

Singing Analysis of the Opera Selection Di Provenza il mar il suol

Wenling Guan^{1*}

¹ College of Music, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China

Email Address

158599323@qq.com (Wenling Guan)

*Correspondence: 158599323@qq.com

Received: 22 August 2023; Accepted: 20 September 2023; Published: 20 October 2023

Abstract:

Di Provenza il mar il suol is an aria sung by George Armand in Act II of Verdi's opera La Traviata. The author will present an analysis of the artistic characteristics and singing of this aria to complete the composition of the graduation thesis. This paper is composed of three parts. The first part is a brief introduction of Verdi's life, the second part is the singing analysis of the aria Di Provenza il mar il suol, while the third part is a comparative analysis of the artistic characteristics of the aria Di Provenza il mar il suol, as well as a critical analysis of the aria. The objective and significance of this paper lie in the improvement of the understanding of the aria of author, as well as in the provision of reference and assistance to the learners in the performance of the aria.

Keywords:

Di Provenza il mar il suol, George Armand, Singing Analysis

1. Introduction

The opera La Traviata represents one of the numerous operatic works of the Italian opera composer Giuseppe Verdi. At the present time, the study of Alfred, the hero of the play, and Violetta, the heroine, is highly experienced both at home and abroad, while the study of George Armand, the father of Alfred, the supporting character, is comparatively scarce. In view of the study of this aria during the author's undergraduate studies and own practice singing, this paper presents a brief analysis of the artistic characteristics and singing of this aria, in the hope that it can serve as a reference and assistance to the students or singers.

2. Biography and Creative Career of Verdi

2.1. Biography of Verdi

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) was a renowned Italian opera composer. Verdi was born in a rural village in Basseto of Italy, where his father was merely an ordinary restaurant owner. The interest of Verdi towards music commenced when he listened to the street performers playing and singing. Verdi started to study music at the age of 13. At the age of 18, he failed his exams at the Milan Conservatory of Music, after

which he remained at the La Scala Opera House in Milan to learn music from musicians in a self-taught manner. In about 1840, Verdi commenced the composition of his operas at the Milan Opera House, a period in which Verdi's wife and son died of illness, in conjunction with the fact that Italy was being colonized and occupied by France and Austria. Against this backdrop, Verdi composed over half of his life's operatic works, which involved the opera Nabucco. At the time, this opera galvanized the intense patriotic spirit of the people, which flagrantly conveyed the ideals and aspirations of the Italian nation in its pursuit of national independence. In the years 1851 to 1853, Verdi composed *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore* and *La Traviata* in succession, which turned him into Italy's greatest opera composer. Verdi composed a total of 27 operas. As a result of his preference for the baritone voice, Verdi composed a number of classic baritone arias, which have been extensively publicized. These arias, with their melodic undulations and intense emotional singing, have created a distinctive voice part in the history of opera: the Verdi baritone. for which we can draw on [1].

3. Singing Analysis of the Aria *Di Provenza il mar il suol*

3.1. Linguistic Analysis

A clear articulation and a mellow and full tune is fundamental to singing, which makes it imperative to have a general understanding of the Italian language prior to learning the Italian arias. The Italian language comes up regularly in the course of vocal studies, in particular for learners of the *bel canto* style of singing (commonly referred to as *bel canto*), which is of great importance. In comparison with French and German, Italian is an easier language to learn and pronounce. Its syllables are composed of vowels and consonants, while a mastery of the five vowels of a, e, i, o, u is the basis of learning to sing Italian songs. Apart from the vowels, there are also sixteen consonants, namely b, s, d, f, g, h, v, n, m, p, q, r, c, t, l, z. The letter "h" is silent, and the letter "q" itself is silent, while the letter "qu" is pronounced when "u" and "q" are put together. Italian pronunciation is comparatively simple and straightforward to spell. At the beginning of learning Italian repertoire, it is recommended to listen to model readings to learn it. The primary concern when learning is the standard pronunciation of vowels, since they take up the longest time in Italian songs. For instance, in the first line of the song: "DiProvenzailmarilsuol", it is possible to perceive the importance of the vowels, which occupy a substantial amount of time in each word. Di, which is centered on the following vowel "i", with the "D" as a consonant merely passing over it. The center of Provenza is on the "o" and the "a". For this reason, it is necessary to take special care to pronounce the vowels correctly and with fullness when singing, for which "a" can not be pronounced as "e", "e" cannot be pronounced as "i". In the higher register, it is necessary to pay special attention to the pitch of the "do" in "Diomiguido !" to reach "G", and to take special care to not pronounce "a" in "o". The author believes that it is essential to focus not only on the beauty of the voice, but also on the pronunciation of the lyrics, the sense of speech and the expression of emotion when singing, so that the art of singing can be more successful, for which we can draw on [8].

