchestrated by the composer, but by someone in each theater, depending on which musicians are available.) Gastone shatters the mood. Violetta says, "Amor, dunque non più" ("Love, no more about that"). Alfredo replies curtly, "Io v'obbedisco" ("I will obey you"). He feels put off, so he becomes very formal. Violetta gives him an orchid/camellia (which don't last long) and tells him to return it. "When?" he asks her. "When it is faded." That means, "Come back tomorrow." His joy overflows as the stretta (less formal than a cabaletta) races to the end. The last chord becomes the first chord of the finale. In that duet, a coach (and singer) must understand what each mark means and how to achieve it. The difficult cadenza at the end of the slow part is tricky, and the mercurial emotions take the characters to places to which neither expects to go.

One more point about Verdi's style: The tessitura in which he writes is somewhat high. First, let us quash the mistakes of the crossword books. "Tessitura" means where most of the notes lie. Some roles lie high, but they don't reach above B♭, while other roles don't sit high but they touch on a high C. From the bottom to the top of a role's notes equals its "range." Some of the tessitura stems from added high notes, true, but even what Verdi wrote hangs in the upper fourth of the voice. This tessitura is supposed to aid the singer in projecting the heightened emotions over the fuller Verdian orchestra. But it also means a great deal of work (and vocal wear) for the singer. (Orchestras, particularly in Europe, might do well to consider this when pitching their "A" at levels almost a half-step above A=440. The string tension doesn't do the instruments much good either.)

When a singer feels advanced enough to proceed to the great Verdi roles, a good coach is essential to help mold and find the pacing for the roles.

All coaches will sometimes need to put together some of the large ensembles that are the climax of Verdi's operas. It is important, before the first rehearsal, to analyze them and decide how to make them not only clear but also build to the important climax the composer intended. Those ensembles of the later operas, like *Aida* and *Don Carlos*, have layers of sound and shifting tempos that build to a pinnacle of sound. These ensembles do not build themselves. While a chorus master will put together the major part of the choral work, it is up to the coach to make certain that the soloists lead the ensembles. Even major conductors have underestimated the difficulty of these climactic moments, and the performances have suffered because of it. The important lines must come out, each singer fitting into the whole. Ensembles, like the *Don Carlos* "auto-da-fé" scene, are filled with clashing emotions, power play against personal upset, and this needs to be set before the orchestra joins the fray.

A coach would do well to study older recordings of Verdi operas to learn about the cuts that Italian opera houses once followed. Curiously, the penchant for cutting Verdi stops around *Un ballo in maschera*. There, as Verdi matured and made his operas more compact (which doesn't mean shorter), the need for cutting went away. Though a minor cut or two may still appear in *Aida* or

Otello, they are far fewer than those operas of the 1850s or earlier. Also, in the later operas Verdi's sense of balance is so complete that any cut can frequently be more noticeable than in the earlier operas. *Don Carlos* is an exception to this, but, uncut, it is very long. In one performance I saw, the second verse of Elizabeth's farewell to the Countess of Aremberg was cut, and, although I didn't know the opera at the time, I immediately felt that cut.

Verdi's musical legacy demands a brief reference to Ponchielli (who subsequently also influenced the operas of Puccini and Mascagni). His style seems at first rather close to Verdi's, and the vocal demands are similar. One might even point out that the libretto to Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* (his greatest work), was penned by Arrigo Boito (anagrammed as Tobio Gorria), the librettist for Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff.* The grand manner, the overblown emotions, and the spectacle are all as much part of Ponchielli as they are Verdi. The elaborate rubato written in (and also added to) by Puccini and the other verismo composers stems from Ponchielli's musical language. His music shows a composer with many of the same techniques in place that Verdi used, and yet his musical instincts are different. He was contemporary with late-period Verdi, but he does not consciously emulate Verdi's early style. Ponchielli does not rise to Verdi's exalted heights musically, but he is still an important composer to consider. *La Gioconda* does not appear all that frequently now, but it is still an opera many people love – and not just for the famous ballet "Dance of the Hours." Singing his music requires Verdian-style singing, and in this he is more in league with the older master than the style of Mascagni (his pupil) and Puccini. Some people denigrate *La Gioconda*, but, given a well-cast performance, one that is well rehearsed both vocally and dramatically, it is a great evening of opera. Coaches must understand the differences in the composers, never assuming the younger composer writes in the same style as the older, because the differences are just major enough to be quite important.

Verdi, unlike Ponchielli, is a mainstay of the repertoire, and, when the requisite voices can be found, his operas will be performed … and coaches must learn how to coach singers in his works.

Notes

1 *Great Shakespeareans*. Pearl GEMM CD 9465. Sparrows Green, Wadhurst, England: Pavilion Records Ltd. This is a recording of great actors of the past, including Lewis Walter, John Gielgud, Edwin Booth (brother of John Wilkes Booth), Arthur Bourchier, Ben Greet, John Barrymore, Henry Ainsley, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and Maurice Evans.

2 I am reminded of a demonstration given once on *The Wonderful World of Disney.* Two dozen or so mousetraps were set up on a table with ping-pong balls resting on them. Then one ping-pong ball was tossed at the table. The reaction that one ball got from the two dozen or so mousetraps flipping shut was impressive and immediate. All the traps were sprung, ping-pong balls flying everywhere.

INTERLUDE 6
THE VANISHING OF LARGE VOICES

It seems somehow appropriate that this Interlude should come directly after the chapter on Verdi and not long before the chapters on Mussorgsky and the Richards, Wagner and Strauss. For the problem facing many opera houses today is the lack of big voices in large enough numbers to satisfy the needs of the various opera theaters. And some of the voices that are big enough are not trained to handle the complexities of the music or the drama. They just sing.

First things first: Opera houses in Mozart's time were much smaller. Economics made the quest for larger houses important. Orchestras also used to play softer, in part because they were smaller groups, and in part because the concept of what constitutes *forte* has changed – the word means "strong" not "loud." The increased volume came in part because symphonic music required larger forces. Even in the opera house, the Romantic orchestra had more winds and more strings, and played music that was sometimes densely scored, forcing the singer to sing over the forces in the pit. The former concert master of the Cleveland Orchestra Daniel Majeske once noted that the general decibels of the orchestra had increased noticeably even since he joined them.

Yet, listening to recordings from earlier in the twentieth century – the 1900s to the 1930s –of singers like the baritone Battistini (not Bastianini, who came later) reveals voices of somewhat brighter cast. To them it was the shaping of the text and beautiful singing that was important. Battistini's "O Leonora" from *La Favorita* by Donizetti is quite eye-opening. Some of his inaccuracies of rhythm are also surprising, but that's not the point here. The quality of his voice is much different from those baritones of the 1960s.

Without being a voice teacher per se, a coach can still listen to singers and tell them when they are singing technically incorrectly. Correction is sometimes achieved by stressing matching vowels. It can also be accomplished by working on legato line and dynamics, particularly if they sing with a tonal production that varies from note to note. This is a sign that the singer is pushing their voice for more volume, and that will lead eventually to less volume. Flexibility is the key to singing, and a dark, weighty tone does not move well. A singer who can sing "Tu che le vanita" from *Don Carlo* should also be able to sing "Ernani involami" from *Ernani*, also by Verdi. They are the same vocal Fach (German word for vocal size and repertoire). But the *Ernani* excerpt requires some quick execution of smaller note values, and some otherwise wonderful Elisabettas and Leonoras (in *La forza del destino*) just cannot do that. (A list of Fachs and what roles appear in each can be found in Appendix A.)

The coach therefore must listen for such pushing and guide the singer into finding ways to sing the larger repertoire healthfully and with flexibility. Roles like Verdi's Otello will always be heavy. And yet, with intelligence, a singer can rely on brightness of tone and what might be called "ping" to add heft to a lighter voice. This is what carries across an orchestra pit. Not all tenors, for example, can give unstintingly in the manner of Franco Corelli or Mario del Monaco. Opera historically has far too many singers with lyric instruments whose careers were shortened by attempting to sing roles that require bigger voices.

There are therefore several reasons for vanishing voices of size. The first is lack of patience or guidance from knowledgeable mentors. Singers want to sing larger roles because they might be more interesting musically and dramatically – which means they also get a bigger paycheck. Unfortunately, no Count Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* will ever earn quite the sums the Duke will earn singing in *Rigoletto.* Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* won't garner the fees of Gilda in *Rigoletto* (let alone other starring lead roles.)

As mentioned above, orchestras are gaining volume. Soft is no longer as soft as it once was. European orchestras also tend to tune almost a half-step higher than A=440. It's hard on the man-made instruments in the orchestra, and some singers just can't push another half-step out. (Coloraturas in particular need to be aware of this when they program Mozart's Queen of the Night for auditions.)

And last is the problem that opera houses are now much bigger than they once were. The Metropolitan Opera has 4,000 seats. Watch a performance in the movie theaters or on TV, and you'll see how huge the house is – a singer must fill that?

There were singers in the past who had cannons for voices. Titta Ruffo (a baritone in Caruso's era) and Jerome Hines (a bass from the 1950s to mid-1960s) could put out quite a huge sound. Some of that was perception which arose from the sheer color of their voices.

It is very important that large voices are trained carefully. Far too frequently young singers depend on their voices alone to make an impact. This excludes using the words – pronunciation and enunciation – to shape the content of what is being sung. I recently listened to a recording in English of *Daughter of the Regiment* in which the tenor sang not only every high C required (or traditionally added), but he made the words resonate with meaning. I'm proud to say that, although such a feat is no longer within my grasp, I was that tenor, and I enjoyed the verbal clarity coming from all the singers. It was not a vocal symphony; it was opera.

If we expect to have some operas in the repertoire in twenty years' time, we may need to search for the appropriate young voices and take great care to bring them along in all aspects of their singing.

11

FRENCH OPERA

French opera repertoire stems from a handful of composers who share certain compositional traits and stylistic considerations, while at the same time they retain their own specific styles. Berlioz, Meyerbeer, Auber, Gounod, Massenet, Bizet, Saint-Säens, Offenbach, Poulenc, Charpentier, and Debussy all share certain ways of writing for voices, and even notational peculiarities. Of that group, only Debussy and Poulenc are stylistically different enough to treat in a separate way.

Notation

The first area that must be covered in discussing French opera concerns tied notes. In Verdi, a quarter note tied to an eighth note would equal a dotted quarter note. In the French style of writing, a quarter note tied to an eighth note equals a full quarter note – tied to but not through the eighth note! Without the tie, the isolated quarter note is somewhat shorter (roughly a dotted eighth note). This is not peculiar to one of these esteemed composers but holds true for them all (see Figure 11.1).

Another important consideration in French opera concerns those syllables that, in spoken French, are left unsounded, but that in opera are given pitch and limited duration. This occurs so frequently that no example need be given. The reason for this anomaly goes back to stage French. The vanishing syllables were supposed to be sounded so they would project. If they aren't sounded, the final consonant does not sound, and diction seems weak due to the distance the voice has to cover. (We also do this to some extent in English stage diction.) This is the case, too, in sung theater. For non-native singers, the tendency is to accent those syllables by giving them their entire duration as notated. Bearing in mind the above stylistic notation, the notes assigned to unaccented syllables should in fact be quite short. Though notated frequently as an eighth note, the singer would do better to remember the "vanishing" nature of the syllable and make it a sixteenth.

Ranges and Tessituras

An important peculiarity in French opera stems from the way those composers wrote for the voices, with particular attention being paid to the tenor. In French opera, most voice types are written with a predominance of middle voice singing, extending only up to F or G for baritones

FIGURE 11.1 French notation – how it is sounded in comparison with what is written, and how German and Italian notation would sound.

and mezzos, to A or B for sopranos, and to E♭ for basses. In a few instances a higher note might be added at the top of a cadenza, but the middle voice carries the best diction and, as Henry Higgins says in *My Fair Lady*, "The French don't care what they do, actually, as long as they pronounce it properly."[1]

Oddly these roles are frequently given a slightly lower center of vocal gravity than in their Italian counterparts. Marguerite in *Faust* may be sung by light lyrics and coloraturas, but the tessitura of the role (as in Massenet's Manon or Debussy's Mélisande) lies much more in the middle voice. Pushing this area of the voice, trying to make it either louder or bigger, will cause it to take on a curdled sound that is not pleasing. Tenors, however, seem to embrace a different tessitura entirely.

This attitude toward the tenor stems in part from the reigning tenor of the early nineteenth century: Adolphe Nourrit. His known range took him frequently up to D or even F. If a tenor can do that, composers will want to exploit it – unfortunately, few tenors have been comfortable up there since. Donizetti and Rossini, in their French operas, dutifully followed suit. Their preferred tenor tessitura sits at times a third higher than in Italian counterparts. Nemorino, in *L'elisir d'amore,* starts his first "buzzed" tra-la-la section basically between A♭ and E♭ (centered on middle C of the piano). In Auber's *Le philtre,* the same dramatic moment puts Guillaume between D and A, a tritone higher!

The French operatic literature is almost always lyrically attuned. That means that the dramatic thrust found in Verdi (for example) is kept in check in his French operas, with none of those heroic and dramatic outbursts such as can be found in *Otello* or *Aida.* One has only to look at the tenor arias from Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* or Adam's *Le postillon de Longjumeau* to realize just how high the "norm" could be. Even Verdi, when he was writing *Don Carlos* or *Les vêpres siciliennes*, gave the tenor roles a higher tessitura than was his already higher norm.

It does not take much study of the operas of Gounod – notably *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette* – or Massenet – *Manon* and *Don Quichotte* – to find highly dramatic moments expressed with a lyric impulse. Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs des Perles*, despite its somewhat melodramatic plot, manages to retain a lyric stance. His *Carmen*, though frequently bellowed as if it were an Italian opera from the high verismo period, is just as lyric and benefits from singers treating it in that fashion. That's one reason people find the dialog version (versus the recitatives, which are by Ernst Guiraud) to be fascinating. There is something about French that makes the melodic line lyric – but gently so, and not the gooey legato that obliterates words. Juliette's Valse, for example, benefits greatly in lift and forward motion if the soprano considers this linear quality and sings the "Je veux" as two upbeats to the downbeat of "vivre." The rests feel almost scanned to create this lift – almost scanned, but not entirely! (Some singers do scan the rests, and that makes the Valse heavy.) That linear quality also holds true in *Carmen*, Berlioz melodies and arias or duets, and even in Offenbach's operettas and his *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*.[2]

With that in mind, an explanation of "lyric" is probably in order. By singing lyrically, I mean that the singer pays much attention to the words and coloration of them, and that the general dramatic thrust comes through this coloration of text, not from *tutta forza* singing that is appropriate (perhaps) in the overt outbursts of Verdi or the monumental arias of Wagner's heroes and gods. In this way the voice can retain a pure and undistorted line, the linear aspect being considered more than single-note accents. When done well, the singer is said to be performing with "taste" and the public does not react as wildly as they do for the more extrovert dramatic displays, but the discerning audience member will know just how difficult the "lyric" stance is to maintain.

The French language calls for forward placement for proper sound. Tonally, this puts the voice in a good place, too. This language is more focused than some of the other European languages; it is also less harsh than some languages. This helps the singers. Always confusing, though, are the consonants that are not pronounced, even though they are written. Many vowels, notably the "a," are brighter than their Italian counterparts – and more than the British counterpart (American "a" is different depending where you live). For non-Francophone singers (those who do not speak the language with great fluidity) the difficulty comes in part through the many required nasal sounds. A singer cannot sing beautifully and use pure nasals; this holds true even in American country singers! This point is controversial, because some teachers will insist that a singer *must* use true nasals. But such a sound has limited carrying power and is frequently unattractive. A good coach must have ideas as to how to approximate the correct sound without allowing the tone to go through the nose. This is accomplished best by singing or saying the nasal correctly and then finding a way to open the vowel some, retaining the essence of the nasal. (This technique is impossible to describe effectively in print.)

Repertoire

Although there are many, the operas that comprise the French repertoire are summed up in a list of about six . Without in the least denigrating Berlioz as a composer, it is a fact that few of his operas are performed. *Les Troyens* (The Trojans) is a fabulous work, but it requires more singers and production values than most opera companies can put forward. *Beatrice and Benedict* and *Benvenuto Cellini* are seldom given. This means a coach will have to make a point of studying them for any coaching assignment. For that reason, I won't cover them here.

Similarly, the "other" operas of Gounod, Bizet, Massenet, and Offenbach are not covered here because they are not in anyone's active repertoire. The important French operas are: *Faust*, *Roméo et Juliette* (Gounod), *Carmen* (Bizet), *Manon* and *Werther* (Massenet), and *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (Offenbach's magnum opus). The other works of these composers, including the many operettas of Offenbach, do not appear frequently. The works of Meyerbeer, Halévy, and others are mere curiosities.

With these composers, pronouncing their French "properly" means giving the words their due. The librettos of Eugene Scribe are poetically well made, but the plots sometimes reek of odd letters, mistaken identities, and people in hiding. Despite a strong desire to under-enunciate the text so no one will know how inane the libretto might seem, a singer needs to work to get these operas across. Most of the standard repertoire from France uses libretti not by Scribe. Jules Barbier and Michel Carré appear three times in the above list. Their poetry is more inspired than Scribe's, and their dramatic slant is more modern, hence more persuasive. They seem to know how to catch the essence of any dramatic situation. Coaches must always be listening to ensure certain texts come through. The generally slightly lower tessitura was given by the composers in the hope that the singers might have some success at word projection; dependency on clarity of text is one of the trademarks of French opera.

The formality of French operatic music stems from the early insistence on including ballet. Therefore, it becomes natural for Manon to sing a gavotte, and various portions of music use the kind of rhythmic verve found in French ballet music. Of course, there are also lengthy ballets in the repertoire of the grand opéras. They are always a problem to stage, and yet they are so integral to some of the plots or musical balance that omitting them means creating a severe hole in the music. While we may think mostly of the ballet in *Faust*, there are others in *Les Troyens* (Berlioz), *Thaïs* (Massenet), and the works of Auber. Sometimes the ballet is so frequently dropped that we don't even realize it exists.

There is a wonderful maxim that concerns French opera and French music in general. Unlike the Italian school, if a French composer does not request a ritardando on a passage, you are not supposed to do it. It is simply not done to add rubato to a violin concerto, but we are anxious to do it in French operas. Consequently, during Juliette's Waltz aria there is a "traditional" expansion of the tempo as she soars to her high note – yet, if we listen to Nelly Melba sing the aria (which she studied with Gounod), that ritardando is not there. Directors may ask for the ritardando, and conductors may allow it, but it takes Juliette's youthful exuberance and filters it through an intrusive layer of Romantic excess.

Particularly in the later nineteenth century, the composers were so specific about what notes to stress, that it is hard enough to do what they say, let alone add something else. The attempt for purity of line and expression is at least part of the explanation for Rossini's strange forty-year silence. From its first performances, his *Guillaume Tell* was burdened with added high notes and generic emotion, rather than exploring what Rossini had asked for. Meyerbeer also was bothered by this new trend, and he adjusted his writing style to something simpler, hoping to recapture the style that, in Berlioz's writing, was still pure.

One would think that, by *Carmen,* the new French style would be ingrained. But many performances come across with a Germanic flavor to them (despite the sung text) that one longs for the linear, slenderer vocal production alluded to in this chapter. It keeps the music agile and airborne. Carmen, by the way, is not so much a mezzo or soprano, as what one might call an operetta soprano. Limited on top (she has one touched B natural), she must sing a lot in middle register (as must Debussy's Mélisande).

Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* is well known, and yet no two recordings are precisely the same. Offenbach died before completion of the score and it is well known he borrowed from other works of his for this opera. The best edition so far is the Kaye edition. It includes the prologue appearance of the Muse, and it has at least two versions of Giulietta's aria. Deciding on which edition is to be used is always a hassle, including in which order to present the acts! Tradition orders them as follows: Olympia, Giulietta, and Antonia. But in the Epilogue, Hoffmann sings "Olympia, Antonia, Giulietta." If these three are, in his life, manifestations of one person – the ingénue, the gifted singer, and the courtesan – then that second order makes more sense.

Then there are the "spurious" moments – the great baritone aria "Scintille diamant" and the septet. What do we do with them? Do we throw them out? Baritones won't like that. And, while we're at it, do we try for one villain (they are really one person), and for one soprano who can sing coloratura, lyric, and then mezzo-soprano. Do we present the Muse? What a troubled mess Offenbach left us!

