

Master Thesis in Music Performance

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The Rossini Mezzo-Soprano

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Abstract

The Rossini mezzo-soprano is presented as a special voice type through the technical and interpretative aspect. My observations based on personal experiences as well as the expertises of my professors deal with the development of the mezzo-soprano voice with the influence of pedagogy and also with the influence and comparison with their own voice possibilities.

The thesis is written in the English language by myself, Ivana Milasinovic and contains 54 pages.

This thesis is part of my Masters Degree programme at Agder University College, The Conservatory of Music (Classical Department) in Kristiansand, Norway.

The study which I present is divided into ten sections.

Key words: **Rossini, mezzo-soprano, singing technique.**

The First Section is an introduction with methods and aim.

The Second Section is short introduction of Rossini and his works.

The Third Section contains general information about singing.

The Fourth Section is about vocal tuition; the technical approach to developing vocal skills to perform Rossini's music for the mezzo-soprano voice through the influence of teachers of singers throughout history and also my own professors whose guidance have given me the basis of my technique to support my professional career.

The Fifth Section contains technical observations about using of **breath, palatal perception, attack of tone, head tone, head resonances and chest resonance.**

The Sixth Section is about challenge of Rossini's demanding music – both for the student as well

as the teacher. This section relates to special technical aspects – such as the *trill* and *coloratura* writing. I also include examples of technical exercises to 'warm up' the voice in preparation for practising and performing Rossini's music.

The Seventh Section is about characteristics of the Rossini mezzo-soprano – a personal observation of the type of voice that suits the composer's challenging music.

The Eighth Section concentrates on the performance of Rossini's operas, including three roles (Rosina from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Angelina from *La Cenerentola*, and Isabela from *L'Italiana in Algeri*) with some annotations and music examples.

The Ninth Section is about Rossini's singers - their vocal abilities and the views of the critics.

The Tenth Section contains a conclusion to my investigation.

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Per Kjetil Farstad, my mentor and tutor, who has such knowledge, strength and patience, knew how to inspire, how to support and how to guide me in writing down my thoughts and experiences.

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I would also like to thank my Visiting Professor **Neil Mackie** who is currently Head of Vocal Studies at the Royal College of Music in London. As well as giving me new technical insight to vocal training, his advice on finding the correction English meaning to underpin my own thoughts was invaluable. Like Professor Hansen, his encouragement and professional experiences have prepared me for my future career.

I am grateful to all three of my Norwegian teachers.

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I wish to pay tribute to the librarian of our school **Anne-Åse Kallhovd** who has been order for me and introduced me to many recordings and essential books on my chosen subject.

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Introduction

From the very first time I heard Rossini, I became his fan. I could not explain why his music made me so comfortable and happy, but I knew that I would perform it one day.

This is not the only reason for choosing this title. Actually, I have chosen to write about it because of two for me essential reasons. The first reason is the experience from my first years of my vocal studies when my teachers thought that I am a dramatic mezzo-soprano, almost alto, and they tried to retard me in a deeper and dramatic division than I really was. In that time, it was O.K. for me, but now, when I look back, I cannot say that it was a proper way of treating a young singer's voice. The big challenge for teachers is to recognize what the Rossini mezzo-soprano really is and what is required of proper technique to do these roles.

In these thesis, I have tried to explain and to observe this problem, because I think it is a crucial for the determination of a Rossini singer.

Other important things, of course, is a nice voice and a talent for stage acting, which can be, when lead by an experienced teacher, a great combination in order to become a splendid Rossini interpreter.

I have to say that I did not find so many written things about this type of voice, especially about those characteristics of the Rossini voices. This, however, made me more interested in this theme.

For some time I have been occupied with Rossini's music, and especially how to interpret his music written for mezzo-soprano. It seems like Rossini's music requires a "special" voice, which has different colours than the voice that suites, for instance, music of Verdi or Wagner.

Methods and Aims

My observation is to explain main problems of developing the mezzo-soprano voice in intention to interpret Rossini's operas in a proper way. The aim can be the answer on the following question: How could one become and exist as a Rossini mezzo-soprano?