3.2. Analysis of Musical Structure

The aria is structured in a juxtaposed single binary form.

The introduction runs from bar 1 to bar 5, which introduces the theme melody of the aria and sets the stage for the development of the piece.

The period A runs from bar 6 to bar 13, which is structured as a diatonic, close-ended single-tone section. The phrase “a” begins with the dominant chord in D-flat major, and a genitive seventh to dominant termination appears in the bar 8 to bar 9 of the period. Afterwards, the period is repeated once. From the perspective of the melody, it has kept making a downward modal progression. The second phrase runs from bar 18 to bar 22, which is expanded in phrase length as required for emotional expression, resulting in a fuller expression of emotion and a structural back-and-forth relationship with the main melody.

Afterwards, the phrase A and B is repeated once as a whole from bar 23 to bar 44. Despite the change in the lyrics, the musical structure is comparable to the one expressed before.

The coda is a highlight termination from bar 45 to bar 48.

Upon completion of the analysis, it can be perceived that the aria tends to return to the main chord in the melodic direction, where the harmonic progression of the terminating chord can be found constantly, while this harmonic progression echoes the emotion of the song. For this reason, the author believes that an essential part of learning to sing a vocal repertoire is to analyze its musical patterns. Following the analysis, there comes a framework understanding of the whole aria, which is instrumental for the control of various techniques or emotions when singing, thereby enhancing the performativity.

3.3. Singing Technical Analysis and Emotion Analysis

Di Provenza il mar il suol is derived from the second act of Verdi’s opera La Traviata. It is a heartfelt baritone aria with a tremendous amount of emotional tension, which carries a dramatic energy in a seemingly simple melody. With a view to singing this aria with great emotion, it is essential to gain an understanding of the background of the story. The background of the story is that after the father George Armand found his son Alfred fell in love with Violetta, for reasons of family history, he obstructed their love in every possible way. Under the persuasion of George Armand, the heroine Violetta left the hero for love and the greater good, whereas the uninformed hero felt a great deal of grief and hatred for knowing that the heroine had left. As a father, George Armand found that his son acted in this way, thereby persuading him to put down the hatred in his heart and sing this aria. In the story, the general tone of the aria is characterized by the father’s love for his son, and his eagerness and helplessness to persuade him to return to his rightful place in life. If the father in the drama is analyzed in depth, the emotion is actually quite complex, which involves the consideration and selfishness of the father himself, for which we can draw on [6]. By learning about the plot, it is evident that George Armand took it upon himself to believe that his son being with such a woman would be fruitless and affect his reputation and fame, thereby making him determined to break the two apart. Nevertheless, as a father, he did not expect his son to have such an obsession with this relationship, for which he persuaded his son to put down the hatred and thoughts in his heart, in an attempt to persuade him to go home with himself by evoking the pleasant memories of Alfred. For this reason, by analyzing the plot and dissecting the father’s thoughts and feelings, it is possible to perceive that the song is emotionally complex and difficult to express. In particular, it is characterized by the guilt, helplessness, urgency and reproach of the father, while embodying tenderness and fatherly love everywhere, for which we can draw on [3]. As a consequence, the

singers who would like to express such complex emotions need to put great effort into analyzing the lyrics with the notation on the score, to match the emotions that they intend to express in each line of the lyrics with the previous analysis one by one.