The true difficulty is found in getting Hoffmann to endure the Prologue, the three acts, and the Epilogue. He has an aria in the Prologue, one in the act with the automaton (an aria which sometimes comes twice), a duet and trio that are both difficult in the Antonia act, and then the most difficult aria – "Oh, Dieu de quelle ivresse" – halfway through the Giulietta act. As if he had any steam left, he must then sing an ensemble as the drunken Hoffmann (in the Epilogue) capped off with

a reprise of an earlier aria – it depends which edition you use which one he sings. The opera frequently sounds heavy and bloated. It should have a lighter texture and feeling than it usually does.

As mentioned elsewhere, Bizet loves to write against the "natural" accent of French, which ostensibly has no such thing. His expertise in this allows him to smooth out difficult words and make them insinuative rather than blunt. This happens in Carmen's arias: Habanera, Seguidilla, the Card Scene aria, and even in the final duet with Don José. To the coach, this means that singers must know their French and project it well.

In some roles, like Mephistopheles in *Faust*, there is a temptation for singers to be too emphatic, stressing the acting over the projection of word meaning. The sardonic nature of Mephistopheles's two arias – "Le veau d'or" and "Vous qui faites l'endormie" – becomes lost in the generic meaning.

Charpentier's opera *Louise* is seldom given or known except for the great aria "Depuis le jour." The composition is a combination of French style, verismo, and even a foretaste of minimalism (years before such a style came into being.) An aria like "Depuis le jour" sounds easy until a soprano tries to project the pure line of the piece. Then the difficulty comes to the fore. A coach must also not underestimate such a section of music as the opening of Act 2. It will require hours of coaching, in part because the music is difficult, the accompaniment being not the least bit helpful to the singers. The sung language in that scene is "street French" with all the contractions that register conjures up, and reference to things like scissors and thread that don't appear in many opera libretti. The gossip section is a formidable challenge for that reason.

In composing *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Debussy took his compositional cue from both Wagner's *Parsifal* and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov.* The former has a constant orchestral underpinning – not really accompaniment – that enlightens and highlights everything that is sung. The vocal line rides over this carpet with quite natural inflection. The voices are kept in the central voice for the most part, enabling the singer to project the text carefully and completely. This naturalistic way of writing rhythms for the voices stems from Debussy's study of Wagner and Mussorgsky. Debussy does not provide quite as many shifts of tempo as Mussorgsky, but he certainly takes his cue on how to write constantly shifting and subtle moods from the Russian master. The occasionally broken lines and short, angular nature of some sung phrases stem directly from the late Wagner style. If the orchestral palette derives from the impressionistic school, the vocal writing stems from the two masters already mentioned. A coach must never underestimate the difficulty of this kind of writing. Particularly in the later acts, the propulsive nature of the music combined with the emotionally rising drama can make singers forget to count the music securely. Otherwise major singers have gone aground on the Debussy work. Without secure rhythm, the music becomes a guessing game, and music of this nature cannot hold together that way. It is a stepping stone of style toward Poulenc.

Francis Poulenc also wrote operas, two of importance, and equally difficult for similar but not identical reasons. *Dialogues des Carmélites* is, as the title indicates, a series of scenes centering around dialog between people. While the characters are vividly drawn, they are sometimes limited in action. For this, Poulenc suggested performing the opera in the vernacular. But, when supertitles are used, we are anxious to retain the original. In this opera it is vital that the singers don't sing syllables without regard to verbal content. The tension in the opera comes when the people discuss and exchange ideas about religion, political events, fear, and the presence of the advancing French revolution. The death of the old prioress is incredible if we can hear and understand the words. Some singers can be lured into the performance mode of parroting the text, sending it out rapidly, but neither addressed to their partners on stage, nor to the audience. Madame Lidoine's aria "Mes filles" from Act 3 is a perfect depiction of her strength and courage, her implacable and unflappable nature rising to the horror facing her and the other nuns. Leontyne Price, who performed the

role early in her career, recorded this aria, bridging to the end of the scene to complete the aria, omitting the jailer in the process.

Coaches be warned: the metronome markings are correct and should be followed. The last march to the scaffold is frequently taken too fast. Quarter equals 50 gives the slow hymn the lift it needs, while racing up to quarter equals 72 means the nuns don't feel the presence of God. In earlier editions of the piano score, some of the important interludes were omitted, but they were added later. They are used frequently in staging rehearsals.

Poulenc's other opera, *La voix humaine*, is a challenge for a soprano. She appears alone on the stage. Her character is called Elle (She) in the score, and the entire opera is sung by the soprano into a telephone. First of all, what is difficult is memorizing the entire role – no cues from anyone else to play off of – and then inventing what "he" says on the other end. When the opera was written, what were called "party lines" from phone companies still existed. Two or three people would be on one "trunk" line, and the bell would ring a given pattern. Two short rings might be your phone, while a short and two longs would be your neighbor. In the opera, it is clear that Elle wants to use the line and a neighbor is reluctant to hang up – or to quit listening in, which was also a problem. The things Elle sings require her to invent being flirtatious, angry, pleading, lost in sadness, and remembering all sorts of events from the past – both good and bad. The French must be impeccable, or the opera can fall flat.

Notes

1 Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, *My Fair Lady*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1956.
2 As this edition of the book was being finalized, a new recording of the original version of *Faust* was released.

12

MUSSORGSKY, TCHAIKOVSKY, AND THE FIVE

The first important hurdle in singing Russian opera will always be the language itself. It is written in an unfamiliar alphabet – Cyrillic – and that alone causes difficulties. Add to that vowel sounds that are totally non-Western, and we begin to gather an appreciation of the problems facing Western musicians when confronting Russian opera. Despite that, the Cyrillic alphabet is not *so* difficult to master, and idiomatic translations can help a coach learn much about the language itself. Input from a Russian expert is still a necessity, but the initial work – pronunciation and even rudimentary division of words into thoughts – can be accomplished without the expert being there. A coach should learn to make a good transliteration (Russian words written in the Latin alphabet) from which to start.

Most opera houses outside Russia deal with only a few Russian-language operas. Until recently, even the Metropolitan Opera would perform these works in English. Around the 1970s that changed. The most commonly performed operas in the Russian language are *Boris Godunov* and *Khovanshchina* by Modest Mussorgsky, and *Yevgeny (Eugene) Onegin* and *Pikovaya dama* (*Pique Dame*) by Pyotr Illyich Tchaikovsky. The operas of Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninoff, and a few others are so seldom performed outside Russia itself that they do not warrant scrutiny here. The other operas of Tchaikovsky are seldom dusted off even there. Prokofiev's operas, notably *The Love for Three Oranges*, *War and Peace*, and *Betrothal in a Monastery*, and Stravinsky's *Mavra* are most often performed, if at all, in translation, though that is changing. Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* was written in English and is not much influenced by the Russian school. Glinka is historically quite important, but he does not figure prominently in active repertoire.

Although the Czech operas of Janáček, Smetana, and Dvořak are being performed more now than they were fifty years ago, productions are still rare, and this book will not deal with them. This says nothing about their quality. Only Dvořák's *Rusalka* has made recent inroads into the standard repertoire. Janáček's *Jenufa* and *Věc Makropulos* (*The Makropulos Affair*) are now becoming standard.

The first thing a coach must understand about Russian opera is the musical give and take of the dialog scenes. Therefore, even if dealing with the operas in English, the coach must make the singer realize that one phrase may answer the previous one in a slightly slower or faster tempo.

There may be slight pauses between phrases, without metronomic regularity. One measure may push ahead in a rather sprightly tempo and the next may languish. An easy example to study (not produced here due to the length of the exchange) can be found in Act 1, Scene 1 of *Onegin*.

In the conversations leading into Olga's aria and after it, Tatiana is filled with ennui and Olga is chiding her in a good-natured way; Larina and Filipyevna are expressing differing degrees of concern about Tatiana's emotional languor. The tempo throughout the exchange must ebb and flow depending on the nature of the words. Even within a statement there may be a need for a brief dramatic breath. Each character must think of what she will say before saying it. With the approach of Lensky, there is a switch to 6/8. Here the rhythm becomes much more precise and difficult. Tchaikovsky expects the anxiety of approaching "company" to infect all of them with a kind of terror. In an almost comic fashion, he has the music plunge ahead to a dramatic stop, effectively placing the women in a receiving line. The effect also seems to give them a pasted-on smile that radiates the kind of "hello" that masks their earlier confusion. Tchaikovsky expresses all these emotions with perfection, capturing the country attitudes with humor. Lensky's subsequent aria, "Ya lyubyu vas" ("I love you"), shows both his reticent and his romantic sides, making clear – by juxtaposing "vas" and "tebya" – when Lensky is being formal and when he relaxes and uses a more intimate form of address.

The operas of Tchaikovsky embrace the life of the average Russian with precision, his characters totally at ease or else highly overwrought – for example in the final scene of *Onegin* or the exalted finale to Act 1 of *Orleanskaya deva* (*The Maid of Orleans*), where Joan of Arc's farewell to her homeland forests leads into an impassioned scene with the voices from heaven.

Tchaikovsky never embraced the Russian culture, however, in the same way as the Russian Five: Cui, Balakirev, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Mussorgsky. Tchaikovsky uses folk melodies, but whole scenes can pass without one reference to such melodies. The harmonic palette, while clearly "Russian," is also influenced by Western practices. The quartet, Letter Scene, or the final duet from *Onegin* are all composed in strictly Russian Romantic style, lingering on certain words and phrases, relying on the verbal projection of the singers. They do not, however, breathe the music of Russian folk traditions or of the church. Tchaikovsky reserved those for the times he needed to indicate social situations or milieus. The chorus of peasants in *Onegin* or *Orleanskaya deva* are filled with the Russian sound, but this does not affect the "higher class" music.

Beyond folk elements, one will find strong characters in Russian opera, living their lives and plotting their futures with great power. Tchaikovsky's Hermann (*Pique Dame*) or Tatiana and Onegin (*Onegin*) are great character studies. His Joan of Arc is equally strong, with wonderful opportunities for both singing and dramatic characterization. Mussorgsky's character roster is of equal strength. Boris Godunov is strong, the dramatic possibilities being as deep as in a role like Hamlet. Of equal interest are other roles like Shuisky, Marina, and Dmitri in *Boris Godunov*, and Shaklovity, Ivan Khovansky, and Marfa in *Khovanshchina*.

Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* is considered a seminal work at least in part because of the completely original way Mussorgsky dealt with the text. This opera is arranged as a succession of mosaic tiles. Separately they are gems in themselves, but they make a story that adds up to the great overthrow of Boris. Mussorgsky is perfectly able to keep a steady tempo for extended passages. The Polonaise and love duet (in the Polish act), Varlaam's song about Kazan (in the Border Scene), or Fyodor's Clapping Song are examples of such moments. The great monologues of Boris himself breathe with a natural flow that requires total immersion in the text.

Listening to the great monologue, with score in hand, will show any coach what I mean. The music flows forward or lingers on thoughts, depending on whether Boris is elated, depressed, indignant, forthright, or haunted by his supposed past. Boris addresses Fyodor in one fashion, fatherly and kind – if also a tad hectoring. Then he muses on the nature of his regime in another. That immensely important aria/monologue shows to some extent how important the words are to Mussorgsky, who wrote only some of what he expected to be performed dramatically. He

frequently wrote words and music simultaneously, something Puccini, Verdi, or Massenet would never have done. Those operas by Mussorgsky that he left unfinished are difficult to complete for this reason. The difficulty in molding Boris into a real being is that Mussorgsky was a part-time composer. He may also have thought that what he wanted was so obvious, depending on the phrasing of the words, that he "knew" the singers would inflect the words properly. He knew that a knowledgeable singer would separate words that needed to be separated. It is for this reason that coaches who do not know Russian need to find Russian speakers to help coach this literature. Mussorgsky might also have assumed singers would know Russian history beyond Pushkin's *Boris* or the few tales that went together to make *Khovanshchina*.

Boris Godunov in particular has been plagued by the tradition of using an edition "edited" by Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov. In both that opera and in *Khovanshchina*, Rimsky-Korsakov changed not only notes to be sung, but keys, chords, and even the shape of certain scenes. Perhaps it is fortunate that he never turned his attention to *Sorochinskaya yarmarka* (*The Fair at Sorochyntsi*), which is filled with conscious attempts to emulate Ukrainian customs. The earlier incomplete opera *Salammbo* was also not edited. Unfortunately, these two operas aren't easy to produce, either.

A coach must understand the dramatic possibilities of each opera, the vocal demands of each opera, and the style of each composer. With that knowledge they can help the singer come to grips with these great operas. The coach will initially find that coaching Russian is difficult. Once acquaintance with the style and language becomes ingrained, the coach will begin to understand the reasons for the "traditional" elements that appear in so many places. It is partially for this reason that the best editions possible should be sought, although some operas will prove difficult to acquire. Finding the best editions will ensure that what the composers put down on paper will come through and be translated into real drama. Dmitri Shostakovich's orchestrations of both *Khovanshchina* and *Boris Godunov* have been used by some in preference to Rimsky-Korsakov's versions. The Pavel Lamm edition gives the piano-vocal score as Mussorgsky wrote the works.

13

RICHARD WAGNER, RICHARD STRAUSS, AND THE GERMAN SCHOOL

German opera became prominent after Mozart's few operas in that language. We generally look to Ludwig von Beethoven and Carl Maria von Weber as a stepping stone to the kind of opera Richard Wagner wrote.

Fidelio by Beethoven shows clearly that the Germans were not following the path chosen by the Italians. The musical numbers in German operas are more symphonically based. Ensembles unfold like major movements of sonatas or symphonies. This is not to say that the composers don't use the text clearly. It merely says that they form the operas around folk elements – simpler forms – and they don't expect embellishments. The vocal writing grows out of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and points to Weber and Wagner. Unlike some later composers, Beethoven made no bow to fantastic elements that invaded the works of Weber. Beethoven's characters are well differentiated in the vocal settings of the text.

Weber's operatic output has elements of mythology in it, but despite the popularity of *Der Freischütz*, his operas don't receive many performances, even in Germany. Several of them have weak librettos, while *Die Drei Pintos* was left incomplete – the completion by Mahler being more a curiosity than a great success. To movie audiences, *Der Vampyr* of Marschner should be attractive, but it also is more a footnote in German opera than a vital part of the repertoire.

In dealing with the late German Romantic school of Wagner, Strauss, and Humperdinck, we must first acknowledge that the coach must do some considerable practicing in order to play those composers' scores. Learning to play these scores is a task comparable to learning several of Beethoven's late sonatas all at once. It is true that, in playing a score at a piano, a coach does not need to play every note written. The reduction is supposed to show what the singer will hear from the orchestra and it is frequently beyond the capabilities of even the best coaches to play every note. Still, achieving even a modest degree of expertise at playing the scores will require hours of practice. It takes time and effort to play all the chords correctly and to find just what is important to play. This is sometimes referred to as playing *melos*, the sounding composition, as opposed to every note the composer wrote. Pride may make a coach try to play everything, but it is probably not going to be possible.

Part of the reason these scores are so difficult is the increased chromaticism found in the operas of these composers. Printed scores are not always perfect, either, at getting all of the notes set out

correctly. Sometimes a little rearrangement of the what is written can make little aural difference but can make an immense difference in the difficulty of what has to be played.

Another reason for the playing difficulty comes from the contrapuntal method these composers used for composing – an orchestral fabric that includes combined musical motives and layered textures. A notable example of this is found in the opening of Act 3 of *Der Rosenkavalier* (an audition piece for coaches!), which includes some extremely difficult passagework, followed by 4/4 time in the main orchestra and a waltz from the backstage orchestra. Without playing all of this, a coach must suggest that both musical strands are continuing and existing simultaneously, fighting for supremacy. The orchestral writing becomes not so much an accompaniment (as in bel canto operas or Verdi) but a running tapestry, commenting on the action and emotions of the characters. This accompaniment sometimes becomes quite dense and heavily orchestrated. It also may take over for whole sections, in transitions from one scene to another or lengthy passages of stage action (and occasionally inaction) that takes times to unwind. This excerpt from *Rosenkavalier*, though no words are sung during its playing, has to be learned because it will be played at staging rehearsals, and it must be clear so that the singers on stage can learn the staging of the pantomime that takes place to it.

With an orchestral underpinning of this nature, the vocal lines are no longer just melodic utterances. They become a counterpoint in themselves to the orchestral fabric. The voice must ride a line that floats on top of the orchestra one moment and then may plunge into the middle of that texture the next. Such vocal lines bear little relationship to songs or regular arias, and the parlando nature of many of these lines makes the rhythm quite difficult. A look at the roles of Wotan (Wagner's *Ring* cycle) or Baron Ochs (*Rosenkavalier*) will show how challenging these roles are for these exact reasons.

Wotan frequently sings at length, with little dramatic help for him to know what he's going to sing next, though chances are it will involve some very full singing. The part of Baron Ochs is rhythmically difficult from beginning to end, spouting first instructions to a lawyer, then throwing lecherous, leering jibes at Sophie, and later still showing his pompous feelings of injustice against himself. Not only that, he must sing most of his music in Viennese dialect (quite distant from high German). For the singers playing both Wotan and Ochs, their roles must flow from their mouths in an easy stream. They are also given a wide range of singing – both baritone and bass. The parlando writing must, however, never degenerate into the kind of singing that seems as much barking as singing. Both of the excerpts discussed later in this chapter, one from Wagner's *Parsifal* and one from Strauss's *Salome*, invite the kind of approximate pitch singing appropriate in Berg, perhaps, but this is not appropriate in Wagner or Strauss, where accurate pitches, rhythms, and good singing must always be employed.

The poetry is important, too, and can be a stumbling block for the singer learning the music. Wagner was his own librettist, of course, and he strove for some very deep moments of introspection. Monologues like those given to Hans Sachs (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*) or Wotan bring out the soul of the character, inner turmoil always being at the fore. When Wagner's characters become heated in high emotion (particularly sensual), however, they can lapse into what, to a translator, seems like babble. Passages of the love duet from *Tristan und Isolde* are nearly nonsensical divorced from their dramatic situation. Earlier texts, while simpler in some ways, are no less difficult to make real than the later ones. Wagner may have learned to become a better composer, but his poetry still carries with it moments of awkwardness, even in *Parsifal*.

This is not to say that everything a singer must learn is related to pitches and poetry. Wagner has given some of his characters "musical instruments" to play. Siegfried must play the anvil and Hans Sachs must play on the bottom of a shoe, both using hammers of differing natures. Wagner

writes the rhythm, however, and, though a percussionist can cover this well in recordings, in live performances it is the singer who must "schlag" in rhythm. This is sometimes quite difficult, and the coach must be certain that the singer can "beat" their role as well as sing it. In *Die Meistersinger*, the singer performing Sextus Beckmesser must also convincingly act as if he is playing a lute, all the while following the conductor (Beckmesser's Serenade is a major difficulty for any conductor due to the stop-and-start nature of the excerpt, and then because it leads into a fugal riot of monumental difficulty – also difficult to coach).

Strauss was frequently working on texts by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and those librettos are quite different from Wagner's. *Salome* (text by Oscar Wilde as translated by Hedwig Lachmann) sets the tone for Richard Strauss's operas by giving considerable emphasis to writing important roles for women, and by relying on orchestral underpinning. But from *Elektra* onward, the story unfolds with greater emotional depth, and the text is frequently replete with layers of meaning or thought. It also has moments that elicited from Strauss what one friend of mine called "noise music" – that curious orchestral writing with no themes, just sound painting. Whips crack in *Elektra*, in *Salome* birds fly around (at least in Herod's mind), and Leopold and other servants of Baron Ochs chase the girls in *Der Rosenkavalier*. They are not great moments of drama – they are just mini tone poems, and Strauss seems to have written through them with little musical care. Still, the coach may have to make sense of them for the singers. The layers involved in understanding a character like the Marschallin (*Rosenkavalier*) or an entire opera like *Die Frau ohne Schatten* can take quite a while to unravel.