Researching Sources

I read some interesting books, but I have to say I couldn't find an exact literature for this research. Other sources used are recordings like DVD-s, CD-s, some useful conversations with my teachers, and internet. All information is used to expose different opinions about Rossini's singers and about his music.

Observation

I observed technical and interpretative aspects of learning and singing Rossini's opera roles, through instruction, masterclasses, view of operas, at opera houses and DVD, CD and concerts.

Historical and Hermeneutic

I have used these methods to make the introduction in first section about Rossini, and in section about his three operas *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *La Cenerentola* and *L'Italiana in Algeri*.

Comparative

I have compared some of Rossini's arias, some different opinions about technique and vocal tuition.

Artistic and Interpretative

This part consists of making interpretative performances on part of the works that is also a part of my examination

Shortly About Gioacchino Rossini

(born Pesaro, 29 February, 1792; died Passy, 13 November 1868)

His parents were musicians, his father a horn player and his mother a singer. So he learnt the horn and singing as a boy. He studied in Bologna and began his operatic career there when, at 18, he wrote a one-act comedy for Venice. One of seven operas written in 16 months, was *La pietra del paragone* and that was success at La Scala in 1812.

This level of activity continued in the ensuing years. The serious opera *Tancredi* is one of the first that won international acclaim in 1813. After this he wrote farcically comic opera *L'italiana in Algeri*, the one showing a fusion of lyrical expression and dramatic needs, with its crystalline melodies, arresting harmonic inflections and colorful orchestral writing, the other moving easily between the sentimental, the patriotic, the absurd and the sheer lunatic. Both operas were written for Venetian theatres and didn't have such success in Milan. But in 1815 Rossini went to Naples as musical and artistic director of the Teatro San Carlo, which led to a concentration on serious opera. But he was allowed to compose for other theatres, and from this time date two of his supreme comedies, written for Rome, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *La Cenerentola*. The former, with its elegant melodies, its exhilarating rhythms and its superb ensemble writing, has claims to be considered the greatest of Italian comic operas, eternally fresh in its wit its inventiveness. It dates from 1816; initially it was a failure, but it quickly became the most loved of his comic works, admired alike by Beethoven and Verdi. The next year saw *La Cenerentola*, a charmingly sentimental tale in which the heroine moves from a touching folksy ditty as the scullery maid to brilliant coloratura apt to a royal maiden.

Most important operas that Rossini have composed were in the period in Naples. The third act of his *Otello* (1816), with its strong unitary structure, marks his maturity as a musical dramatist. The Neapolitan operas, even though much dependant on solo singing of a highly florid kind, show an enormous expansion of musical means, with more and longer ensembles and the chorus an active

participant; the accompanied recitative is more dramatic and the orchestra is given greater prominence. Rossini also abandoned traditional overtures, probably in order to involve his audiences in the drama from the outset.

In that time the leading soprano was Isabella Colbran, mistress of the impresario, Barbaia. She transferred her allegiance to Rossini, who in 1822 married her; they were not long happy together.

Among the masterpieces from this period are *Maometto II* (1820) and, written for Venice at the end of his time in Naples, *Semiramide* (1823).

In 1823 Rossini left for London and Paris where he took on the directorship of the Theatre-Italien, composing for that theatre and Opera. *Le siege de Corinthe* and *Moise et Pharaon* are adaptations from Paris period. *Le Comte Ory* is a comic opera, and *Guillaume Tell* wholly. This last, widely regarded as his chef d'oeuvre, and very long, is a rich tapestry of his most inspired music, with elaborate orchestration, many ensembles, spectacular ballets and processions in the French tradition, opulent orchestral writing and showing a new harmonic boldness.