By analyzing the score, it is apparent that the overall melody of the aria *Di Provenza il mar il suol* is fairly flat. In terms of tempo, *Andante* is also slow, in conjunction with the *dolce* (gentle) and *dolciss* (quite soft) that can be found throughout the score, making it a good idea to sing it in a slow and soft manner. This is also one of the major difficulties in singing this aria, namely the control of the breath. In addition, the design of the mouth must also be controlled in a proper manner. Therefore, if there is not a reliable waist and abdominal strength, as well as solid breath support, the voice position will fluctuate while singing, and the farther the melody progresses, the more stiff the body will become. The flow of the song is eliminated, which makes it emotionally impossible to express the subtle and complex emotions of George Armand as a father, while the artistic image of fatherhood will also collapse. On the basis of controlling the breath steadily, there must be a certain rhythm to ensure that the breath is not dragged down by the prolonged melody. In particular, when the music is propelled to an emotional peak, and the helplessness of being a father bursts forth, the breath needs to be more dramatic with one step in the right direction. If the breath is rigid in the waist and abdomen, the singing will appear clumsy and even the singing will not be proceeded. Consequently, the breath requires stability as a great tree taking root, while also gurgling and flowing like a stream of water. Meanwhile, when processing some details of the score, it is also necessary to take notice of some particulars, such as *marcato* (emphasis; mostly with a *staccato*), and when processing the weak note “*pp*”, which appears constantly, making it a point to be especially careful. When analyzing the sound technology, since Verdi baritone features distinctive characteristics, the use of chest resonance is indispensable in singing. It requires full chest resonance not only in the middle register, but also in the treble register. In the second half of the piece, the baritone voice change frequently occurs in the point of the tone with mostly long duration, which requires two or even more beats of the high notes. In this way, it demands the ability of the singer to control the muscles with a degree of relaxation, as well as the ability of the elastic breath control, so as to ensure the expression of the emotion without losing the stability of the singing. This proves to be a difficult point for singers. However, it also serves as a source of fascination for Verdi baritone, for which we can draw on [2].

Secondly, Verdi also incorporated some hard attack vocalization techniques in the aria *Di Provenza il mar il suol*, where the hard attack vocalization means that the vocal cords are first closed, followed by a flow of air that rushes through the cords, which makes the vocal cords vibrate and produce a vocal sound. For the sake of clarifying this feeling, it is possible to mimic the feeling of coughing, namely the sensation of opening the vocal folds with the airflow. Nevertheless, this technique is likely to fatigue the tissues of the vocal folds in a speedy manner. On the other hand, the climaxes of Verdi's arias require forceful, decisive and crisp articulation, which in turn necessitates the use of hard attack vocalization techniques, thereby accentuating the dramatic conflict between the characters. For this reason, the author believes that it is possible to alternate between a soft and a hard attack vocalization while singing. When the mood of the piece is brought to a climax, the hard attack vocalization is applied to accentuate the emotion of the character. When the mood is comparatively smooth, the soft or relaxed attack vocalization can be adopted, which is not only conducive to retaining the power to allow a better completion of the whole aria, but

also beneficial to the protection of the voice. Meanwhile, the use of the hard attack vocalization can also adequately demonstrate the dramatic effect of Verdi baritone, for which we can draw on [4].

4. Singing Artistic Characteristics of the Aria Di Provenza il mar il suol

4.1. Analysis of Different Versions of Singing Treatment

By viewing and appreciating the video material of the singers, the author conducted an analysis of the different versions of Di Provenza il mar il suol from La Traviata.