Projection of voice through these dense textures must come from a clear enunciation of the text. This means both consonant/vowel diction and the more important "thought diction" mentioned in Chapter 3. With texts constructed in the fashion of Wagner or Hofmannsthal, attention must be given to the lively words, those that can elicit a vocal coloring of the text. The coach should realize that Wagner and Strauss, no matter what their reputation for heavy orchestral writing may be, actually allow the singer to come through with only a modest amount of heft.

When asked to prepare some women to sing the "Ride of the Valkyries," I began by dividing the number into smaller sections that were easier to learn. Then I made certain that each singer knew they should sing lyrically. Heft per se was not the goal. The sisters are singing in optimum roar range – the best projecting area of their voices. They don't need to press for more sound; eight women make plenty of sound! Yet here, too, the words do make things easier. (The staging seldom follows the gathering of bodies of heroes now, though!)

Birgit Nilsson – well versed in both composers – commented once that Elektra, after a few initial outbursts, becomes a relatively lyric role and should be sung that way. While this observation may not allow lyric voices to sing the heavier repertoire, it does mean that larger voices do not have to give 100 percent throughout an entire evening. It also means that, if a smaller voice attempts to sing the large roles (Siegfried, Brünnhilde, Elektra, Salome, Tannhäuser, Wotan, Hagen, etc.), it will suffer vocal collapse. Coaches must understand this and guide the potential Wagner and Strauss singer into the correct repertoire choices, helping them also to learn methods to get through such monumental assignments.

Though the general vocal writing would be difficult in any case, both composers require an extremely large orchestra. Whereas Verdi's early works require perhaps fifty players (and some houses might use fewer), his later operas *require* only a few more than that (say, sixty-five). Bel canto composers used probably a maximum of forty-five players. But Wagner used orchestras of around seventy-five players for even his early works, and the later ones, particularly the *Ring* cycle, require around ninety players. Strauss, particularly in *Elektra* and *Salome*, requires around one hundred players. Imagine trying to sing over an orchestra that size! The purpose of having an orchestra

of this size is to enable a wide range of colors to be produced, and not necessarily volume. Still, it means a bigger pit and the potential for very dense textures. The length of a work like *Die Frau ohne Schatten* makes learning and playing such an opera difficult for any orchestra, or for any coach trying to play a reduction. Orchestral players at the Metropolitan Opera have described playing the three acts of Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten* as comparable to playing three Mahler symphonies back to back.

Wagner had a solution to the problem of size-volume. He designed a stage and pit for his Bayreuth Festspielhaus that had a unique construction. The stage, unlike most theaters, is not above the level of the audience, but it is at a level that continues down from the slant of the auditorium floor. This idea came to him from the Greek amphitheaters, whose playing areas are also at the bottom of the audience slant. This allows the sound to radiate up from the singers as in that Greek amphitheater. The orchestra pit, though in front of the stage, is lower yet, with only a slight curved cover sticking up – enough for a singer to see the conductor. This has the advantages of diminishing the amount of sound pouring from the orchestra, of blending that sound more completely, and of making the orchestra invisible to the audience. Since the pit opening is so much smaller, the viewer is unaware that a pit exists, and thus they become unaware just how tall a *giant* or a *dwarf* might be. This also makes the action on stage closer to the audience. Considering the importance of the words in Wagnerian monologues, this is a bonus, since the audience can see the emotions registering on the face of the singers much more clearly. In addition, the sight lines are unbroken by pillars or other obstructions. The depth of the stage can be opened to the depth of three stages. Thus, when Lohengrin is "seen in the distance," he actually is at quite a distance from the audience.

The Bayreuth pit is also constructed with a singular shape all its own. Instead of the entire orchestra being on one level playing area, the orchestra pit is tiered down in three or four tiers, the brass and percussion taking the lowest area and strings the highest. This aids in balancing problems within the orchestral fabric, and between the pit and the voices. The sound shoots up onto the stage and then goes out into the auditorium proper. This means that the orchestral size and volume are taken care of in Bayreuth in a way no other theater can manage. The oddity is that no other theater has even attempted this solution, particularly the idea of the stage being lower than the audience. Yet it would seem to be a viable idea for any number of theaters, not only the hallowed halls in Bayreuth. (The fact that the seats are uncomfortable seems to be a malicious idea from Wagner to keep the audience awake during the extensive monologues and dialogues.) The covered pit has yet another blessing: its structure means the orchestral players can dress casually – in the summer! – and still not be seen.

The vocal production demanded in these scores is something a coach must consider. In recent years, the older school of non-singing in Wagner operas has vanished. People have begun to remember that Wagner grew up at the end of the bel canto era. That is to the good. Wagner requires a large, healthy voice produced with some ease and with good line, verbal acuity, and with enough voice to carry over the orchestra pit to the back of the house. Some roles (notably Tannhäuser and Siegfried) are simply voice killers. And yet they are not impossible, provided a singer takes time to learn not only the music of the roles but also how to sing them properly.

Coaches must understand what kind of vocal size these operas demand and find ways for the potentially gifted interpreters of them to sing them. Recent gifted singers, such as Deborah Voigt and Ben Heppner, have proved that not only is singing Wagner possible, but also that the roles can be sung beautifully and passionately without destroying their voices. The key, I think, is to understand when to give voice and when to relax, allowing diction to carry the voice across the pit.

In Wagner's earliest operas, *Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot*, and *Rienzi*, the recitatives were wooden and uninteresting. Some of this can still be found even in *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, and

Lohengrin. It takes some work to make the singer sound natural in these passages. But after those operas, starting with the *Ring* cycle, Wagner worked his recitative more completely into the whole fabric.

In the excerpt from *Parsifal* shown in Figure 13.1, I have included two accompaniments. The various ways the original rhythms are simplified in the lower version can guide the coach in how to make his or her job easier, and perhaps also make the singer hear more clearly the tonality of the accompaniment.

The excerpt was chosen because it invites the "barking" style of Wagner singing. It is also so chromatic that singing pitches are difficult to find. In the second measure, the basic chord is an A7 chord, despite the initial D♯. Parsifal can find his pitch here relatively easily. But he must sing that first "Ja!" with an onset (a flexing of the diaphragm to start the air and tone). He may color that word in some way, but it must have tonal substance and not be mostly hot air.

In measure 3, the persistent E on top makes finding the D in the voice difficult unless the singer considers the left hand to be playing a G minor chord (first inversion) without an added sixth. The vocal line in measure 3 must be quite sustained, the rest barely registering. The violins in measure 4 help the singer to be certain he is on the right pitch. Halfway through the bar, the chordal structure outlines an E♭9 chord, the voice taking the fifth.

Measure 5 begins in the voice merely a step up from the previous measure. Luckily the voice fits in with the orchestral tonality. "Deutlich erkenn' ich ihn …" is a short phrase, as is the following one, but they must be fully supported, though not loud, and they must further the thought from one phrase to the next. In measure 7, the voice must not pound into the F♯, as the text does not warrant it. The pitches throughout these measures are not too difficult to find: "die Lippe" is frequently approximate in pitch, but the accompaniment is quite clear, helping the singer.

Measures 9 through 12 are much more problematic for the singer. Possibly already tired from earlier in the act, the singer tends to deliver these notes in a parlando fashion wholly inappropriate to the intense moment. Therefore, they push the parlando, thinking this will get through. A steady, singing tone, centered on every pitch and rhythm, will make the singer's voice sound forth quite nicely. Particularly nasty is the scalar passage on "flatterten lachend die Locken": it changes "tonality" halfway up, and singers don't always center their voices squarely on the pitches. The line can be sung in a sustained and lyric fashion, culminating in the top G♯, but it will require several passes to get the pitches correct.

Measures 12 through 14 are less wicked rhythmically, although the non-chord notes are still quite prominent. Measure 14 is usually sung with the syncopated notes being leaned on and the smaller notes being less accented. This makes sense in terms of the textual accents and gives the singer a semblance of sobbing.

The singer must be singing with a free tone and still convey the impression that he is convulsed in agony throughout. For this reason, the singer must initially learn the role carefully with all rhythms, pitches, and words sung with little emotion. Once his technique is up to the challenge of a passage, the singer can then turn on the dramatic "engines" and find the pathway to the truth of the dramatic moment.

It is also important for a coach to know that Wagner, while generally avoiding the highest notes of a voice's register, may instead put the singer directly in the *passaggio* (register shift range, also called "the break") of the voice and leave them there. In the second act finale of *Tannhäuser*, the tenor sings whole ensembles in the E to G range, and then he is asked to rise to As. This takes a toll on a singer as much or more than the size of the orchestra.

Engelbert Humperdinck (the composer, not the pop singer) is known almost exclusively for his opera *Hänsel und Gretel*. This opera requires less skill to sing than those of his mentor, Wagner, but

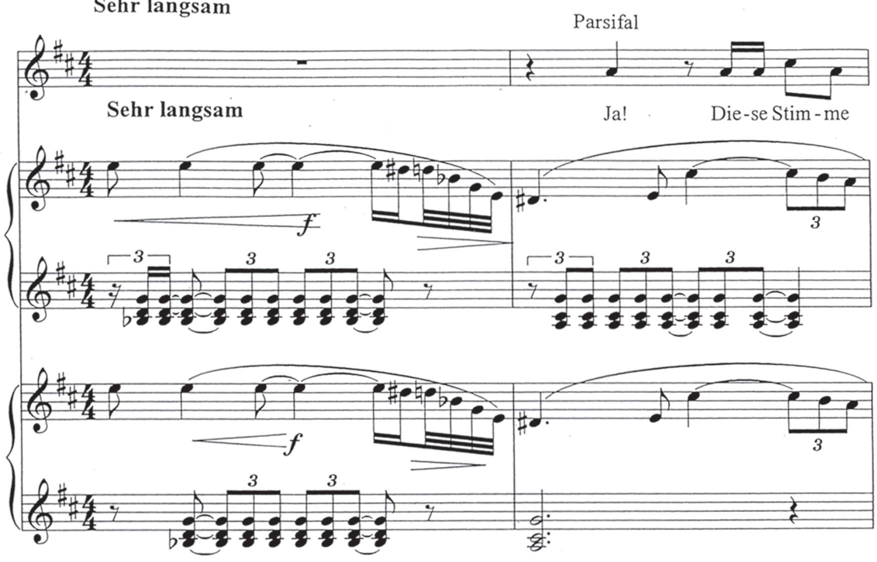

FIGURE 13.1 Wagner – excerpt from *Parsifal* (Act 2) (Continued)

his textures are more than reminiscent of his teacher, some nearly direct quotes sounding clearly forth. The singers must all be well schooled in their roles, and no one can ever take the score for granted just because it is a "children's opera." It is curious to note that in the joyous waltz near the end of the opera, many younger singers do not have waltzing in their bones. They understand it, but their bodies don't quite catch the *Schwung* of the piece. There are also some discrepancies between scores in this section, Peters being generally more correct, but the orchestral partiture

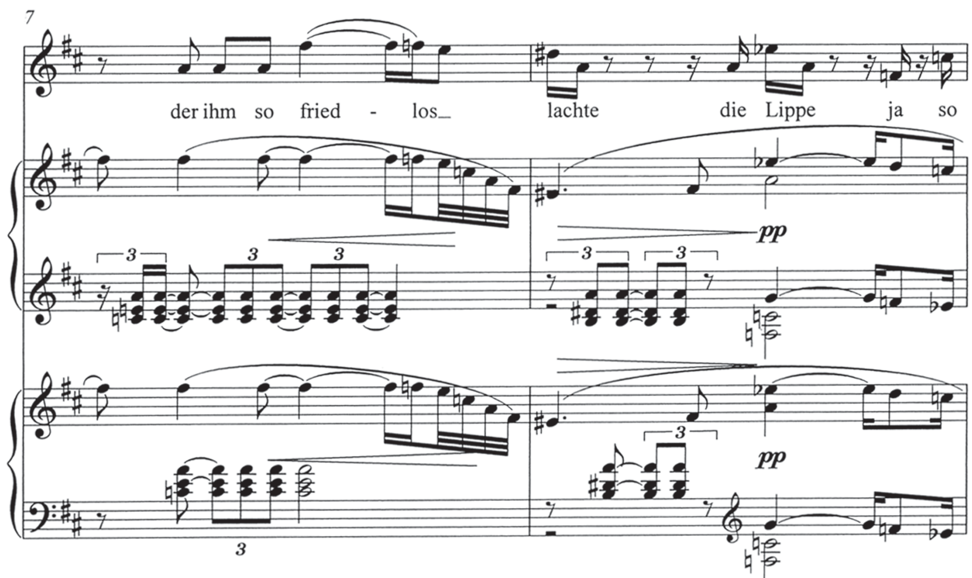

FIGURE 13.1 (Continued) Wagner – excerpt from *Parsifal* (Act 2)

being more correct than any piano-vocal score. Note: the witch can be sung by sopranos, high mezzos, tenors, or high baritones. It needs to be sung, however, more than just cackled.

Figure 13.2 comes from Strauss's opera *Salome*. The first note in the figure is the last note of the famous "Dance of the Seven Veils." The accompaniment is a maze of cross-rhythms, chromatics, and impossible fingerings. The left hand in measures 4 and following should be brought out,

FIGURE 13.1 (Continued) Wagner – excerpt from *Parsifal* (Act 2)

possibly letting some of the triplets go in favor of those bass notes and perhaps the important pitches in the right hand.

Until measure 9, in fact, the accompaniment does not double one note of the vocal part. How, then, is the singer to find his pitch? At the beginning of the excerpt, the crashing chord is A minor. From that point on, through measure 7 of the excerpt, Herod outlines A major tonality, the only

FIGURE 13.1 (Continued) Wagner – excerpt from *Parsifal* (Act 2)

note not fitting the actual chord being the F♯ in measure 5. In measure 8, the singer veers away from A major just when the accompaniment accents an A7 chord. The next measure, however, lets the voice and accompaniment unify in a tonality, the distant G♭ major (although it is a brief landing point). In a passage like this, the accompaniment being as much a hindrance as a help, the singer must at times feel his own shifting tonalities, finding pitches here and there in the orchestra from which to grab the tonal center as a reality check.

Of course, the opera *Elektra* is much harder than this. But the later operas of Richard Strauss can be deceptively difficult, too. I have coached the Najade, Dryade, and Echo scene (the one announcing the arrival of Bacchus) many times, and I have never had a trio think it was easy at first; some have almost cried, and some have thought that they "could never learn it." But with careful and slow study, they all gradually found the path through the maze of shifting tonalities and verbal phrases, and came to enjoy the scene.

The operas of Alban Berg – *Wozzeck* and *Lulu* – are written in a style that is an extension of the Strauss heard in *Elektra* – and musically deal with extreme chromatics, though only *Lulu* is truly written in Arnold Schönberg's twelve-tone system. Though there are still some of the long lines we associate with Richard Strauss, the drama and musical style demand that the vocal lines be very angular, with wide leaps, difficult tessituras, and difficult pitches to find.

The vocal writing also incorporates Berg's usage of that wonderful Schönberg invention: *Sprechstimme*. This is literally "speaking voice" and means that pitches indicated with an X instead of a note head are to be more spoken, less on pitch than the usual parlando style incorporated into other operas. The tone is frequently produced without much vibrato, and a certain sing-song quality is heard. Unfortunately, *Sprechstimme* allows singers to sing *at* pitches rather than on pitches and invites very free interpretations of Berg's written ideas. A simple study of existing recordings will point this out. But there is a major reason for this inappropriately wayward attitude to pitches, and that is the singer's immersion in the drama.

Berg was dealing with the new era of Freudian psychology, and that is represented in the moody ramblings of Wozzeck or of Lulu. To a tame extent (except in *Elektra*), so does Strauss. Wagner used little psychology and a lot of philosophy. This is evident in Hans Sachs or Wotan, but sometimes extends to the very nature of the storylines themselves. The psychodrama elicits from Berg a vocal and orchestral writing that is extremely difficult to master, and yet in these operas singing the notes correctly and musically is quite far from the eventual goal of projecting these manic and disturbed characters. It is a means to an end, but not the end itself.

It is not really the job of the coach to get into heated discussions with the singer about the dramatic slant of an opera beyond the nature of the character itself. Whether a character might be a grotesque stereotype or not may need some discussion, but the director will take his or her slant on things, and the coach can leave it at that. There are many people who say, for example, that Mime (notably in *Siegfried*) and Sextus Beckmesser (in *Die Meistersinger*) are examples of Wagner's anti-Semitic stance. This sort of thing can bear discussion to a degree (and perhaps should be discussed), but creation of the character itself is the important thing, and you cannot play a stereotype. A singer must portray a real character, and if that character has some stereotypical attributes, so be it. Wagner's avowed anti-Semitism was well known from his verbal writings (though that may be as much a jealous diatribe against Meyerbeer personally as against all Jews in music), but it does not mean that every bizarre character created by Wagner is an anti-Semitic slur.

Berg's *Lulu* and Wagner's music dramas have a formal layout that needs to be understood as well. *Lulu* is dramatically constructed on a large arch, with elements being presented at either end of the arch that depend on the other end to be present. This is the reason Friedrich Cerha's completion of the orchestration of Berg's operas was so important. The form needed it.

Wagner's forms can be even more immense. The *Ring* cycle represents the form of a huge symphony, which means that fourteen hours of music are all related. The "bar form" used so frequently by real Mastersingers is explained in Act 3 of *Die Meistersinger* quite clearly, but some people have pointed out that the entire opera is one!

It is just as impossible for a singer to play a form as it is for them to portray a stereotype. But a coach must understand to some degree how each of these things are manifest in the opera and, if

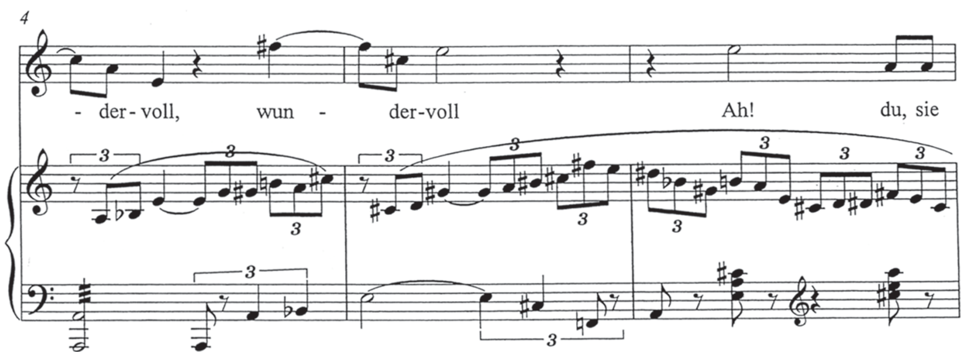

FIGURE 13.2 R. Strauss – *Salome* – excerpt for Herod directly after the "Dance of the Seven Veils." (Continued)

necessary, be able to point them out to a singer. It may not be necessary for a singer to consider *Siegfried* as the scherzo of a symphony, but it may help in dramatic or even vocal ways.

The sheer size of these Germanic operas makes learning and playing them quite difficult. Understanding them on at least some level beyond just notes is also a difficult assignment, and yet it is one a coach must take on to coach these great works.

FIGURE 13.2 (Continued)

I must insert one short and personal note. During my time in Hamburg, Germany, I was introduced to a wonderful, elderly lady named Sigrid von Richthofen, sister-in-law to the Red Baron – that's how she was introduced to me. She later appeared as one of the ladies in Sally Bowles's apartment house in the movie *Cabaret*. What I regret never knowing until a few years after returning to the States was that Sigrid von Richthofen was born Sigrid Johannson. She sang opera as a young woman, singing the role of Marie in the premiere of Berg's *Wozzeck*. The opportunity to ask someone who really knew what *Sprechgesang* or *Sprechstimme* was like passed me by.

14

PUCCINI AND THE VERISMO SCHOOL

The operas of Giacomo Puccini were written in the post-Ibsen era, when realistic reactions and interactions were dramatically the norm. Drama had not yet reached the psychodrama stage of Freudian-based works, but it was certainly a far cry from the dramatic style Verdi had chosen as the basis for his operas. The major sources Puccini chose for his operas were Murger, Belasco, and Sardou. As with Verdi (except in his Shakespeare operas), Puccini chose the newest plays and novels of the era and transformed them into great dramas. Where Verdian characters could take time to wax poetic or take a stance and blatantly trumpet their resolve to the rafters, Puccini's characters are more natural, acting in an almost normal time frame and with little real bombast. Despite singing, they take time for poetic utterances, but they also react in a real way to dramatic situations. This was the style and era known as verismo (literally: realism).