At 37, he retired from opera composition. In 1837 Rossini left Paris to live in Italy, mainly in Bologna. But he suffered prolonged and painful illness there. His wife Isabella died in 1845 and the next year he married Olympe Pelissier, with whom he had lived for 15 years and who tended him through his ill-health. He composed hardly at all during this period. But he went back to Paris in 1855, and his health and humor returned, with wit and refinement that he called *Peches de vieillesse* (*Sins of Old Age*) including the graceful and economical *Petite messe solennelle* (1863). Universally honored, he died in 1868. *

*www.wikipedia.org, *Gioacchino Rossini*

About Singing in General

The development of singing technique started a long time ago. Even in very early times the phenomenon of the voice and its specific ability of the singer, used to be the subject of scientists' researches. Both the famous philosophers, Aristotle and Galen, knew that the voice was produced in the larynx but detailed explanations about this mechanism were not available. Real beginnings of scientific explanation about the creation of voice started when the laryngeal mirror was discovered.

That was in the second half of the 19th century (a mirror for examining the larynx, in use even today). At the same time vocal cords were observed for the first time ever. The man who made this colossal discovery was Manuel Garcia (1805-1906, a famous singing Professor who taught for half a century at the Royal Academy of Music in London, Great Britain.

(Cvejjic, 1994: 27)

“Voice, its mechanism, tone emission, its thousand modifications are science. Singing however is an art. Without art the science is deprived of something that's essential: the flame, heavenly expression, sacred fire (le feu sacre). But surely art without science is incomplete.” - Melchisedec (Cvejjic, 1994: VII)

A famous singing teacher from the Conservatoire de Paris explained very clearly that if art is based on science then art stops to be purely empirical; it becomes the property of everyone and therefore information about voice examinations can be repeated and consequently properly researched. (Cvejjic, 1994: VII)

The art of singing is the skill of using the poetry as much as the music. That's why singing pedagogy should be focused on words as much as the music.

Ivo Lhotka Kalinski says in his book “Art of Singing”, that “singing is idealising speech.....sing like you speak”. (Kalinski, 1975: 6)

He actually observes that if a singer can't “talk” with his audience through the singing word it is because he is not making close contact with the emotional meaning of the text and as a result the singer does not perform as though he believes in the written word.

Commenting on the relationship between singing and speaking, Walther Gruner, a German who settled in London after World War 2, said that the Italians have a distinctive advantage because there is not a big difference between their speaking and their singing. They speak while they sing. The speech of the Welsh in Great Britain also have a sing-song melody which in turn also narrows the gap between speech and the 'produced' singing voice. Perhaps this is the explanation why so many singers from Italy and Wales are “born singers”. (Grindea/Gruner, 1995: 67)

With our voice we can express our emotions and inspire the audience more than any other instrument. In order to make a sincere and natural human impression to an audience, Ivo Kalinski thought a singer should develop:

- a) a sense of the beauty of sound (tone) as well as the musical phrase
- b) a sense of the text
- c) and with the above mentioned, the emotional communication with the audience

Many singers are confused over the aforementioned issues and only try to show the natural possibilities of the voice. Pure voice is not enough for a true singing artist. I believe this is a strong statement because many singers don't express the poet's sentiments through the composer's thoughts but also an audience will react much better if a singer serves the poetry as well as the musical intentions; not just exhibiting a natural voice with a good technical ability. Otherwise I think an audience is left untouched by a cold and clinical performance.

Young singers need to learn this art early on in their careers and many find this difficult to find in

their performances. Undoubtedly life experience is an asset and also it is important to read good literature and enjoy the visual art of the great masters. (Kalinski, 1975: 4)

“Speech is the master of music, and not its servant.”

Claudio Monteverdi (Cvejic 1994: 93)

“Merely singing words are untrue and ugly if the singer doesn't burn with his own spirit.”

(Kalinski, 1975: 4)

“The Voice has to be the person” - a quotation from one of my Professors, Dr Neil Mackie from the Royal College of Music in London.

But a naturally beautiful voice is not enough. Every singer must master the technique and the technical approach in their singing. Often young singers who are blessed with a natural voice can have a short career because without a sound technique the voice can tire and many bad habits can be formed. This has happened throughout time - young singers tackle difficult operatic roles, such as the Rossini roles, when all they have is a natural voice with no technique.

I found Dr. Cvejic's thoughts on 'Psychology and Singing' very interesting indeed.