In the La Traviata at the Royal Theatre in 1994, the role of George Armand as the father was played by Leo Nucci, who portrayed the role of the father to the fullest, and portrayed George Armand's majesty as a father and his love for his son adequately. His performance demonstrates Georges Almond's selfishness as a father and the guilt he felt for his son. After the persuasion and singing of the first half of the song and seeing his son did not have any reaction, he told Alfred the pain and tiredness he had suffered, in the hope of obtaining his sympathy. There exists a certain contrast between the front and back emotions, with the first half being more majestic and introverted, and the second half being softer. Therefore, the emotional expression of the song is both strong and soft, which portrays the complexity of George Armand's psychological activities as a father realistically, making it a classic. In the singing, he also ensured the consistency of the melody, with a change of breath in two lines without any panic and a smooth flow, which is sufficient to demonstrate his solid breath and singing skills.

In the performance of La Traviata at the Salzburg Festival in 2005, the role of the father was played by Thomas Hampson, who added his own distinctive understanding of the role of the father. From his singing, it can be perceived that his vocal line is inclined to be soft, which is eye-catching. Through his singing and performance, it is possible to perceive that a father's love can also be as ardent as a fire. The melody drives to its peak without any concealment of emotion, with its emotional fullness and unity of sound, which accentuates the dramatic character of Verdi baritone. This treatment brings back memories even after one has heard it.

4.2. Analysis of the Different Versions of Artistic Literacy

By watching and listening, it is easy to perceive that no matter which version of George Almand was performed, it featured intense dramaturgy and showmanship. It is evident that despite the differences in the singing style or interpretation of each version, they were all set on the premise of the identical scene, the identical conflict, and the identical script, followed by the secondary creation, namely the singing. By viewing the first two versions, it can be perceived that each singer contemplates and analyzes his own role. Despite having a fixed script, role and emotions, the emotions they expressed are all distinct from each other. As a consequence, with a view to singing this aria properly, the singing skill is of great importance. Nevertheless, the author holds that it is even more necessary to understand it, to experience the emotions of the characters physically and emotionally, and to study and understand the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the real world. Singing skills resemble the blood and flesh of a human being, which serve as the necessary means of presentation on the outside; while the understanding of the emotions of their

characters resembles the soul bestowed on the flesh and blood. It is necessary to incorporate individuality into commonality, and to seek commonality in individuality. In this way, it is possible to make the secondary creations more successful.

After experiencing the emotions of the characters, how can the characters' thoughts and feelings be integrated into the singing? As the name suggests, performance involves both acting and singing, for which the author argues that there is no separation between performance and music. The same is true in theater art, in spite of the fact that the proportion of performance and music is relatively dissimilar between the two. For this reason, the author considers that some of the theories of theater art performance can be taken as reference to assist in integrating the emotions into singing.

The most influential theories in the study of world theater art performance are the theory of "experiential performing art" and the theory of "expressive performing art". The experiential school, as the name suggests, involves the actors putting themselves into the script to experience the life, emotions and thoughts of the characters, followed by portraying the characters in the process of performance. The actors are required to start from the point of view of the character and realize that "I am the character". As a result, it is imperative to fully immerse ourselves in the plot and the character to achieve this. On the other hand, the expressive school advocates a kind of "separation effect", which means advocating an emotional distance between the actor and the character in the art of acting. It is suggested to consciously separate the emotion between the characters and the actors, in which the actors should always be aware of the fact that "I am acting", and perform with rational effect, rather than with emotional effect as in the case of the experiential school.