What exactly is verismo? It began at least as far back as 1875. *Carmen*, although French instead of Italian, is sometimes thought of as verismo in style. In verismo opera, characters are ordinary people, with no kings or queens, no dukes or earls. Not one of those characters can be found anywhere in Puccini until we come to *Turandot*, and that opera focuses on the lower end of the caste system, preferring to place emphasis on the people behind the figures.

The dramatic situations were also different. Although Verdi and Puccini both supplied us with the major examples of consumptive heroines, most of Verdi's plots are about political intrigues, actions at a court, mad gypsies, and the like. These are hardly the things to which the late-nineteenth-century person on the street could relate. But, then, this also reflects the difference between audiences. The royal theaters of the eras of Mozart, Rossini, and early Verdi had become public theaters, and this was reflected in the subject matter chosen to be presented. In some ways, Verdi's *Rigoletto* (1850) might be considered the first verismo opera, so the differences are not as great as one might think dramatically. However, in verismo the drama took total precedence over the musical forms, and that is a major difference between earlier operas and the operas of Puccini and his followers in the verismo school.

Puccini's operas deal with people in personal crises. Whether dealing with the conflict between lovers, politically charged events, or the betrayal of one lover by another, the drama always moves on a personal level. In *Tosca*, for example, the Napoleonic political movement provides a time-centered background for the opera, but the actual drama takes place in private areas. Act 1, though

frequently played in the main nave of a church, is supposed to take place in a private chapel off the main nave. This may be less spectacular to watch, but it focuses the drama into a smaller place, and makes Scarpia's singing in the "Te Deum" a fight against the demons within himself rather than a struggle against the vocal forces behind him. Act 2 is set in the confined area of Scarpia's apartment, and Act 3, although in the open air, is at the top of Castel Sant'Angelo, and the only means of leaving the top parapet are the stairs or leaping over the edge – both of which are used.

This new drama required a new acting style. When Rodolfo sings "Che gelida manina," he may be in a poetic mood (he's a poet, after all), but the poetry is never quite as high-flown as his vocal line. Directly before the aria he had behaved in a fashion both humorous and very typical for a man alone with a young woman in his own apartment. When he finds and hides the key, he has an attitude quite new for the times, to say nothing of his extinguishing his candle even earlier (usually played as no accident but as a willful improvement of the situation on Rodolfo's part). This natural acting style might seem to mean less hysteria and over-the-top acting, but that is not quite true. The high emotions of Tosca, of Giorgetta in *Il Tabarro*, or of Madama Butterfly arise out of intensely driven plots that build to a climax. These climaxes are all rooted in normal reactions to extreme stimuli. Even ecstatic moments like Suor Angelica's final apotheosis arise out of a storyline based on interaction between normal people in abnormal situations, and that was a situation not unheard of in Puccini's times. When Cavaradossi lunges at Scarpia in Act 2 of *Tosca*, it is the reaction of a politically savvy man tasting a moment of vindication and triumph. His "Vittoria" may be short-lived, but he reacts appropriately for a fanatical but real individual.

All of this must be understood by a singer and by a coach. I have begun with the acting style instead of the music because that is the most important difference between Puccini and Verdi. There are other important differences to come, but to understand where the drama comes from in Puccini's operas is essential. The odd mistaken identities and secret letters of Scribe-type librettos (from the mid-nineteenth century) are nowhere in evidence. Indeed, the only letter of importance in Puccini appears in Act 2 of *Madama Butterfly.* And that is, in part, to prepare Butterfly and the audience for the change of situations that will present itself in the final scene.

Musically, it is important to note that Puccini bases many of his arias on the simpler canzone of his time. Neapolitan and Sicilian songs are never far from Puccini's musical palette. The lines are almost never in a strict tempo, always yielding to the meaning of the words. Puccini provides copious markings: *ritardando*, *affrettando*, *tenuto*, *staccato*, *portate le voce*, and so on. They are all aids to singing and interpreting the roles; the coach must help the singer find and perform as many of them as possible. *Affrettando* means to press forward, while *portate le voce* means to allow a light slide from one note to another, "carrying the voice" in that manner.

Though Puccini uses many passages of parlando singing over an orchestral theme, the moments we remember most are the incredibly melodic arias, and there the orchestra shadows the singer in many passages. The long lines of Rodolfo's "Che gelida manina" or Liù's "Tu, che di gel sei cinta" are accompanied much more completely and heavily than similar moments in Verdi. This makes the high C in *La Bohème* relatively easy for the tenor. He has merely to ride the orchestral tide, not competing with it but enjoying it (far easier than the C in Gounod's *Faust*). This melodic doubling, however, invites pushing, and the singer who allows himself to do that will surely fail. If he keeps a lithe line riding on the orchestral wave, he can rise comfortably to the heights.

A coach must realize that, with Puccini and the verismo school, we embark on open-throated singing that carries with it the emotion of every note and word. Enrico Caruso, Mario del Monaco, Giovanni Zenatello, Franco Corelli, Renata Tebaldi, Maria Callas, and Giuseppe Taddei are all examples of singers with this kind of totally committed vocalism. The goal is to make an audience think a singer is giving their all; yet that can be quite boring … and dangerous! Even del Monaco

managed to sing some exquisitely soft passages in *Andrea Chénier* – when he wanted to. It is the coach's job to help singers achieve these passages of tender and softer singing, as this helps them endure throughout an entire role, and it helps them gain variety of singing.

I must point out that other composers in the verismo school – Ruggero Leoncavallo, Francesco Cilea, Umberto Giordano, and Pietro Mascagni – are sometimes even more overtly dramatic than Puccini, and again the coach must help the singer retain some variety. The all-out approach seems exciting at first, but it then becomes tiring. The fact that Puccini writes in a slightly lower tessitura might make a singer believe the roles are easier or, perhaps, overtly dramatic. But the singer who allows his or her voice to get "bigger" in the middle voice will find him- or herself fighting hard for effects not intended by the composer.

Puccini and his contemporaries could write some very complicated music when needed. Some of the ensembles in these operas are full of exciting arguments and actions, while some of the atmosphere created by offstage singers, chimes, cannons, and so on, can be difficult and time-consuming to put together. *Gianni Schicchi*, for example, has the ensemble of the relatives furious at being left out of the will, and the dressing trio can be just as difficult to get right. These kinds of scenes are just as much a part of the whole as the arias and duets we all love.

Even in large casts, such as *La fanciulla del West*, Puccini applies his skill to even the smallest character. They are all fully fleshed-out characters. Benoit, in *Bohème,* is a troublesome old coot; he's also a dirty old man, and this allows the Bohemian companions to feign righteousness at his indiscretions.

There is one important thing to note that can help in the interpretation of Puccini: That is the presence of many recordings of first interpreters. Caruso, Farrar, Zenatello, and others were all given premieres by Puccini, or they were at least trained by him for second or third productions. These give us the best possible connection with exactly what the composer wanted. The fact that Leoncavallo accompanied artists in his songs and arias is important. There are even groups of recordings of first casts, including Francesco Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur* and first Met casts – *Madama Butterfly.* The student (or coach) who ignores these recordings because they are not high fidelity and digitally recorded is missing the considerable wealth of nuance these recordings embrace. One might say they have "higher fidelity" in some respects than the digital age can provide.

INTERLUDE 7
OPERA IN TRANSLATION

In the United States we like to think of ourselves as, at one time at least, being at odds with the world, in that we used to perform a great many of our operas in English. This is not as odd as it seems. As late as the early 1970s, German and Italian opera houses the size of La Scala or the Hamburgische Staatsoper still performed operas in translation. The Metropolitan Opera in New York even performed the Russian and other Slavic operas in translation later than that. Then, in order to capitalize on international singers and their reputations, companies switched to using original languages. Colleges have even begun preparing students for this trend by using original language instead of vernacular productions. However, there will always continue to be some opera in translation. Comedies lose a great deal if the humor must be read in the supertitles. It is important to note, though, that those projected titles do not allow the singer to be less expressive or less specific in their dramatic projection, and diction must still be a major concern.

A coach must help singers deal with the "wrong" words being sung. Good translations place the important words in the same locations in the music (or nearly) and use similar expressions. One tries to capture the meaning at times when the specific words sound odd. Some other translations, however become very freewheeling and distant from the original libretto. This is not as terrible as it seems. Some verbal idioms are not translatable exactly into English. An easy example to demonstrate this comes from *Die Zauberflöte.* At the entrance of the Queen of the Night in Act 2, Monostatos, seeing that Pamina is her daughter, declares "Das ist Salz in meine Suppe." This means, literally, "That's salt in my soup/stew," but that means nothing to us in English. An idiomatic equivalent might be, "That's a feather in my cap" or "Chalk one up for me."

The first difficult problem in singing in translation is that words are displaced from one part of a phrase to another, which means coloration devices of the composer might fall inaccurately on the wrong words. Sometimes this just cannot be avoided. It must sound like English, not some odd translation. For example: if the words so backward fall that they English resemble not to anyone, then the translation not good is (as this sentence ably shows). A translation should not sound like a bad imitation of Yoda in the *Star Wars* movies. Some arias, like "V'adoro pupille" from Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, are virtually untranslatable into anything like an accurate singing text.

In making translations, it is sometimes quite difficult to get the best phrasing and meaning into the given note patterns. An example is found in *Die Fledermaus.* In the famous solo and chorus from Act 2, "Brüderlein, Brüderlein und Schwesterlein" literally means "little brother, little brother

and little sister." But that does not fit the few notes given. It is also harsh on the ears, where the German original is quite fluid. When I translated it, I began the verse with, "All of you, each and every one of you," which dealt with the situation at hand and allowed the articulation to be ultra-legato. It is not the only solution, but it had virtues that outweighed its faults. I reverted to "brother dear, brother dear and sister, too" at the repeat of the phrase two lines later.

In the same ensemble, "Du-i-du" might be considered nonsense. While it is used that way, it can also mean – literally and musically – "You and you" – which continues the idea of getting the chorus to relax, becoming "gemütlich" ("friendly") with one another.

Another problem with singing in translation is the vowels. Some words translate closely but with vastly different sounds. *Herz*, *cor*, *coeur*, and *heart* all mean the same thing, but what a difference the various vowels make. The astute coach may have to adjust a translation for a singer just because he or she needs a different vowel on a high note. This is awkward, of course, because a translation has been paid for and usually should be followed closely. But some adjustment is made in almost every performance. Coaches should make suggestions, with a cautious warning that some conductors and directors will not allow deviations from the sung or spoken text. Even if the coach can devise an excellent solution that fits the notes and is twice as literal in meaning, there may be good reasons why changes cannot be made. In these situations, adjusting the underlay may help.

Ideally, such changes should not cause major headaches – assuming they are done well and with care. Rhyme schemes must frequently be observed, and close meanings need to be attempted. Humorous content is sometimes much more difficult to adjust than dramatic content. Some of the older translations become laughable to us because they have really antiquated language or else their humor is not nearly as funny as the translator thinks. On *Bell Telephone Hour* (a TV show of the 1960s), Tito Gobbi once observed that the old librettos of Donizetti and his era are just as flowery and antiquated to the modern Italian ear as the translations are. So care must be taken.

Translation is never an ideal situation, but it can be far preferable to having a singer singing (or speaking) unintelligibly in a foreign tongue, with no discernable meaning emerging. And audiences still respond to the immediacy of hearing their own language in a performance.

What makes a bad translation may be surmised from the above. It is astonishing how distant some translations are from the original language text. Singers of Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus* are frequently asked to sing "humorous" texts that sound dated almost as soon as they are written. The German of the aria is a perfect painting of an autocrat in love with his own importance, so one wonders why translators don't try for a closer rendering of the text.

Tenors preparing the aria "Una furtiva lagrima," Nemorino's Act 2 aria from *L'elisir d'amore*, if asked by a coach what the mood of the aria is, frequently think it is sad. If a coach presses the singer for a word-for-word translation or to describe what happened prior to this aria, the singers frequently don't know. Singers need to understand the dramatic context for anything they sing. For the record, the aria, although in B♭ minor, is not sad, morose, or despondent; it is whimsically confused. Nemorino just saw Adina get upset, weeping in fact, when he was surrounded by pretty young ladies. He is on the point of realizing his most cherished dream: "M'ami!" "She loves me!"

Some operas suffer greatly when translated. *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Debussy provides an ideal example. In addition to being quintessentially French – musically, verbally, dramatically, and ideologically – it has phrases that just do not translate into easy English phrases. Take Mélisande's opening phrase. In French, she sings, "Ne me touche pas" several times in succession, which means literally, "Don't touch me." But that does not fit the number of notes given. One can try again and again to make a singing translation, but anything one tries will come up several notches below the easy flow of the original. This and the aria from *Giulio Cesare* by Handel already discussed can provide hours of frustration to any translator. Another test: Secco recitatives should end in a rhymed

couplet. Most translators just skip that aspect and hope for a good closing line with meaning that does not rhyme.

Translating is a great skill, and the question will always be raised whether singing the "wrong" words is a good practice or not.

EXERCISE #1: Take a popular aria from Puccini, Verdi, Gounod, or any other composer. Make a word-for-word translation, and then make a singing translation that captures the mood correctly, with accuracy toward the original text. For added difficulty, try to keep the rhymes at the same places (although not the same sounds)!

15

OPERETTAS

In the mid-nineteenth century the split between grand opéra and *opéra comique* took a new twist. Grand opéra was supposed to be in five acts, was to have ballet in the second, third, or fourth acts, was to have no dialog (only recitative), and was to have an historically or biblically based story, with noble causes being sung about. Spectacle, the bigger the better, was important, too.

Opéra comique was a more sedate operatic venture. It was shorter and was technically family entertainment. It was usually in three or four acts, had dialog (with minimal sung recitative that propelled into certain numbers), little or no ballet (folk-based, if at all), and was to be on more domestic subjects. *Daughter of the Regiment* (Donizetti), *Fra Diavolo* (Auber), *Faust* (Gounod), and *Carmen* (Bizet) were written in this form, the latter raising great hackles because of the dramatic content of the story. These styles began to merge into a sort of lyric opera, less grand and more romantically inclined, with fewer historical events and more personal struggles.

In France, along came Jacques Offenbach, an émigré from Germany. His personal style was quite that of a dandy, with lavish suits and shirts and a distinctly "different" manner about him. He invented a new musical form, which he called *opéra bouffe* or *bouffon*. This is nothing more than the French equivalent of *opera buffo* from Italian. It was terribly funny, quite light, with little or no meaning (other than an occasional political barb), and it contained pleasant melodies and farcical situations. It was written in two or three acts and had plenty of spoken dialog to move the action along. Offenbach was equally famous for his one-act comic operas, which he called *opérettes.* As the form took root and spread, the Viennese in particular took the name and made it an Italian version of the word: operetta. I should point out that Gilbert and Sullivan, who brought the form to high standards in England, never called their works operettas but rather comic operas (sometimes with modifying phrases specific to certain works).

As anyone who has heard a Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera will attest, there are often pages of dialog, some of it quite funny and some even serious. Though Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* is usually produced with only minimal dialog between numbers, the original dialog was lengthy and involved. The *opéra comique* operas also had long stretches of dialog, but most of these were greatly shortened or turned into recitative outside France. I hope the lessons learned in this chapter will carry over into serious operas, too.

Directors might assume that singers, particularly if they are acting in their own language, can speak dialog intelligently. It may not be that easy. Dialog in operettas is filled with parenthetical phrases and asides to the audience and the whole manner is at a high energy level. What may serve as a reserved and appropriate level for TV or movie dialog will seem flat and unimaginative for the operetta character. In operetta, characters may stem from reality – at least somewhat – but they are more overtly drawn, more completely above a normal, everyday pace of life. An actor working with operetta dialog must find the winks and leers in the script and bring them out. Instead of saying a line like "Of course, you could do that" in a matter-of-fact fashion, emphasizing "Of course …," the actor may want to consider other possibilities. "Of course, you *could* do that!" or even "Of course, *you* could do that!" (implying "but *I* couldn't"). The practiced operetta actor will take all dialog and try different readings to find the emphasis that works best. These characters are *based* in reality, but they are not real. They are directly from French farce, and sensible reactions to things are not always assured – and almost never timid. One might say the characters "pose."

EXERCISE #1: Try the following lines with as many different meanings as possible: "Oh dear, I was hoping you could stay a little longer. You have so much more to learn about us."

1. Needing to tell you our whole sad story.
2. Add a sensual nature to the lines, particularly the second one.
3. The person is threatening someone with a gun.

EXERCISE #2: Take the lyrics of a popular song from any musical, and, *speaking the lines only!*, change the meaning of the lyrics completely.

Coaches may think that they have nothing to do with dialog, and, in a sense, they do not. Yet an understanding of that dialog is essential because the flavor carries over into the music as well. The most important and dangerous mistake a coach can make is assuming that operetta is "easy" music. Listen to an amateur production of Gilbert and Sullivan, or of *Die Fledermaus*, and you quickly find out just how precise the music must be, both in musical projection and in dramatic intention.

Some directors rooted in the dramatic schools attempt to find a "better" speaking voice from singers by having them push their speaking voices down in pitch. This limits the range, giving no place to go down further. It also forces the singer to place their voices in the wrong range. The fact that Beverly Sills sang in a high register and spoke quite low is an isolated anomaly; she should not be emulated. A clearly produced voice, sounding in the middle range and carefully dealing with nuances in the dialog, will project quite well and will not have the thin, high sound that directors are trying to avoid. Supporting the speaking voice and projecting it are just as important as the similar efforts taken with the singing voice. Pushing a speaking voice down below its normal range can damage it.

To project numbers like "Were you not to Koko plighted" or "I am so proud" from *The Mikado* clearly takes real consideration of vocal, verbal, and technical demands. The technique discussed elsewhere of working patter up to a top speed will of course come into play. But it is also true that dramatic placement of kisses in the first number or of the counterpoint in the second is quite important. These do not just happen, and a coach should insist on rehearsing whatever is needed to

get everything into the body apparatus. This does not mean that Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum have to kiss in every rehearsal, but it does mean they should make a physical "kiss" into the air, so they know the difficulty of wedging them into place within the prescribed time – which is minimal. In many patter songs and numbers, a luxurious, plush sound will be a detriment. In Katisha's "Alone and yet alive" (again *The Mikado*), the fatter sound is appropriate, but she must then focus it differently for her duet with Koko.

The vocal demands in operetta are sometimes just as great as those in French grand opéra – and sometimes even greater. An aria like Rosalinde's "Czardas" in *Die Fledermaus* demands the most of any soprano, beginning with a low tessitura for the *lassu* (slow portion), and ending with an effortless (!) high D at the end of the *Friss* (fast portion) – these are the terms also used in Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies. The musical style, though it lands on the listener's ear with pleasant ease, can be quite difficult. The only thing lighter is the storyline. The physical demands in operetta of singing, dancing, and high energy can sap even the experienced performer.

The coach must realize, therefore, that, when standing still in coaching, singers must concentrate on the physical element of singing with diction. If the singer cannot project the musical and dramatic ideals when standing still, then the coach will know that more work is necessary. The coach may have to suggest that the singer understand that can-cans, waltzes, and other traditional actions all take energy, and that energy applied to the body takes focus away from the vocal demands. If a person has trouble singing a passage standing still, a workout regimen should be recommended.

Coaches must also realize the sheer discipline involved in singers performing operetta. The great Gilbert and Sullivan performers of the early 1950s may show some questionable vocalism, but projection of text and the meaning of that text is impeccable and always at the correct energy level. They stand as models of a musical style to be emulated. Many of those recordings lack dialog, but the few recordings that retain it can give a good idea of the style that should be used.

A recent development with companies that produce operas with spoken dialog is that they speak the dialog in English and sing in the original language. This is not an ideal situation. It is true that the music retains the original lyrics and style, but it also seems to say that singers can sing a language but not speak it. It is quite a jolt when Dr. Falke (in *Die Fledermaus*) says, "Is that the famous watch? Everyone will know it's you. Bring it along tonight," and then the music starts and he sings "Komm mit mir, zum Souper." The switch should barely be noticed, yet it jumps out too prominently when both languages are used.

In a more serious work, like Weber's *Der Freischütz*, the jolt can be even more extreme. Can one take seriously the following exchange?

> Dialog: Agatha: Where did you shoot the deer?
> Max: Somewhat far from here – deep in the woods – in the Wolf's Glen.
> Recitative: Agathe: Wie? Was? Entsetzen! Dort in der Schreckensschlucht?
> *Dort – in der Schreckensschlucht?*

Agatha is answering Max by repeating the word for Wolf's Glen, but the change leaps out because, first of all, "Schreckensschlucht" is a mouthful to sing, particularly twice. And the orchestra, after Max's spoken line, has such an overtly huge reaction, it doubles the intensity of a word that is not *that* important.

16

BENJAMIN BRITTEN AND OTHER MODERN COMPOSERS

Many modern composers want to write operas, and yet they despair because singers do not seem to want to sing their works. The composer cannot understand this reluctance on the part of the singers, while the singers fire back that composers do not understand the needs of opera. Both are accurate to a degree.

Singers are generally raised in a school of singing that fits the works of Italian and French composers. Music training is not always aimed at non-traditional writing. Some "modern" operas are written with dissonances, but they are not that different from Puccini or Debussy in difficulty. Some singers adapt themselves for German and Russian operas, and some even manage a few English-language operas. There is an English school that embraces the Handelian oratorio (but not necessarily his operas) and the operatic works of Britten, Vaughan Williams, and Delius. But very few singers are taught a technique that will enable them to tackle the many works that have been written since 1940. That's hardly modern in 2019, when I'm writing this; historians would say it doesn't even qualify as modern. To a singer, however, it does. Even Britten has only gained an honored place in the repertoire in the last fifty years – after his death. Other composers are interpreted by a select few singers, like the late Sanford Sylvan, who specialized in the modern works of Adams and Glass and relished the demands they present.

George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* must be addressed as a modern opera, although it predates 1940. The characters there are strongly drawn, taken directly from Dubose Heyward's play. The music is written with trained voices in mind, and the Gershwin trust still maintains the demand that all characters be played by black singers (except the white policeman). The music is never easy to sing; it makes demands on the best opera singer. Black singers don't as a rule enjoy performing the work. The problem is that the story shows an historic time when certain characteristics were considered normal for black neighborhoods. These are not inaccurate, perhaps, but they are difficult to accept today, even from black people.

The other problem is that the opera is written in what was once accepted as "black speak." Coaching the opera is an enjoyable experience, but a person must come to terms with this dialect. Part of the problem is the grammatical construction of the sentences. Again, it may have been correct and acceptable for the time, but now it takes on a sense of racism, and that was never Gershwin's intent. Phrases like "God got plenty o' money for duh saucer" are easily understood,

and they ring true to the characters. But some words like "duh, dem, brudder, Hebbin" hit our ears much differently than they once did.

What the libretto says is beautiful and the story is powerful, constructed on a standard kind of operatic format. Like Rossini and Verdi, it even has a huge storm! But any production must lift the gold from the dross, making the work shine with the raw emotions the opera portrays, while not allowing the other portion of the story to pull it down. The story and the characters are worth the effort. Not all operas are so well balanced.

Many modern operas are story-oriented, which is to say that they present a decidedly plot-formed opera, and the various characters have scant chance to develop their characters beyond a shallow sense. Other operas may be just the opposite, with developed characters but with no story to take those characters anywhere. Some operas have so much conversation that nothing happens. *Peter Grimes* by Benjamin Britten has wonderful characters that live and breathe in a fashion that would interest any singer. Like *Porgy and Bess*, stereotypes populate Britten's opera, giving wonderful color to Crabbe's tale. There are, however, several Britten operas in which the characters get lost in the message of the story, and people are left to wonder why they should care. *Albert Herring*, also Britten, has wonderful wit and charm, but it also has some musical jokes that totally misfire with audiences. The Handelian fugato at the end of the first scene is witty, but the musical humor is too sophisticated. That Albert is a momma's boy is very clear.

The other pressing problem for singers is the sheer difficulty incurred in learning a modern opera. A singer might be able to learn a Puccini or Verdi opera in a few weeks, but an opera by Henze, Adams, Adamo, Previn, or Britten will take much longer, involving considerable "woodshedding" to learn notes and rhythms. Even works that are tonal and seem straightforward may involve considerable effort to learn due to rhythmic intricacies.

It is one thing for a singer to sing some of the works "correctly" with music in their hands, and it is another thing to invest the character with feelings and attitudes, at the same time singing the whole opera correctly from memory. After all the effort to learn the work, they also must ask how many other productions will the singer be asked to do of that opera? The answer, unfortunately, is few.

Although the styles of Benjamin Britten, Aaron Copland, Dominick Argento, Douglas Moore, and Carlyle Floyd are all quite different one from the other, they present very similar difficulties in vocalism and musicality. Whether overtly British (in Britten) or clearly American (the others), these composers share a tonality-based style, with text setting quite natural for the regions represented by the stories. In all cases, certain regional accents may be appropriate and desired. This may be as important to these scores as Viennese slang dialect is for Baron Ochs in *Der Rosenkavalier* by Richard Strauss, or Louisiana black dialect in *Porgy and Bess*. Such accents, however, may elicit vocal responses that pull the voice out of line. It is also important that a coach not guess at what would be the correct accent for London or South Carolina. There are people who know, even if the coaches don't. In *Albert Herring*, a coach should remember the fact that "patriotic" and "patriotism" are pronounced with a short "a" in the first syllable, not a long one.

The vocal writing of these composers is frequently centered in the middle voice. The music is based on a more episodic, rhapsodic flow of music and not on forms. This means that arias do not unfold with ABA or AAB form as with earlier composers. Themes return and develop, but that does not mean that they are set in a formal way. Duets and whole scenes can unfold as dramatically driven, the music reinforcing the scene structure and not a musical format. If, as in Floyd's *Susannah*, Copland's *The Tender Land*, or Britten's *Peter Grimes*, a dance is used as a dramatic device, the folk element of that dance will dictate the music and possibly the vocal element accompanying

the dance, but the dramatic flow will not be dictated by traditional aria forms. The accompaniment of the orchestra is intent on supporting and coloring the storyline.

Rhythms are usually more obtuse than in the works of earlier composers (other than possibly Wagner and Strauss). The correct rhythmic performance of each line may be quite important. An ensemble such as "The promise of living" from *Tenderland*, or "Threnody" from *Albert Herring*, must be rehearsed many times to make it totally capture the hope or comedy or sadness of the form. Similarly, the earlier Handelian excess at the close of Scene 1 of *Herring* must be carefully rehearsed for tonal reasons and for rhythmic precision. Handelian style *must be clean, doncha know*, and excessively grand!

The conversational passages in these composers is usually varied. Some composers continue the line begun as far back as Donizetti, with continuous music underscoring the vocal lines, while other composers, again like Britten in *Albert Herring* and Stravinsky in *The Rake's Progress*, adopt a form of secco recitative to great effect.

The composers discussed above are considered conservative. But never underestimate the difficulty of making the music of those composers come alive. Barber's *Vanessa* is quite difficult to sing correctly and dramatically. The text, by Gian-Carlo Menotti, is purposefully obtuse and unclear, but that only adds to the gothic overtones of the piece. Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* has some scenes, such as the one in which Lennie murders Curly's Wife, that are simultaneously frightening, fascinating, pathetic, and very moving.

Gian-Carlo Menotti, of course, wrote not only the text for *Vanessa* but also composed quite a few operas himself. His style has been described as post-Puccini, though that is an oversimplification of the facts. In his best works – *The Telephone*, *The Medium*, *The Saint of Bleecker Street*, *Amelia al ballo*, *The Old Maid and the Thief*, and *Amahl and the Night Visitors* – he creates music and texts that resonate perfectly together and give singers a lot to work with. In his lesser works, notably those of later vintage, he seems to be working through stale territory. His dramatic impetus, once so keen and strong, faded as he approached the 1960s. *Help, Help the Globolinks* uses electronic music to represent invading aliens, who can only be controlled by Emily's violin – real music controls electronic music. Get it? The potency of those early operas listed, however, should be noted, and coaches will be dealing with arias and scenes from them for a long time. They are classics, just as are works by Verdi, and coaches must give them just as much care and understanding (and be just as strong with singers who sing incorrectly or with no care for the text) as they do to the "greater" masters.

If the list of composers already given could be said to be an extension of traditional writing, Hans Werner Henze is a jump to a more difficult style of vocal writing, foreshadowing what was to come in the 1990s and the twenty-first century. *Elegy for Young Lovers* is quite fabulous to see, the intensity of the drama taking hold of an audience and moving it quite beyond expectations. The difficulty of learning an opera like that, or *Der junge Lord* by the same composer, is extreme. The first issue is the range/tessitura of some of the roles, high notes liberally reaching the upper limits. There is a wide usage of vocal tricks (*Sprechstimme*, sotto voce, tonlos, etc.) and the lengthy silences become quite important. Most daunting is the harmonic language, nontonal in basis and reflective of the emotional state of the characters.

Scenes from these operas can come across dramatically and musically, which means that the singers must work very hard to assimilate the music and get inside the characters. The best modern operas have interesting characters, and composers should realize that playing such characters makes all the difficulties of learning the piece worthwhile. Those operas that are only story-driven are possibly a little too bland to arouse interest, whether they are modern or from the nineteenth century.

Let's take a moment to differentiate range from tessitura. I've done so before, but let's do it again. Few composers write beyond the accepted range of a given voice type, because they look them up in a book and stay within the parameters given. A recent opera given at the Metropolitan Opera, *Exterminating Angel*, took the lead soprano up to high A – above high C! Writing in that way limits future performances. A range is simply the scope of a role from highest note to lowest.

Tessitura deals with where within that range most of the notes lie. Rodolfo in *La Bohème* is given a top C and a low D (the one sounding below middle C on the piano). Faust has the same range as Rodolfo, but the tessitura in Faust is about a second higher. The tessitura for Hoffmann (Offenbach), though lacking the high C, is higher than either of these other two roles. Too many composers write either too low – afraid to tax the singer – or too high – not realizing that a singer can no more sustain a constantly high tessitura than can a trumpeter or hornist.

One of the first questions the singer has will concern the rhythm in modern opera, because such rhythms do not come easily, even though they are "natural." Notes and rhythms in modern scores reflect correct speech inflection to an extent not considered by the nineteenth-century composers. This "natural" way of singing sometimes requires more time to learn than the stanzas of earlier operas. Learning pitches and rhythms must come simultaneously with study of the dramatic projection, because they are so completely and intrinsically linked. One solution is to speak the words in rhythm and tempo. At this stage, it is best to take small sections at a time. After this task is mastered, the singer should add "melodic" contours. The most natural inflections should be sought with careful consideration of the dramatic thought behind each line or situation. Other influences, such as jazz rhythms, may also cause problems. Even "easier" modern composers such as Gian-Carlo Menotti will require effort on certain passages.

The second question will be: "How do I find that pitch?" Composers seem to forget: singers, unlike instruments, cannot necessarily pick pitches out of the air. Not all singers have perfect pitch, and even those who do find some pitches difficult to find, due in part to the sounds around them into which they must sing. The coach must point out the methods possible. Few composers leave a singer without some related pitch somewhere to find their notes. The passages quoted earlier from Wagner and Strauss showed that, even at their most chromatic, they still managed to give source pitches somewhere.

The coach needs to find ways for the singer to relate to the music. This may involve interval relationships to the music heard, or it may involve understanding mini-tonal centers. Even obtuse intervals may be found in this way. It is best not to try to learn the pitches by rote, because an aural stimulus can easily throw the singer off. At the premiere of *Bomarzo* by Ginastera, obscure pitches were reportedly found by having instrumentalists standing just offstage playing them for the singers. These were experienced singers, too! This isn't a recommended strategy.

Learning rhythms and pitches from recordings is equally false. It isn't that the people on the recording sing incorrect pitches (though some do!), but the listener hears the pitch or rhythm in some way different than it really is.

In the next chapter, I will follow through with the newer operas and newer trends. These are operas that are entering the standard repertoire and taking opera to new levels of excitement, dramatically and musically.

17

LOOKING TO THE NEW DEMANDS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Up to this point in history, opera has taken a straight path to the late twentieth century. Singers, depending on vocal endowments, could progress from the music of one era to that of another. Sopranos could sing Poppea, the Countess, Sieglinde, or Salome. Other voices could be equally versatile. The late bass Kurt Moll sang Seneca (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*), Bartolo (in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*), Rocco (in Beethoven's *Fidelio*), Osmin (*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*), Gurnemanz (*Parsifal*), and Baron Ochs (*Der Rosenkavalier*) – all with wonderful voice and character. In Hamburg, Moll also sang the king in an opera based on the story of *Puss in Boots* in the same year he sang Massenet's *Don Quichotte* (in German).

Voice teachers know that composers are writing more and more progressive operas, leaving the older kind of opera behind. Composers were also taking new steps, and they were not cautious ones either. Andrew Lloyd Webber threw down a gauntlet when he wrote *Jesus Christ Superstar – a rock opera!* One can argue how much "rock" is there, but in many ways, it is a convincing step away from, yet clinging to the principles of, opera. What is fresh there is more entertaining and dramatic than most of his other scores. As written, it is a difficult theater piece to pull off. Some of the vocal writing is ultimately treacherous as written. Yet the story is clear and does not stray far from the source.

Stephen Sondheim, a protégé of Oscar Hammerstein, has several musicals that border on full opera. *Sweeney Todd* is one that several opera companies have performed. It, too, retains the trappings of opera, including an opening chorus, arias, involved duets, and a climax that is chilling.

The vocalism in these two works may not be entirely pristine, but they satisfy the senses as opera. So does the lengthy *Les Misérables* by Boublil and Schönberg. The structure there, trying to capture the entire mammoth novel, moves quickly. I don't wish to sound snobby when I say I'd love to hear a performance of the work in a theater in the original French. The French language recording is so vital, and the French language is much more direct. "A la volonté du peuple" is so much stronger than "Do you hear the people sing?"

In a realm as sedately set as opera, there are many witty, even hysterically funny attempts at humorous situations. One of these, *Too Many Sopranos*, libretto by Miki Lynn and music by Edwin Penhorwood, and published by ECS Publishing, is quite witty. It contains a stellar sextet of women, which gives the singers wonderful opportunity to unfurl their diva banners. That they

are already dead and being forced to audition for Gabriel in heaven is a light premise that delivers sprightly music.

Tobermory (based on a tale by Saki and published by the composer) shows composer Jorge Martin in even better circumstances. It is part of a set of four operas, not all of them funny. The opera follows the Saki story quite closely. It is centered on a tea party where a scientist shows off his latest experiment; this might not, by description, seem funny or operatic, except that the scientist has taught a cat to speak … neglecting to teach him what not to say! By the time Tobermory (the cat) runs off to teach the rectory cat a lesson, the guests are plotting horrendously gruesome ways to kill Tobermory. (Yes, the line "there is more than one way to kill a cat" does appear.) The rectory cat beats them to it. "Poor Tobermory!" The vocal writing is witty, the accompaniment modern but also clever. The chance for singers to act in marvelously horrid fashion makes the opera fun.

A curious opera is *So oder So*, which I coached in Hamburg and for which I was pianist in the orchestra. It has moments of improvisation, some music totally written out, and some organized by story and section numbers which change according to the story. Diether de la Motte wrote this work and it is published by Bärenreiter. The framework, a new sort of invention, presents a basic story in Scene 1 – the husband kisses his wife goodbye, the wife and the maid entertain a lover and beggar, the husband returns to a beating. The four following scenes repeat the same story, but in different surroundings: a mental asylum, a nightclub, watching television, and finally "Neanderthal," which is set at a cave. It is both moving and clever, and it has some minor musical difficulties that are fun to figure out.

Other extremes exist in the works of "modern" composers. John Adams and Philip Glass are relatively tonal, but their usage of minimalism and difficult rhythms makes the learning time quite lengthy. Singers must be mathematicians to keep in mind the shifting repetitions. One soprano friend of mine, Amy Hansen, sang Pat Nixon in a production of Adams's *Nixon in China*, and she told me that the tessitura (but not the range) was difficult to sustain because it sat just high enough to be difficult to sing comfortably. Another singer friend, Todd Thomas, who has sung Verdi, Puccini, Prokofiev, and Wagner, said that understudying Nixon was one of the most difficult assignments he ever had. It was the difficulty of counting the constantly changing accompaniment. John Adams also wrote *I Was Looking at the Ceiling, and Suddenly I Saw the Sky.*

A composer friend indicated, however, that the use of minimalism in opera was introduced in order to take the narrative quality away from the orchestra. The orchestra backs the singers, but it focuses the story into the hands of the singers.

Philip Glass has written several operas in the minimalist style. Of these, *Satyagraha*, written in Sanskrit, is the most famous. He has also written a soundtrack for the movie *Dracula*, plus an opera based on the story *The Fall of the House of Usher.* Where Adams's kind of minimalism is difficult to count, the patterns used by Glass are repeated much more steadily. I have not had the opportunity to coach any Glass, so I don't know how intricate coaching his works would be. The repetitions indicated in the score to *Satyagraha* look quite difficult.

More traditional works have appeared late in the twentieth century and in the early twenty-first century that are somewhat more difficult fare. In a more traditional vein, the late André Previn's only performed opera was *A Streetcar Named Desire*, published by G. Schirmer – the only time Tennessee Williams had allowed a play of his to be turned into opera. Renée Fleming sang the premiere and it was quite successful at the time. The music is approachable modern, easy for an audience to understand, and it shows Blanche DuBois's fragile mental state nicely. Rodney Gilfrey was Stanley Kowalski, a career-making assignment. Blanche, particularly, has several arias that can be used for concerts or contests.

This points to another trend – taking movies and turning them into operas. *Exterminating Angel* at the Metropolitan Opera was such an opera. So is *A Wedding* by William Bolcom, libretto by Arnold Weinstein and Robert Altman (upon whose movie it is based) and available through Hal Leonard. Written in 2002–2004, it follows the movie plot scrupulously, which is difficult because the movie had many improvised scenes. The music is very American, and the story covers many vagaries of families at a wedding. The cast is large, as befits a wedding. The music is difficult to play, but it is not impossible to learn.

Henry Mollicone (not Ennico Morricone, a movie composer) is quite famous for an early opera, *The Face on the Barroom Floor.* Its melancholy and dramatic surprises make it a short but effective theater piece. (The real-life barroom with its floor still exists.) Mollicone's full-length opera *Coyote Tales* is based on Indian legends. Coyote is a kind of Loki character – deceitful but not unlovable. The role, written for lyric tenor, has several solo scenes that are beautiful to program in concerts or auditions. The opera is filled with whimsy and with big and small scenes. The baritone, Pavayoykyasi, has a very good audition aria (except that it's somewhat difficult to play at sight), as does the soprano who plays The Maiden. Even the ducks have good singing opportunities. (The gliding of the ducks through the water was accomplished by wheeled desk chairs without backs, behind a "wall" of water.) The orchestral material is brilliant and reasonably written. The libretto is by Sheldon Harnick, who also authored *Fiddler on the Roof* and Richard Rodgers's last musical, *Rex*. According to the bio in the score, he has also made translations of *Carmen*, *The Merry Widow*, *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (Ravel), *Tenderloin*, *She Loves Me*, *The Apple Tree*, and many more.

An opera that has had several productions and which is either loved or not is *Little Women* by Mark Adorno, published by G. Schirmer. The cast has a rare advantage in that it has six important roles for women: Jo (lower mezzo-soprano), Meg (mezzo-soprano), Beth (soprano), Amy (coloratura soprano), Alma March (mezzo-soprano), and Cecilia March (contralto). The story follows the novel, beginning at the end, then "rewinding" to the beginning. The role of Laurie (Theodore Lawrence) is for a lyric tenor, John Brooke is a lyric baritone, and Friedrich Bhaer is bass-baritone (or optional mezzo-soprano!). The writing is lyric and quite effective. The presence of so many women allows for multiple ensembles of women and the joys and tragedies are all handled well. It isn't easy to play for rehearsals or coachings.