According to the author, regardless of which method is desirable, the key is to determine which method is suitable for their own singing needs. In the process of learning, the most heard is the "experience school way" of bringing their own emotions, immersed in which to experience the role of emotion, whereas this method in some cases may be counterproductive. For instance, some singers are likely to become overly involved in their own emotions, thereby losing control of their emotions and causing their singing to go unchecked. This is on account of the fact that it is necessary to maintain the musculature and body at all times whilst singing, whereas over-emotionalization can disturb this balance. Some singers are overwhelmed by the emotion of being in a dramatic role with great emotion for a long period of time, which affects the subsequent introduction of the song. These are all situations that need to be taken into consideration and avoided. With regard to this kind of singers, it is advisable to employ the second "expressive school way" to integrate singing and emotion. Through the interpretation and analysis of musical notation and rhythmic notes, it is possible to make precise control of the voice to manifest the emotion of the song. Despite the fact that the rational expressive way of singing lacks the elements of one's own understanding of the music, it is undoubtedly the way of singing that is closest to the emotions of the composers. There is no need to get hung up on which way is better. The author always utilizes a combination of the two ways when practicing singing. As the saying goes, the theory is dead, while the person is alive. This is on account of the fact that our own understanding of the character is limited on a number of occasions, which is related to our experiences and the situation we are in. By taking the aria *Di Provenza il mar il suol* as an example, this is a song sung by an old father. Nevertheless, the author has not been capable of assuming the role of a father in reality. At this point, if the role is forced into the role

of the experiential way, it can only depend on the imagination, speculation, and make up the emotions through the story. In this way, the song will be sung more or less emotionally deficient. However, if some rational analysis is included, namely the expressionist method, to analyze the details of the score notation and strictly execute it, which can exactly make up for the lack of experience in the perceptual. As a result, the expression of the emotions of the character tends to be enriched, and the singing becomes more successful, for which we can draw on [5].

In conclusion, it is essential to identify a suitable singing style for ourselves, select a style that fits our own situation, and apply the two theoretical systems in a flexible manner, which will enable us to express the emotions of the character we would like to present while singing more easily [10].

5. Conclusions

La Traviata represents one of the operas composed by the renowned opera master Verdi, while learning the arias from the operas is an imperative part of the learning process for us as vocalists. When we are presented with an aria, familiarizing ourselves with the melody and the lyrics is merely the first step. More importantly, it is crucial for us to figure out the thoughts and emotions of the characters, their personalities, the storyline, and even to ponder on the creative background of the opera and the connotations that the author would like to express. It is only by studying and comprehending from multiple perspectives and dimensions that we can get closer to the emotions of the work, thereby enabling us to interpret the work in a more favorable manner. By taking the singing treatment analysis of the aria Di Provenza il mar il suol in the opera La Traviata as an entry point, this paper explored the singing technique, the modeling of the character image, the artistic quality and the expression of emotion, in the hope that it can be of help to the learning of the aria for vocal music learners. The above-mentioned is some superficial comprehension of the author in the learning process, there are still numerous inadequacies, in the hope that experts and scholars can criticize and correct.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- [1] Yu, R.Y. A General History of Western Music. Shanghai Music Press, 2002, 242-272.
- [2] Zhu, Z.T. An Analysis of Verdi Baritone Aria Singing Technique--Take the Land and Sea of Provence as an Example. *Song of the Yellow River*, 2017, 6, 66-67.
- [3] Sun, B. Aria Provence Land and Sea Character Character Analysis. *Notonly Musi*, 2012, 3, 170-171.

- [4] Su, D. Grasp of Verdi Baritone Aria Singing Skills -- Take the Land and Sea of Aria Provence as an Example. *Talent*, 2014, 13, 280.
- [5] Peng, J.X. Introduction to Art. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2015, 174-214.
- [6] Pei, P. A Brief Analysis of the Musical Image of “George Armand “ in Verdi’s Opera La Traviata. College of Art and Design, Henan University of Science and Technology.
- [7] Liu, S.R. The Opera Master Verdi. Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 1997 edition.
- [8] Lv, X. Effects of Italian and Chinese Occlusal Pronunciation Characteristics on Vocal Singers. Jilin University of the Arts.
- [9] Guoyao Chizi. A Brief Discussion of the Artistic Characteristics of Verdi’s Opera La Traviata. *Music Life*, 2018, 11, 86-87.
- [10] Deng, Q. A Brief Discussion of Verdi’s Opera La Traviata. *Learning Weekly*, 2011, 35, 184.



© 2023 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)