There are two other stories for operas taken from movies. *Dead Man Walking*, published by Bent Pen Music, Inc., is about a prisoner who committed murder but who is befriended by a nun, Sister Helen, is not only moving, but it has also gained an early firm foothold in the repertoire. It was written by Jake Heggie (noted for some truly beautiful modern songs), with a libretto by Terrence McNally. The role of Sister Helen has many lengthy solo opportunities. The "accompaniment" is what I should call an all-inclusive reduction: difficult chords and rhythms are placed in two, three, or four staves. The vocal lines look reasonable to sing, but the accompaniment requires a very good pianist.

Another movie-based "hit" is *Brokeback Mountain*. The popularity of the opera rests on the storyline, which made for a great movie. The score is not always easy to read, and sung pitches are difficult to find. But the final eulogy by Ennis for Jack (while holding the shirt Ennis had given him) is strong enough to bring tears. It is the most lyrical piece Ennis's character sings in the entire opera: he is finally able to say what his feelings for Jack were.

When preparing this chapter, I was recommended to look at two different and difficult operas. The first of these, George Benjamin's *Written on Skin*, with text by Martin Crimp, is published by Faber Music. The story is set at the beginning of books – books with illuminations (pictures) in them. The story is mythical and somewhat hard to follow. But the Boy was played by Bejun Mehta

and Agnes, the wife of the protector, was played by Barbara Hannigan. The orchestral accompaniment is quite intricate and requires a very good pianist to play at rehearsals.

The other opera must be included because it is not written in traditional writing: it is written in graphic notation. As a coach, I find this quite difficult to read, which means I don't know how to coach it. The opera is by Christopher Preissing and is called *Thunder, Perfect Mind*, and is published by the composer. Don't look on YouTube because, although the title is there, the opera isn't. Based on gnostic texts and Hammadi writings, the story is of Sophia, who descends to earth to go through the realms of the earth as Eve. The story narrative is difficult to get from the score, because the score is not laid out in standard notation or, in some places, even clear graphic notation. Still, it is a new trend, and coaches must be ready for the next newest trend.

Three operas I wish I could include here, but I have not seen their scores, are operas that premiered in 2011, 2017, and 2018. The Cincinnati Opera premiered *Fellow Travelers* (2017) music by Gregory Spears, libretto by Greg Pierce. It was about a point in history when Senator Joseph McCarthy was running the hunt for Un-American Activities. Hawkins Fuller was a maneuverer in Washington, and his sexual advances toward Timothy Laughlin were finally Fuller's undoing. The opera is lyric and easy to appreciate, but the dramatic aspect of the score seems cautious, as does the music. I reserve judgment until I can see the score.

The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs (2018) composed by Mason Bates, with libretto by Mark Campbell, is about the creator of Apple, Inc. Steve Jobs rises to power, with flashbacks to aid our understanding, and then, after the intermission, collapses through ego and bullying actions. The vocal writing is quite good. Jobs has an impressive monologue/aria at the end of act one that, when the score is available, should make great audition material. Laurene Powell Jobs has a duet with Steve Jobs in Act 2 that is also well written.

The earlier opera, *Silent Night* (2011) premiered at the Minnesota Opera, also has had a firm start. During World War I, a famous incident occurred when, during a Christmas Eve truce, soldiers heard Christmas music from the opposing camp and, for one night, allowed humanity to rule. Mark Campbell wrote the libretto and Kevin Puts wrote the music. It is sung in German, English, French, Italian, and Latin. The publisher is not listed online.

Briefly mentioned in the array of operas was an opera about *Puss in Boots.* I don't mention the composer because it hasn't been picked up since the premiere. One of the problems modern operas have was found in that opera. It had a widely varied accompaniment, but, during the performance, the tempo of the opera, the feel of the opera remained *andante moderato.* Nothing went rapidly for long, and nothing was truly intense and slow. Great intensity may come from the story or not, but the generally middle tempo pace is deadly.

Another problem in modern operas is that attempts at humor land in a silly fashion – like the comedian who laughs at his own jokes more than the audience – or else they aren't funny at all. This also occurred in *Puss in Boots.* A "funny" scene of a man portraying a puppeteer who had Adolph printed on his back fell stolidly on the audience.

From this varied list, the coach clearly must find a way to help the singer hear the pitches in the orchestral underpinning, getting them to understand the harmonic structure over or in which they are singing. Even understanding that the piano score is a reduction of the orchestral texture, the reductions are frequently very tough to play, giving new meaning to the famous "too many notes."

Combining the approaches in this way, the notes come slowly but surely, and the rhythms become firmly entrenched because they are related to the totality. One might call this going beyond the obvious. The task of singing notes and rhythms, so difficult in and of itself, now becomes only

the first step toward the ultimate goal: a complete realization of the character through all of the symbols left by the composer.

The coach, conductor, and the director may have to explain the dramatic structure of the opera or character – in post-Freudian works that means that the operas lean heavily on the psychological element. The composer may need to help in the explanation, too. For the newest works, they are usually there. Gone are the poses some great characters seemed to take, replaced by the intuitive and probing sense of the character. It also points to structures in which traditional narrative approaches are forsaken.

Coaches must, therefore, understand modern drama almost as much as modern opera. The coach who is content to work on dynamics and other strictly musical things is not fulfilling the needs of the singer. The new stage craft in theaters allows more and more cinematic approaches to telling the stories.

This also means that the coach must learn to play the piano reductions as best he or she can. There are many problems with this, some of which are outlined above. It sometimes involves highlighting important lines that must be played, leaving out lesser figures. It may involve rewriting a reduction. (Some orchestral parts are so complex and dense that they impede the projection of the voices.)

Sometimes conflicting rhythms may interfere with each other to such an extent that one brain and pair of hands can't reproduce it all. Pray that the singers and the coach are not working from a hand-written manuscript. While some are imminently readable, others need intricate deciphering. The orchestral score of *Tender Land*, when I conducted it, had some mistakes in it, some of them corrected by an addition taped to the top or the bottom of the page. Modern computers are helping alleviate this problem. What is clear to a composer may be obtuse to a coach or conductor. Scores I once worked through with a composer are vague to me now – meaning that I no longer am sure how certain passages should go.

The scores I mentioned that included aleatoric (improvisatory) elements create yet another problem. It is one thing to improvise with two or three people, but when that number reaches twenty or so, you must still find a way to keep together (though "together" takes on slightly different meaning in this context). A coach or singer may be tempted to laugh at some of the "silly" tricks composers request, but, since the performance still looms, it serves no one's goal. After all, Verdi wrote the following over a line of Falstaff: *un fil di voce.* That means "with one strand of voice." Try it out – it's not easy, but it's very effective.

Mainstream singers, those not trained in these modern works, are looking more and more to new challenges. Some of these are "other" operas by the masters. But some are willing to take the plunge into the murky and unsure waters of the twenty-first century. Singers will always find works rewarding if the works create good characters and music that has interest and color. These are what make learning new music viable and interesting. These are the goals. The coach who can help a singer hurdle over vocal or dramatic demands of new roles becomes a valued companion on the journey to opening night. Singers can't learn many of these modern operas from recordings because they don't exist yet. I'm proud to say that the baritones who first sang leads in *Brokeback Mountain, The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs, Exterminating Angel,* and *Fellow Passengers* all coached with me early in their vocal education. As did two mezzo-sopranos in the recent *Marnie* at the Metropolitan Opera. The conductor of *Steve Jobs,* and *Silent Night,* Michael Christie, also started at Oberlin, conducting *Albert Herring* in rehearsals, while I played piano.

For these hurdles, a coach must find the best path beyond the difficulties. They must decide (with the singers!) the best way to cut through the hard rhythms, "impossible" pitches, and dramatic

hurdles. When such a method is mapped out once, the next and the next will come more quickly, with what was difficult becoming gradually easier.

As with the florid singing found in bel canto operas, learning the music carefully and correctly first negates a lot of problems that arise when such care is not taken. Passages like the one found in the middle of Albert's great act 2 monologue of *Albert Herring* – "Dish after dish they brought us …" – must be exactly in tempo, inflected "naturally" and made to fly from the mind and lips of the singer.

Some singers, quite talented in more traditional fare, find these modern operas beyond their abilities, partially because they don't like modern music. Singers and coaches can't always be that choosy.

A scene like the opening scene from Berg's *Wozzeck* is quite difficult for the Captain. His angular vocal line is all over the vocal range, verbally pointed and filled with tricky rhythms. Yet, when done properly, the effect is positively maniacal. His vocal line alone solves most of the problems of characterization.

But Berg and Britten are hardly modern composers. The most modern composers are sometimes easier by the measure, but the accumulative difficulties of changing rhythms or repeated rhythms (in minimalism) are tricky to learn and disconcertingly awkward to "feel." Modern singers must develop the memory and musical chops for these new scores. Haphazard learning of such music leads to major headaches in rehearsals. Since it doesn't seem that modern composers will ever return to a simpler style of writing, and I'm not suggesting that they do so, it is incumbent on the singers to improve their abilities. Operas like *Little Women* or John Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles* (not discussed here for lack of space) are so rewarding that singers can benefit from developing such learning "chops": and gain really wonderful characters in their repertoire.

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ENSEMBLES LARGE AND SMALL

This brief chapter was not in the original edition. Elsewhere I discussed the quintet from *Carmen,* but there are many ensembles that, unless care is taken, will not fall together well. One of the most infamous is Richard Wagner's fugue and stage fight near the end of act two of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg.* It is difficult standing still, but a street fight is also raging. It emerges from the serenade of Beckmesser – a notoriously difficult challenge for conductors. Once a steady tempo is settled into during the last verse of his serenade, the fugue emerges as people rise against Beckmesser's caterwauling in the street. Such an ensemble demands attention to counterpoint, probably rehearsing various fugal voices separately, then putting them together. Note: much Wagner is filled with true counterpoint, and the music loses definition when a conductor allows the wash of sound to overtake the contrapuntal and rhythmic underpinnings.

Another notorious ensemble is the auto-da-fé scene in Verdi's *Don Carlos.* Whether in French or Italian, the ensemble is difficult due to constantly shifting tempos. King Phillip plunges ahead in tempo, angry with Don Carlos for interrupting the burning of the heretics (and political prisoners.) Against the King are Don Carlos, Elizabeth, Eboli, Rodrigo, and the Brabantians pleading in a slower tempo for mercy. It is one of those situations where a conductor needs to have clear idea what the musical course is. A coach will probably have to have a soloist rehearsal without chorus, and then spearhead a rehearsal with everyone in attendance.

One of the conducting nightmares is, surprisingly, from one of the most famous operas in the repertoire: *La Bohème.* Act two of that opera has many shifts of tempo, but nothing gets worse than from the beginning of Musetta's Waltz to the end of the act – or at least until the backstage march is established. The solo part of Musetta's Waltz slows down as early as the fourth measure. Musetta stretches the tempo so that she can prove more alluring to Marcello. This happens phrase after phrase. Then, when the aria per se is finished, there are massive ritardandi that stretch other phrases, immediately plunging ahead once again into tempo. Some conductors solve the problem by minimizing the ensemble tempo change, but it really is necessary to make it overt and not too subtle. Make the technique succeed over the conception rather than change the conception just to make it easier.

Verdi's *La traviata* has an equally difficult ensemble, the tempo being part of the problem. In the third scene of the opera, after Alfredo has thrown money at Violetta, paying her for her perceived pleasures, the explosive ensemble that climaxes with the repeated "Va, va, va, va," comes to a

stunning halt. Germont has entered. As he berates his son's crass actions, he is given some freedom, as is Alfredo in his stuttered rebuttal. But when Violetta calls out to Alfredo, the tempo settles into a much steadier tempo. Then what's the difficulty? The music is just too slow to do with a single beat per dotted quarter note, and too fast to do beating each eighth. The solution is to beat the dotted quarters, keeping an inexorable tempo. Only in the moments of the ground-swell (where the volume rises for climactic moments) and brief ritardando does the conductor lapse into beating the eighth notes. It will feel dangerously slow, but taking a brighter tempo takes away from the pathos.

In that ensemble, Alfredo's short solo interjections have a traditional expansion for high notes. This does not make preparation easier, but at least it is between the singers and a few orchestral musicians. A conductor can follow Alfredo, but the entire company must follow the conductor otherwise, or real trouble can occur.

In more modern opera, the finale to act one of Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* is a fabulous layering of singers. The number begins with Peter Quint calling to Miles, who answers eventually. Then the Governess, Miss Jessell, Mrs. Gross and Flora join in. A very steady tempo must be retained then, or the disparate strands will not match up. A very curious and surprising moment occurs at the climax, where the "Screw" theme comes in *softly!* The orchestra drops way back. It is as if a cloudy sky was suddenly wiped free of clouds by a breeze. The layered voices become luminescent for a moment, and then the rush as the Governess takes the children and Mrs. Gross back inside.

In any ensemble rehearsals, steady attention to rhythm and dynamics must rule. Oh, yes, we want good diction, but that is part of the rhythm, isn't it? You can't just hope things hang together. Nor can you allow individuals to set their own tempos.

Two more ensembles as demonstration. *Falstaff* act one, scene two. The women are discussing the letters Falstaff has sent, and they have a quartet in 6/8 that dances along in their merriment. Then the men charge in, their 4/4 measures equaling the 6/8 in length. But they aren't together. They are arguing, and Verdi seems to challenge the singers to make both arguments/ensembles understandable. In a good performance, it is *almost* possible. That ensemble begins with solo rehearsals, then the four women, then the five men, and finally *tutti*. If singers try to out-sing their neighbors, trouble will brew. I should point out that this is only the **first** difficult ensemble in *Falstaff*.

And finally, the second-act finale of *Le nozze di Figaro*. After the scurried duet where Cherubino jumps from the window, the finale begins with a trio, then the impudent moment when Susanna emerges from the *gabinetto* instead of Cherubino. The Count enters the closet, and the tempo picks up again – this time a duet, then a trio. Figaro bounds into the room – now we have a hurried quartet, with solo lines everywhere. Antonio's drunken entrance changes the ensemble again, but nothing like the explosive entrance of Marcellina, Basilio and Bartolo. (Don't take the entrance too fast, or the soloists don't stand a chance of getting their lines out.) Finally, Susanna, the Countess, and Figaro are up against the Count, Basilio, Bartolo and Marcellina. Such an ensemble works very well dramatically, but the complete togetherness of the ensembles can either sparkle or not.

Understand that large ensembles are difficult, but the numbers involved don't mean that smaller trios or duets can't be just as hazardous. The concluding trio of *Faust* will, by the way it is written, become an "I can singer higher than you can" ensemble. Sopranos feel like they are lunging at the high notes. So does Faust. With both on the highest notes, Mephistopheles hopes he's heard. But sung with a lyric cast, the idea being a desperate prayer for Marguerite, the urgency but not heroic stance for Faust, and then the hurried and furtive "come on" of the devil, the fervent clarity of the piece can be achieved without total burnout of the singers.

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CONCLUSIONS

Based on the amount of information considered in the preceding pages, the idea of becoming an opera coach might seem an insurmountable hurdle. Opera is so vast an area (ranging from 1600 to the present) that the idea of encompassing all these genres is daunting in the extreme. Certainly, no book can hope to encompass all the considerations necessary for any style or practice. But the repertoire, while still expanding and changing, is slimmer than that. It embraces only about fifty to seventy-five operas, with the others existing in the fringes through arias and ensembles. Understanding the core repertoire gives a coach ample clues on how to handle the similar operas and even the new ones. Undoubtedly there will be new operas premiered between the time I write this book and it comes to print.

A coach would be wise, for example, to learn the closing aria from *Capriccio* by Richard Strauss, but the chances of coaching that opera complete outside of Germany are few. One might expect to find *Salome*, *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, and *Ariadne auf Naxos* on an opera company's plan. Even *Arabella* has gained modest popularity only in the last decade or two.

The important thing is for a coach to gain the understanding of how to put together an opera, how to coach it, and how to make a singer live in a role. For this reason, some of the most modern operas present major hurdles that are hard to surpass without the composer there to explain and essentially coach. It is always possible to learn a new opera. In fact, most opera coaches will say that they have strange blanks in their repertoire of operas that have just never come their way. For example, unless a coach is working for a major opera house, he or she will not likely coach complete works of Wagner or the grander operas of Verdi. Still they must understand the style, because scenes and arias will most certainly appear from those works. Working in the larger houses will involve those masters.

The study of piano leads generally to one repertoire. The wider study of chamber music or accompanying give the pianist the awareness of a broad range of music and techniques never encountered in solo music. Opera expands that realm even further.

If knowledge of languages is an added plus in other music, it is a necessity in the study of operatic works. If sensitivity to phrasing and dynamics is important in solo works and chamber music, they grow exponentially in importance when confronted by the demands and scope of opera. There are works like Brahm's *Liebeslieder Waltzes* (vocal quartet and piano duet) that pianists are asked to play on occasion, and the rehearsals for those will be, basically, coaching sessions, in

which words and phrasing, balances, and tempos are all worked out together, quite like working out ensembles in operas. No two coaches are exactly alike in these endeavors either. Each coach develops his or her methods and techniques, building up an idea of how best to approach each problem that comes along.

The opera coach can approach these things and learn. It is not a wild plethora of unrelated facts but is, instead, an interconnected chain that has grown and spread from the single first opera in 1600 to encompass various reactions to the single word: "opera" (plural for "opus," which means work).

The job of a coach must include analysis of what makes a piece of music difficult – dramatically, musically, technically, or even physically. They must even study what makes an opera work (or not) in the theater. A coach who approaches this field with an inquisitive mind and enthusiasm will find it is a field with many rewards and, yes, with many difficulties. But the difficulties are all worth the effort in the final analysis, and those rewards will make all the efforts seem trivial.

Besides, the best coaches make the best solo performers, too, much as the best symphonic conductors historically have been opera conductors – and vice versa.

APPENDIX A
A LIST OF VOCAL FACHS AND THEIR ROLES

The following list is extensive but not exhaustive. This is simply a list as prescribed by the German opera houses and there are sure to be some omissions. Some roles might also fit into more than one category, or might be cast in different ways in different productions. Some roles have changed their casting since this list was written out for me, and some have changed in our perceptions of them in the last twenty years or so. It is a guide with real merit, but it is not infallible, and some people will disagree with it. I have included some roles not generally performed in Germany in the interest of being as complete as possible. Those listed without arias have much to sing, but no excerpts.

Coloratura Soprano

Ariadne auf Naxos--------------------R. Strauss--------- Zerbinetta----------"Groß mächtige Prinzessin"
Un ballo in maschera-----------------Verdi-------------- Oscar------------------------------------two arias
Il barbiere di Siviglia-----------------Rossini----------- Rosina----------------"Una voce poca fa" (also considered a coloratura mezzo role)
La Bohème---------------------------Puccini----------- Musetta--------------------"Quando m'en vo"
Les Contes d'Hoffmann---------------Offenbach-------- Olympia--------------------------"Les oiseau"
Die Entführung aus dem Serail-------Mozart------------ Constanza---------------------------three arias
Faust-------------------------------Gounod--------- Marguerite-----"Roi de Thule"/"Air des Bijoux"
Lakmé-------------------------------Delibes---------- Lakmé--------------------------------"Bell Song"
Lucia di Lammermoor----------------Donizetti--------- Lucia---------"Regnava nel silenzio"/Mad Scene
Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor ------Nicolai----------- Frau Fluth----------------------"Nun eilt herbei"
Manon-----------------------------Massenet---------- Manon--------------------------------three arias
Pagliacci-----------------------------Leoncavallo------- Nedda--------------------------"Stridono lassu"
I puritani----------------------------Bellini----------- Elvira--------------------------------"Qui la voce"
Rigoletto----------------------------Verdi-------------- Gilda--------------------------------"Caro nome"
Roméo et Juliette--------------------Gounod----------- Juliette-----------------------------Juliette's Waltz
La traviata--------------------------Verdi-------------- Violetta------"Ah, fors'e lui"/"Sempre libera" + "Addio del passato" (also cast as a lyric soprano)
Die Zauberflöte--------------------Mozart-------------- Königin------"O zittre nicht"/"Der hölle Rache"

Soubrette

Opera	Composer	Role / Aria
Arabella	R. Strauss	Zdenka—no aria (could be a lyric or even coloratura soprano)
Così fan tutte	Mozart	Despina—"In uomini"/"Una donna"
Don Giovanni	Mozart	Zerlina—"Batti, batti"/"Vedrai carino"
Don Pasquale	Donizetti	Norina—"So anch'io la virtù magica"
L'elisir d'amore	Donizetti	Adina—"Prendi"
Die Entführung aus dem Serail	Mozart	Blonde—two arias
Fidelio	Beethoven	Marzellina—"O wär ich schön mit dir vereint"
La fille du régiment	Donizetti	Marie—three arias
Die Fledermaus	J. Strauss	Adele—"Mein Herr, Marquis"
Der Freischütz	Weber	Ännchen—"Kommt ein schlanker Bursch gegangen"
Gianni Schicchi	Puccini	Lauretta—"O mio babbino caro"
Hänsel und Gretel	Humperdinck	Gretel—"Awakening Aria"
Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor	Nicolai	Anna—one aria
Le nozze di Figaro	Mozart	Susanna—two arias
Der Rosenkavalier	R. Strauss	Sophie—Act 2 duet/Act 3 trio
Werther	Massenet	Sophie—two arias

Lyric Soprano

Opera	Composer	Role / Aria
Arabella	R. Strauss	Arabella—"Schluß"
The Bartered Bride	Smetana	Mafenka (Marie)—two arias
La Bohème	Puccini	Mimi—"Mi chiamano Mimi"/"Donde lieta usci"
Carmen	Bizet	Micaela—"Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante"
Così fan tutte	Mozart	Fiordiligi—"Come scoglio"/"Per pieta"
Don Giovanni	Mozart	Donna Elvira—three arias
Elektra	R. Strauss	Chrysothemis—no real arias
Die Fledermaus	J. Strauss	Rosalinde—Czardas
Der Freischütz	Weber	Agathe—"Leise, leise"/"Und ob die Wolke"
Guillaume Tell	Rossini	Mathilde—"Sombre forêt" ("Selva opaca")
Idomeneo	Mozart	Ilia—three arias
Manon Lescaut	Puccini	Manon—"In quelle trini morbide"/"Sola, perduta"
Le nozze di Figaro	Mozart	Countess—"Porgi amor"/"Dove sono"
Otello	Verdi	Desdemona—"Salce, salce"/"Ave Maria"
Susannah	Floyd	Susannah—"Ain't it a pretty night"/"The trees on the mountains"
Turandot	Puccini	Liù—"Signore, ascolta"/"Tu, che di gel sei cinta"
Vanessa	Barber	Vanessa—"Do not utter a word, Anatol"
Der Wildschütz	Lortzing	Baronin—one aria
Yevgeny (Eugene) Onegin	Tchaikovsky	Tatiana—Letter Scene
Die Zauberflöte	Mozart	Pamina—"Ach, ich fühl's"

Dramatic and Hoch-Dramatic Soprano

Aida------------------------------Verdi----------- Aida----------“Ritorna vincitor”/“O Patria mia”
Andrea Chénier--------------------Giordano-------- Maddalena------------------“La Mamma morta”
Antony and Cleopatra -------------Barber------------ Cleopatra-------------------------------- two arias
Ariadne auf Naxos ----------------R. Strauss -------- Ariadne-----------------------“Es gibt ein Reich”
Un ballo in maschera---------------Verdi ------------- Amelia----------------------------------- two arias
Don Carlos -----------------------Verdi ------------- Elizabeth -------------------------------- two arias
Don Giovanni---------------------Mozart----------- Donna Anna --“Or sai chi l’onore”/
“Non mi dir” (Also considered a lyric or dramatic-coloratura)
Elektra---------------------------R. Strauss---------- Elektra-----------------------------“Agamemnon”
Fidelio ---------------------------Beethoven -------- Leonore -------------------------“Abscheulicher”
Der fliegende Holländer------------Wagner------------ Senta-------------------------------------one aria
La forza del destino---------------Verdi--------------- Leonora---------------------------------two arias
Lohengrin------------------------Wagner------------ Elsa--------------------------------“Elsa’s Traum”
Madama Butterfly-----------------Puccini------------ Butterfly-------“Un bel di vedremo”/“Tu, tu, tu, piccolo addio” (can also be placed in the lyric soprano category)
Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg -----Wagner----------- Eva--------------------------“Sachs, mein Freund”
Norma----------------------------Bellini------------ Norma--------------------------------“Casta diva”
(This role is particularly difficult to place in any Fach)
Ring cycle-------------------------Wagner
Die Walküre -------------------------------------- Sieglinde--- “Die Männer Sippe”/“Du bist der Lenz”
Die Walküre--------------------------------------- Brünnhilde----------------------------“Hojotoho”
Siegfried --- Brünnhilde -----------------------“Ewig war ich”
Götterdämmerung ---------------------------------- Brünnhilde -------------------Immolation Scene
Der Rosenkavalier -----------------R. Strauss -------- Marschallin ----------------------------- two arias
Rusalka---------------------------Dvořak----------- Rusalka------------------------------“Moon Aria”
Salome----------------------------R. Strauss -------- Salome-------------------------------- Final Scene
Tannhäuser------------------------Wagner----------- Elizabeth-------------“Dich teure Halle”/“Gebet”
Tosca -----------------------------Puccini ---------- Tosca --------------------------------“Vissi d’arte”
Tristan und Isolde-----------------Wagner------------ Isolde---------Narration and Curse/“Liebestod”
Il trovatore------------------------Verdi -------------- Leonora --------------------------------- two arias
Turandot--------------------------Puccini----------- Turandot-----------------------“In questa reggia”

Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano and Alto

Aida------------------------------Verdi-------------Amneris---------------------------Judgment Scene
Ariadne auf Naxos------------------R. Strauss-------- Componist-----------------“Sein wird wieder gut”
Un ballo in maschera----------------Verdi------------- Ulrica---------------------------Incantation Scene
Carmen---------------------------Bizet--------------Carmen-------Habanera, Seguidilla, and Card Scene
Cavalleria rusticana-----------------Mascagni--------- Santuzza-----------------“Voi lo sapete, o Mamma”
(Though listed for and often sung by sopranos, this role is frequently taken by mezzos.)
Don Carlos------------------------Verdi------------- Eboli------------------“Veil Aria”/“O Don Fatale”
Khovanshchina--------------------Mussorgsky ------- Marfa--------------------------------“Night Song”
Lohengrin ------------------------Wagner----------- Ortrud-------------------------------------- Curse
Macbeth---------------------------Verdi------------- Lady Macbeth--------------------------three arias
(Though listed for and often sung by sopranos, this role is frequently taken by mezzos.)
Orfeo ed Euridice------------------Gluck------------- Orfeo-------------------“Che farò, senza Euridice”
Orleanskaya deva-----------------Tchaikovsky ------- Joan---------------------------------“Adieu Forêt”
(This opera also goes by the titles *Maid of Orleans* and *Joan of Arc.)*

Parsifal ---------------------------Wagner----------- Kundry ----------------------- "Ich sah das Kind"
(Though listed for and often sung by sopranos, this role is frequently taken by mezzos.)
Ring cycle ------------------------Wagner
Das Rheingold--------------------------------------Erda --------------------- "Weiche, Wotan, Weiche"
Die Walküre ------------------------------------- Fricka---------------------------Scene with Wotan
Götterdämmerung--------------------------------- Waltraute---------------------------------Narrative
Der Rosenkavalier-----------------R. Strauss---------- Octavian--------------Beginning Act 1/Rose Duet
Rusalka----------------------------Dvorák----------- Jezibaba--------------------------------------no aria
Samson et Dalila------------------Saint-Saëns -------Dalila-----------------------------------three arias
Tristan und Isolde-----------------Wagner------------ Brangäne ------------------------ Brangäne's Watch
Il trovatore------------------------Verdi ------------- Azucena --------------------------------- two arias
Werther-----------------------------Massenet------- Charlotte--------"Letter Aria"/"Va, laisse couler mes larmes"

Lyric Mezzo-Soprano

Il barbiere di Siviglia--------------Rossini------------- Rosina-----------------------"Una voce poco fa"
Boris Godunov-------------------Mussorgsky -------- Marina--------------------Aria/Duet with Dmitri
La Cenerentola-------------------Rossini------------- Angelina (Cenerentola)-----------"Non più mesta"
La clemenza di Tito---------------Mozart------------- Sesto--------------------------------"Parto, parto"
Così fan tutte---------------------Mozart-------------Dorabella---------------------------------two arias
Die Fledermaus-------------------J. Strauss------------Orlovsky--------------------"Chacun à son goùt"
Giulio Cesare--------------------Handel--------------Cesare--------------------------------various arias
L'italiana in Algeri----------------Rossini-------------Isabella----------------------------------two arias
Le nozze di Figaro----------------Mozart-------------Cherubino---------"Non so più"/"Voi che sapete"
Vanessa-------------------------Barber--------------Erica-------------"Must the winter come so soon?"

Countertenor

El Niño---------------------------John Adams ------ three roles--------------------several ensembles
Giulio Cesare----------------------Handel----------- Tolomeo-----------------------------several arias
Orfeo ed Euridice-------------------Gluck------------ Orfeo-----------------"Che farò, senza Euridice"
A Midsummer Night's Dream -------Britten----------- Oberon-----------------------"I know a bank"

(Numerous roles in Handel, Scarlatti, Vivaldi, and other baroque operas. Recently, composers have begun writing for this category, as in *El Niño*. Steven Rickards, a member of the original cast of *El Niño*, has published an exhaustive catalog of works written since 1900 for countertenor.)

Lyric Tenor (Including Leggiero)

Il barbiere di Siviglia---------------Rossini-------------Almaviva-------------------------"Ecco ridente"
La Bohème----------------------Puccini-------------Rodolfo---------------------"Che gelida manina"
La Cenerentola-------------------Rossini------------- Ramiro--------------------"Principe più non sei"
Così fan tutte---------------------Mozart------------- Ferrando-------------------------------three arias
Don Giovanni--------------------Mozart-------------Don Ottavio------------------------------two arias
Don Pasquale--------------------Donizetti---------- Ernesto----------"Povero Ernesto"/ "Come gentil"
L'elisir d'amore-------------------Donizetti----------- Nemorino---------------------"Quanto è bella"/ "Una furtiva lagrima"
Die Entführung aus dem Serail-----Mozart------------- Belmonte---------------------------------four arias
Falstaff--------------------------Verdi---------------Fenton--------------------------Opening of Act 3

L'italiana in Algeri	Rossini	Lindoro	two arias
Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor	Nicolai	Fenton	"Horch, die Lerche"
I puritani	Bellini	Arturo	two arias
Rigoletto	Verdi	Duca	"Questa o quella"/ "Parmi veder"/ "La donna è mobile"
Der Rosenkavalier	R. Strauss	Italian Tenor	"Di rigori armato"
La traviata	Verdi	Alfredo	"De miei bolenti spiriti"
Die Zauberflöte	Mozart	Tamino	"Dies Bildnis"/ "Flute Aria"

Spinto Tenor

The Bartered Bride	Smetana	Jeník (Hans)	one aria
Carmen	Bizet	Don José	"La fleur que tu m'avais jetée"
Les Contes d'Hoffmann	Offenbach	Hoffmann	four arias
Faust	Gounod	Faust	"Salut demeure"
Guillaume Tell	Rossini	Arnold(o)	"Asil héréditaire" ("O muto asil")
Lucia di Lammermoor	Donizetti	Edgardo	"Fra poco a me ricovero"
Madama Butterfly	Puccini	Pinkerton	three arias
Manon	Massenet	Des Grieux	"Le Rève"/ "Ah, fuyez douce image"
Tosca	Puccini	Cavaradossi	two arias
Yevgeny (Eugene) Onegin	Tchaikovsky	Lenski	"Kuda, kuda"

Buffo Tenor (Spiel Tenor)

Ariadne auf Naxos	R. Strauss	Tanzmeister/Brighella	one aria
The Bartered Bride	Smetana	Vasek (Wenzel)	two arias
Les Contes d'Hoffmann	Offenbach	Franz (Four Grotesques)	one aria
Les Contes d'Hoffmann	Offenbach	Pedrillo	"Serenade"/ "Frisch zum Kampfe"
Die Entführung aus dem Serail	Mozart	Die Hexe	one aria
Hänsel und Gretel	Humperdinck	David	(Act 1) "Mein Herr, der Singer"
Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg	Wagner	Basilio	"In quegli'anni in cui val poco"
Le nozze di Figaro	Mozart		
Yevgeny (Eugene) Onegin	Tchaikovsky	Triquet	"Ah, cette fête conviez"
Die Zauberflöte	Mozart	Monostatos	one aria

Dramatic Tenor and Helden Tenor

Aida	Verdi	Radames	"Celeste Aida"
Andrea Chénier	Giordano	Andrea Chénier	three arias
Un ballo in maschera	Verdi	Riccardo (Gustavo)	two arias
Boris Godunov	Mussorgsky	Dmitri	Garden Aria
Cavalleria rusticana	Mascagni	Turiddu	two arias
Don Carlos	Verdi	Don Carlos	(one aria, but two versions)
Fidelio	Beethoven	Florestan	"Gott, welch Dunkel hier"
Der fliegende Holländer	Wagner	Erik	one aria
Der Freischütz	Weber	Max	"Durch die Wälder"
Lohengrin	Wagner	Lohengrin	two arias
Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg	Wagner	Walther	three arias
Otello	Verdi	Otello	three arias
Pagliacci	Leoncavallo	Canio	three arias

Opera	Composer	Role	Aria
Parsifal	Wagner	Parsifal	"Amfortas"
Ring cycle	Wagner		
Das Rheingold		Loge	Narrative
Die Walküre		Siegmund	"Ein Schwert"/ "Winterstürme"
Siegfried		Siegfried	Forging Song
Götterdämmerung		Siegfried	one aria
Tannhäuser	Wagner	Tannhäuser	Rome Narrative
Il trovatore	Verdi	Manrico	"Ah si, ben mio"/ " Di quella pira"
Turandot	Puccini	Calaf	"Non piangere Liù"/ "Nessun dorma"

Lyric Baritone

Opera	Composer	Role	Aria
Ariadne auf Naxos	R. Strauss	Harlekin	no real aria
Il barbiere di Siviglia	Rossini	Figaro	"Largo al factotum"
La Cenerentola	Rossini	Dandini	"Come un ape"
Così fan tutte	Mozart	Guglielmo	"Non siate ritrosi"/ "Donna mie la fate"

(The aria "Rivolgete a lui lo squardo" is occasionally inserted now, but it was withdrawn by Mozart himself and is not really part of the role.)

Opera	Composer	Role	Aria
Don Giovanni (may also be sung by lyric basses)	Mozart	Don Giovanni	three arias
Edgar	Puccini	Father	one aria
Faust	Gounod	Valentin	"Avant de quitter"
Falstaff	Verdi	Ford	Monologue
Le nozze di Figaro	Mozart	Count	"Hai già vinta la causa"
Pagliacci	Leoncavallo	Silvio	duet with Nedda
Tannhäuser	Wagner	Wolfram	two arias
La traviata	Verdi	Germont	"Di Provenza"
Der Wildschütz	Lortzing	Count	one aria
Zar und Zimmerman	Lortzing	Czar	"Mit Krone und Szepter"
Die Zauberflöte	Mozart	Papageno	three arias

Dramatic Baritone/Bass-Baritone

Opera	Composer	Role	Aria
Aida	Verdi	Amonasro	"Ma tu Re"
Andrea Chénier	Giordano	Gerard	two arias
Un ballo in maschera	Verdi	Renato	two arias
Carmen	Bizet	Escamillo	"Votre Toast"
Cavalleria rusticana	Mascagni	Alfio	"Il cavallo scalpita"
Les Contes d'Hoffmann	Offenbach	Dappertutto/Lindorf	two arias
Don Carlos	Verdi	Rodrigo (Posa)	two arias
Falstaff	Verdi	Falstaff	two arias
Guillaume Tell	Rossini	Tell	"Sois immobile"

(Frequently sung as "Resta immobile" from the Italian version.)

Opera	Composer	Role	Aria
Otello	Verdi	Iago	"Era la notte"/ "Credo"
Pagliacci	Leoncavallo	Tonio	"Si può! (Prologo)"
Rigoletto	Verdi	Rigoletto	"Pari siamo"/ "Cortigiani"
Il tabarro	Puccini	Michele	"Nulla silenzio"
Tosca	Puccini	Scarpia	"Te Deum"
Il trovatore	Verdi	Conte di Luna	"Il balen"

Helden Baritone/Dramatic Bass

Opera	Composer	Role	Aria
Boris Godunov	Mussorgsky	Boris	three arias
Boris Godunov	Mussorgsky	Varlaam	"Kazan Aria"
Don Carlos	Verdi	Phillip	"Ella giammai m'amo"
Elektra	R. Strauss	Oreste	no aria
Fidelio	Beethoven	Don Pizarro	"Ha! welch ein Augenblick"
Der fliegende Holländer	Wagner	Dutchman	"Die Frist ist um"
Lohengrin	Wagner	Telramund	one aria
Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor	Nicolai	Falstaff	one aria
Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg	Wagner	Hans Sachs	two arias
Parsifal	Wagner	Amfortas	two arias
Parsifal	Wagner	Gurnemanz	Act 1 Narrative/ Good Friday Spell
Ring cycle	Wagner		
Das Rheingold		Wotan	Entry into Valhalla
Das Rheingold		Alberich	Curse
Die Walküre		Wotan	Farewell
Salome	R. Strauss	Jochanaan	"Er ist in einem Nache"
Susannah	Floyd	Olin Blitch	two arias

Bass (Buffo/Serioso)

Opera	Composer	Role	Aria
Il barbiere di Siviglia	Rossini	Basilio	"La calunnia"
Il barbiere di Siviglia	Rossini	Bartolo	"Ho un dottor"
The Bartered Bride	Smetana	Kecal	one aria
La Bohème	Puccini	Colline	"Vecchia zimarra"
La Cenerentola	Rossini	Magnifico	one aria
La Cenerentola	Rossini	Alidoro	three arias
Don Giovanni	Mozart	Leporello	two arias
Don Giovanni	Mozart	Masetto	"Ho capito"
Die Entführung aus dem Serail	Mozart	Osmin	three arias
Faust	Gounod	Mephistopheles	two arias
Fidelio	Beethoven	Rocco	"Das Gold"
Der fliegende Holländer	Wagner	Daland	one aria
Der Freischütz	Weber	Kaspar	two arias
Lohengrin	Wagner	König Heinrich	one aria
Mefistofele	Boito	Mefistofele	"Il Mondo"
Nabucco	Verdi	Zaccaria	one aria
Le nozze di Figaro	Mozart	Figaro	three arias
Le nozze di Figaro	Mozart	Bartolo	one aria
Les vêpres siciliennes	Verdi	Procida	"O toi Palerme"
Der Wildschütz	Lortzing	Bacculus	one aria
Yevgeny (Eugene) Onegin	Tchaikovsky	Gremin	one aria
Die Zauberflöte	Mozart	Sarastro	two arias

From the above list, arias from *Don Carlos* and *Les vêpres siciliennes* may be sung in either Italian or French. French is the original language, but until recently this was seldom used and is still not the norm. Either is acceptable. Original keys and languages are usually required by competitions, but traditional transpositions from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for the Rosina and Basilio arias are so frequently

used that they too may be acceptable. Transpositions of certain arias should not be used because the point of singing the aria, other than being artistic, is to prove that the singer has those difficult high notes! I have not listed too many operas in unusual languages here because they are only occasionally given in the West. I have also not listed every role in each opera mentioned, nor have I listed every aria for each character; some roles have extra arias besides the one main one. Some operas listed are not frequent visitors to Western theaters, but in the interest of the coach being advisor, these are listed as possible roles to be encountered in Europe.

APPENDIX B
NOTABLE AND RECOMMENDED EDITIONS

The criteria for the following discussion of the best editions to use need to be explained. Any printed score, whether piano-vocal or orchestral, should be complete — all the music should be included. Traditional cuts may or may not be indicated, but no edition is really very good if it omits music, no matter how typical the cut may be. Consequently, I cannot recommend the G. Schirmer *Lucia di Lammermoor* or *Le Nozze di Figaro.* The *Lucia* has a major omission of coda material at the end of the Enrico–Lucia duet. In *Figaro*, part of the "Aprite, presto, aprite" duettino is omitted. These are both now performed complete quite regularly and need to be included.

Some scores will be coming out soon in critical editions that will restore much of the omitted music, sometimes including music that has not been heard in years. At least such restorations allow the production teams to know what was really written and can be performed.

In *Lucia* the question of keys also arises. I will discuss this more below. *Figaro* contains two versions of certain passages — notably the second-act trio for Susanna, the Countess, and the Count. Both versions should be printed in any edition that is to be considered really good. Schirmer prints only the revised version, and Bärenreiter prints only the original. Thus neither gets it right.

All music must be correct down to the last dotted note. This is very difficult to edit, but that's the point of critical editions. Consequently, the Bärenreiter *Figaro* is preferable, mainly because it gets all of the rhythms correct (the exception being the curious mistake on the word "garofani" mentioned in Chapter 8 about Mozart).

It would be helpful if an edition printed standard transpositions in the piano-vocal scores, and indicated "if a transposition of the following aria is made, the transposition begins here," and how this is done. This would be useful both for *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and for *La Bohème.* Orchestral material frequently comes printed in two keys.

Study of manuscripts/autographs can reveal just how difficult editing can be. Some composers are quite clean and clear — for example, Mozart is quite easy to read. But other composers scratch out and use such shortcuts, so that the chance of knowing exactly what the original composer ultimately wanted is purely speculation (for example, see Bellini's autograph for *Norma*). In some cases it can be necessary to use more than one score as reference.

Baroque Operas

Handel

Bärenreiter now prints the clearest edition of these works. They have most if not all of Handel's works in print. The older Chrysander edition has virtues not to be totally ignored, but the scholarship just isn't quite as complete as it might be. Still, in works like *Alcina* the older edition gives indications of music that does not but should appear in the Bärenreiter printing, including different keys for some arias. Handel may have rewritten *Alcina*, but some conductors prefer the original version. His *Messiah* is available in a very good and inexpensive edition from Oxford University Press. This includes all of the alternatives!

Scarlatti

Few will need to search for Scarlatti scores, but Harvard University Press once had a complete edition of his important scores. They are not all still available, but they were complete and scholarly, with alternate versions and changes placed in the appendix.

Vivaldi

I haven't seen a publisher for Vivaldi's operas yet, possibly because I have yet to coach one of them. Cecilia Bartoli's recent championing of his operas may change that situation.

Mozart

Surprisingly, Dover editions are very clear and mostly excellent orchestral scores. They come from the Peters editions, with Georg Schünemann and Kurt Soldan as editors. More recent scholarship points to the NMA for both orchestral scores and piano-vocal scores. These are printed by Bärenreiter. The piano reductions are very good and contain more correct markings than any other scores. In the case of works like *Idomeneo*, all music and all options for each role is printed (Idamante in that opera is printed for both a tenor and a mezzo-soprano). In such discussions, it may seem strange to carp, but Bärenreiter could put more music on a page and save the coach so many page turns. Although this may seem a trivial point, in a work like *Idomeneo* or *Figaro* it makes a large difference. Undoubtedly, G. Schirmer has the most frequently sung translations, though Andrew Porter's excellent translations are now printed in some editions based on the NMA. Unfortunately, the G. Schirmer *Die Zauberflöte* prints only a cut version of the dialog, making it impossible to include more if desired, and using more complete dialog is becoming the norm. (The uncut dialog is very interesting to read, but it is quite difficult to get an international cast to speak it well.)

Any coach should keep on top of trends of thought. In that way, they can understand the reasons behind the occasional desire to rearrange Act 3 of *Le nozze di Figaro* or whether to have a mezzo-soprano or tenor singing Idamante in *Idomeneo.*

Bel Canto Operas

Dover edition orchestral scores are generally available and are not bad, though they are not the best Dover prints. For orchestral scores and parts, Ricordi should be followed.

Rossini

The new Fondazione Rossini editions are recommended above all others. These are published in piano-vocal score by Ricordi. The orchestral scores are becoming more available, too. Not all of the operas are available as yet, but the editing process continues through each opera. So far *Guillaume Tell*, *La Cenerentola*, *Otello*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Ermione*, and others exist. Other than critical editions, Ricordi is still preferable to others for Rossini's operas. In some scores, such as *La cambiale di matrimonio*, the errors are many and obvious to the discerning eye.

Bellini

Other than *Norma*, most scores of Bellini are fairly straightforward and have fewer alterations. I believe Ricordi is embarking on producing critical editions of these operas, too – at least, it is to be hoped so. *Norma*, particularly, exists in various editions, with orchestral scores seldom agreeing with piano-vocal scores. In some places even the manuscript is a quagmire of cuts, rewrites, and the like. "Casta diva" appears variously in F or G (the original and more difficult), and other changes affect not only exact notes to be sung but also how long certain movements are. The soft ending to the "Guerra" chorus in fact involves some editorial working by the conductor.

La sonnambula appears almost universally in transposed keys, since the keys for the original tenor part (written for Rubini) are out of reach for most tenors, even those who specialize in that repertoire. Perhaps a critical edition will restore exactly what Bellini wrote and then print the transpositions as well.

Donizetti

Critical editions of Donizetti's works are emerging quickly as well. Again the publisher is Ricordi. Even the "non-critical" editions are now respectable. But *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *L'Elisir d'amore* were in need of clean, new editions, and Casa Ricordi has provided these. Although G. Schirmer piano-vocal scores of these works are more accessible, their edition of *L'Elisir* in particular has some notable problems in the editing process wherein spurious phrase markings confuse singers and coaches alike. The Ricordi *Don Pasquale* has one of the best printed translations ever of any opera.

Beethoven, Weber, and Nicolai

I tend to favor Boosey & Hawkes for Beethoven's *Fidelio*, but that is possibly because I like the reduction. It sounds more complete somehow than the G. Schirmer version. Weber operas are not usually performed, but the Dover orchestral score of *Der Freischütz* is quite good, including all of the dialog, even the brief scene frequently omitted at the beginning of Act 3. Since this is a reprint of the Peters edition, one can be sure that the Peters piano-vocal score is also worthy of consideration. G. Schirmer has some minor errors in *Der Freischütz*, though it includes a listing of which instrument plays each number (always helpful). The printing, however, makes many rhythms quite difficult to read, due to even printing of uneven rhythms.

For Otto Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*, I suggest Peters again. If someone wishes to perform the work in English, then the piano-vocal score of G. Schirmer is fine, since it uses the same musical plates as the Peters edition. G. Schirmer, unfortunately, makes some cuts and includes only English, precluding use of German language for study of arias, duets, or dialog.

Humperdinck

While we're on Germanic opera, the Peters edition is best again for Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* for two reasons: Peters is in German only and also there are certain rhythms in the final waltz inaccurately printed in the more generally available G. Schirmer edition. Otherwise, Schirmer is quite good, with a very playable reduction that retains most of the cues needed. Both nicely isolate the cuckoo line, so an offstage conductor can use the piano-vocal score instead of a full score for cues to the cuckoo and echo voices. The Dover orchestral score is quite good, too.

Verdi

After years of inadequate piano-vocal scores and orchestral parts for Verdi operas, Ricordi is finally rectifying this problem by extending their critical scores to Verdi's entire oeuvre. This has involved a great deal of work to uncover long-lost sections of music and earlier versions of scenes now performed in recomposed variants. Most notable in the new editions is the score for *Don Carlos*, published in French, Italian, and German (but not English!) singing texts. It tries to put forth every variant that Verdi wrote for the opera, and includes the huge ballet as well. Other operas have been appearing, as has the *Requiem.* Production of some critical editions, such as *Falstaff*, is hampered by the difficulty in finding orchestral originals, even when piano-vocal scores exist. But the mainstream operas like *Rigoletto* and *Don Carlos* are readily available in piano-vocal scores and full scores.

French Operas

The existence of critical editions in French operas is in a woeful state. Although the works of Hector Berlioz have appeared in new and wonderfully complete editions, the works of Charles Gounod, Georges Bizet, and Jules Massenet have not. Even the works of later composers, like Saint-Säens, Debussy, and Fauré, are in need of more care.

Gounod

Faust had so many alterations made to it during the initial rehearsal process that one can hardly have any idea what Gounod wanted in some places. The autograph exists was the basis for a very new restudy and edition of the music. In the absence of that, Fritz Oeser, whose editions are questionable in other ways, here has the best possible edition, since all he did was take all previous editions and combine the most accurate readings of each section. He did not, however, have access to those sections that appear only in the autograph. Where are Faust's cabaletta (with the only sung mention of his name!), Marguerite's mad scene, the little scene with the girls offstage, and numerous smaller sections? The autograph offers quite a few surprises in the portions it shows that have never been heard, but so much remains lost.

Roméo et Juliette causes fewer problems, yet there is no completely accurate score for this either. The G. Schirmer, a reprint of the revised piano-vocal score, gives all scenes complete — in a sense. Only the ballet music and a chorus from the wedding scene are missing. But the orchestral material does not include some of that music. It will come as quite a surprise to a coach or a singer to find whole sections missing, particularly from Act 1. The original piano-vocal score shows even more surprises, particularly in Act 3. Unlike *Faust*, where inclusion of omitted music might add another forty-five minutes to the performance length, the "lost" music in *Roméo et Juliette* would probably amount to no more than fifteen minutes. In addition to the "complete" music included in the most

recent EMI recording, these missing sections include the complete coda to Act 1, an aria for Frère Laurent – with offstage chorus – in the wedding scene of *Roméo et Juliette*, and an extension to the fight scene (actually an alternate version of the scene, though portions could be taken to strengthen the scene even more). Oddly enough, the difficulty of making this material available is minimal, since many older orchestral parts include the music crudely crossed out. Editions Choudens seems to show no interest in rectifying this matter.

Bizet

Carmen exists, of course, in the much-maligned Oeser edition. This has many failings, but also some important variants not printed elsewhere. A better critical edition has not yet appeared. Oeser's most flagrant excesses are reversion to earlier readings of certain melodic cells that were changed for the better before the composer died – and since he died only months after *Carmen*'s premiere, that is saying something. Oeser also reverts to an early reading of Escamillo's exit in Act 3 Scene 1, and to a spurious outburst at the killing of Carmen (although it is quite exciting!).
Les Pêcheurs des Perles has been edited and reissued with many excisions and alterations restored. These affect many moments, but most notably the end of the famous duet for the tenor and baritone, and also the duet for the soprano and baritone. Always investigate the publishing date and seek the most recent edition. There are not many editions of this opera from which to choose.

Massenet

G. Schirmer actually has a good edition for *Manon.* International Edition prints a good *Werther* (apparently only one translation and printing of that opera exists, and International makes the French edition available most easily). Massenet's other operas are not frequently given. For orchestral scores, turn to Edition Choudens, although Dover's *Manon* has some interesting variants in a place or two. (A good critical edition of both would be a blessing.)

Debussy

Pelléas et Mélisande is a wonderful opera, but there are discrepancies between scores that affect rhythms, scoring, and barring. The Dover orchestral score uses an earlier version of the score, and certain rebarrings appeared in the revision. I believe that there is a critical edition of this score that includes a portion of the Yniold/Golaud scene that was cut before the premiere and is frequently reinstated today. Seek it out. For a traditional view, International is readily available, and it is mostly accurate.

Offenbach

Les Contes d'Hoffmann has been a particularly open field of contention for years. What did Offenbach really intend? Oeser's edition, published, as are all his editions, by Editions Alkor, printed by Bärenreiter, is filled with honest attempts to fill out the portions left incomplete by Offenbach. The problem is that many, many pages of music have been discovered in the years since that edition emerged. The edition to study now – unfortunately rental only (so I understand) – is the Michael Kaye edition. Various recordings of both the grand opéra (recitative) and *opéra comique* (dialog) editions have been issued. The problem for this opera in general is that there is too much of a good thing. In one place Offenbach wrote three interchangeable arias for Giulietta! What to do?

For the operettas the problems are now becoming less. While Belwin Mills once started an aborted edition of the complete works of Offenbach (mostly unavailable now), Boosey & Hawkes is now issuing Offenbach Edition Keck (OEK), with critical answers to the various problems and variants between performing versions. It is to be hoped that this edition reaches completion and remains available to us for a long time. While I've only seen the orchestral score and piano-vocal score for *Orphée aux Enfers*, it promises to be an excellent answer to the problems encountered in earlier editions. An example of these problems can be found in *La Périchole.* The Met version includes music from other sources, transpositions, and a shortened dialog (not printed with the music!) that obscures some important facts and niceties of the original dialog. It would be wonderful if Boosey & Hawkes (also publisher of the Met version) would add new English translations to these new scores; the *Orphée* had only French and German versions. Many companies that perform operas in the original languages revert to English for operettas. An English translation included on the CD-ROM that accompanied the orchestral score only is not a good solution.

Wagner

The music dramas of Wagner have also been undergoing a thorough cleansing and editing. Perhaps the most interesting of these for a scholar would be the earliest operas: *Das Liebesverbot*, *Die Feen*, and *Rienzi, der letzte Tribun*. Though these operas are not performed much, all of the operas are being scoured for mistakes. These are not as prevalent in the later operas, but in *Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin* the problems can still be quite a trial. G. Schirmer vocal scores are not bad, except for *Tannhäuser*, where the multiplicity of editions confounds them. For that opera, I'd suggest the Peters edition. Many of the published piano-vocal scores use the same printing plates but interchange translations.

Richard Strauss

Richard Strauss's operas may pose many problems, but finding suitable printed editions is not among them. Until most recently Boosey & Hawkes in America (Fürstner Verlag in Europe) has been the exclusive publisher. So if mistakes exist, they can only be rectified by careful study, not by changing editions. Those editions now emerging from copyright are still printed from the plates used by Boosey and Hawkes.

Puccini

Ricordi is bringing out critical editions of Puccini's operas, too, uncovering many minor details even in operas as well known as *La Bohème*. *Turandot* may even emerge with more than one ending – take your pick! *La Fanciulla del West* has a small section in Act 1 that was only recorded for the first time by Eva Marton, Ben Heppner, and Leonard Slatkin.

Modern Opera

More recent works by composers such as Berg, Britten, and others are generally available in only one edition, and since these are from the original publishers, one must hope they are accurate. Ricordi's earlier editions, however, show that such an assumption could be a major mistake.

APPENDIX C FAVORITE CATCH PHRASES AND BUZZWORDS

I hope no one will take the following phrases and terms as merely funny things to say. True, they have a certain levity, but a very important purpose lurks behind each one of them.

1. "I understand every word you said – but you don't!" This means that the singer is singing quite accurately and clearly each syllable, vowel, and consonant. But the meaning is not coming through, hence the idea that I can understand your "verbal diction" but not your "thought diction."
2. "Thought diction." This literally means the projection of the meaning of the word beyond the presence of vowels, consonants, and syllables. This can involve projecting the active part of words – "uscite dal mio petto" from Susanna's recitative before "Deh vieni non tardar" (in *Le nozze di Figaro*) should have a certain mild force to it, "banishing" the very cares from her heart. It can also mean simply connecting with the meaning of the text. When Butterfly's "Un bel di vedremo" becomes a narrative and not an aria, then the singer is projecting her "thought diction."
3. "Optimum roar range." This is that portion of a singer's voice in which he or she can produce the most sound, at times too much sound to balance. It is usually used in conjunction with trying to balance an ensemble where one voice is quite high and another is quite low. In the entrance music at the beginning of Act 3 of *Carmen*, Don José's line is written quite high, very much in his optimum roar range. Unfortunately, this means he will have major difficulties in balancing the rest of the ensemble. The bottom of a voice is not usually considered a roar range at all, but the area between the first and second *passaggi* can be quite loud and difficult to control.
4. "The words are 'Tra-la-la-la,' not 'Tra-lol-lol-lol.'" I discovered this problem working on the first scene of *Hänsel und Gretel*. Singers have a major tendency to sing "lol" instead of "la" – particularly when the syllables follow in close proximity, as in that scene. The problem with this is that it causes almost immediate tension in the tongue, down in the throat. "La" is both easier to say and causes no tension, but it is a chore to get the singers to stop old habits.
5. "The words are 'Muh-tuh, Fah-tuh' not 'Moo-tair, Fah-tair.'" Young singers are not the only ones to make this mistake. German pronunciation of *Mutter* and *Vater* is closer to the way we would pronounce these words in English than the incorrect pronunciation given above. But,

because "der" is pronounced so closely to "dare" in the English language – even more properly, one might say "day-uh" – the singer assumes that the "-er" in the unaccented syllables of those two words and many others should be pronounced in the same fashion. This is inaccurate, of course, but it persists. Knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) will help a singer learn more accurately the differences in languages. Coaches would do well to learn it, too, in order to teach more effectively.

6. The "three vibrati on the unaccented syllable" syndrome. This happens particularly in Italian literature, recitative, and arioso. But it is not exclusive to that language and literature at all. What is it? Take Cherubino's "Non so più." The first line ends with the word "faccio." The accent falls on the first syllable, but countless singers, wanting just a little more "tone" to come through, allow the second syllable, "-cio," to elongate to almost twice its length. In recitative this causes words to become improperly stressed, and therefore the singer is actually singing bad Italian. This is not something exclusive to young singers either. I once heard a good Leporello sing, "Madaminaaaaa, il catologo e questooooo." You get the point. The remedy is to stress the proper syllable, in recitatives making it a hair longer, and tapering off from the wrong note quickly. This takes practice and perseverance from coach and singer alike.
7. "No arias not written by the composer." This refers, again in recitative, to the way some singers, particularly students, start singing the recitatives with too much legato, notably on certain short phrases. It does not refer to the practice of more legato singing at the end of a recitative.
8. "I didn't know your name was Rossini! " The last word could also be Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, or whomever. It refers to the singer's ability to invent rhythms and notes, and not to follow the composer's written instructions. An example might be Laetitia's recitative and aria from Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief*: "Steal me, oh, steal me, sweet thief." I cannot say how many people treat the rhythms in this recitative casually, as if Menotti had no idea exactly what he wanted. If he writes a triplet on the words "The old woman sighs," he means a triplet, not an eighth note and two sixteenths. Similar mistakes happen all through the recitative. American singers seem to think that if it's in English, no one will notice their inventive, rhythmic "improvements." In Rossini it happens in passagework and is not a result of purposeful alterations of the passages for embellishment. It means the singer has learned the passage wrong – a problem for singers of all composers.
9. "You just slipped into another language! " This refers to those moments when a singer mispronounces a word in one language as if it were part of another language. The usual mistake is "qui" being pronounced as "chi" – I accuse the singer of coming directly from singing in French. It can happen in other languages, however, and it is one of the dangers of not learning to sing intelligibly in more than one language.
10. "But it's not that way on the recording." This says a lot more than the singer saying it thinks it does. It seems to say that the recording is correct and the coach is wrong. Both are fallible, but the more important point is that there are recordings other than "the" recording to which the student has been listening. How many recordings has the singer listened to? "The" would indicate only one. When a singer says this, I answer with, "Which is 'the' recording? Who is on it? Who conducts?" The student frequently can't answer these questions. Today, few singers know about the tendency of certain conductors to be notably slow (Karajan) or fast (Böhm) in their late years.

These are the primary phrases and terms I have used or with which I have had to deal. These examples can be used to make a point but still keep the coaching light and to maintain a good working mood.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Appendix B listed a variety of desirable scores and the reasons why they are desirable. The following annotated bibliography deals with sources I have used in the preparation of this text and some that should be valuable to anyone entering the profession of opera coach.

Adams, David. *A Handbook of Diction for Singers: Italian, German, French.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. *This book offers some of the best and most comprehensive rules on good diction in the three major operatic languages.*

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Alan Montgomery holds a Doctorate in Instrumental Conducting from Indiana University, where he first began accompanying and coaching. In 1974, this led to his coaching at the Hamburgische Staatsoper in Germany, where he coached several new productions and worked with major singers there. When he returned to the United States, he sang lead tenor roles with the Whitewater Opera Company in Richmond, Indiana. This gave him valuable experience on the other end of the stick. Dr. Montgomery spent several summers with a small music theater in central Indiana – Nettle Creek Players – performing major musicals. But his work at Oberlin consisted of thirty-three years of coaching young singers. Several of his students have become major singers: Denyce Graves, Derrick Lee Ragin, Daniel Okulitch, Todd Thomas, Limmie Pulliam, Edward Parks, and Elizabeth de Shong, to name only a few.

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