“Psychology as a science that explores the deep recesses of a human's mind, their inner life, their psychical properties, features prominently in everyone's artistic life. Singing is associated with a lot of psychical manifestations. People have to have an interest and a desire to sing; so that they should be able to sing properly, people have to have artistic leanings (musical endowment, the feel of rhythm, proper hearing). When they sing they express both their own and the composer's feelings).

In addition to proper musical conditions, a voice student must also possess an ability to engage in positive thinking. For proper success one requires willpower, motivation,

perseverance and persistence. A lot less of the success will be achieved by a voice student who is lazy, without initiative and a strong will power, who lacks an ability to concentrate, and who is without strong emotions and perseverance. “ (Cvejic, 1994: 47)

From my own experience I can concur with these wise words and I also think the psychological aspect in singing is of prime importance. For example a stressful situation can play a very big influence on our singing. Very often singers cannot control their breath nor their support; therefore, they cannot concentrate on words, on phrasing, and on other important aspects resulting in a lack of emotional communication which leaves a performance bland and sterile.

It is difficult, but nevertheless very necessary, to be able to perform after an unhappy or stressful day.

A singer needs to learn the art of projecting confidence even though they are under stress. Again, it is important to be able to call upon one's technical resources to produce a fine performance even under pressure or emotional upset. We singers must remember the famous Italian words – “boca ridente” which mean “smiling mouth”.

Ivo Lotka Kalinski comments:

“Negative opinion that technical exercises don't have any subject, because they don't contain any word, is incorrect. Vocal exercises must have emotional joy and freedom within them - not mere sounds and agreeable noises.” (Kalinski, 1975: 7)

All the above mentioned observations bring me back to the art of performing Rossini's music. Without these important attributes his music would be impossible to perform with absolute conviction. However, singing is a complex art especially during the first years of studying and it is vitally important to find a mentor and voice teacher who can inspire and lead a young singer to find their voice, their technique and their singing souls. The chemistry between singer and teacher is all-important; without it, training to be a singer is a worthless exercise.

Vocal Tuition

In this section I am going to observe vocal tuition generally; not least, because it is extremely relevant to the art of singing Rossini's distinctive music.

I share the learned opinion of Dr. Dusan Cvejic (already mentioned previously) who has stated that the human voice is the most beautiful, the most excellent yet a complex instrument as it is inside the human body and therefore inaccessible to an immediate visual analysis. (Cvejic, 1994: 210)

There have been throughout the ages the usual questions – “why do we have to learn to sing?” and “Isn't it a natural art form?” This opinion can be very dangerous especially for young voices who need to learn the methodology of the voice like learning to drive a motor car!

My personal experiences in vocal pedagogy demands that I need to think about my technique at all times - one must always learn and one must always have another pair of ears, for as singers we cannot hear exactly how we sound.

What do we understand with the phrase: “a good vocal technique”?

“Phonation, the functions of the voice and of the speech are not instinct-related operations, they have to be mastered.” (Cvejic, 1994: 210)

A sound vocal technique is actually fundamental if a singer is to be able to cope with a composer's demands properly - especially with Rossini's music. It takes time to develop a sure technique and without it a singer will not progress. But a singer needs patience, hard work and a strong commitment if they are going to succeed. A singer must also learn good vocal habits from the beginning of their training and also satisfactory muscle involvement including muscle development - a singer needs to train like an athlete.

According to Magda Olivero, our technique must be right at all times. Even when we don't feel well, we can still sing if the technique is correct. It is sometimes possible to sing even with a bad bronchitis but if the singer has laryngitis it is almost impossible. In fact a singer should not perform under such circumstances. In short, a singer needs a solid technique if they are going to meet the demands in all the areas of a performance. Otherwise a character, such as in operas by Rossini, cannot be realised if the singer cannot articulate the florid passages for example. Rossini's magical writings dictate that the singer needs a sure technique - the use of breath, focus, flexibility and above all, passion.

(Hines, 2003: 210)

What should beginners know?

The most difficult time for a singer is the very beginning when a young person is finding their instrument. Many teachers are less keen to start voices from the beginning and only work with established voices - and then they take all the credit! However, it is often the skilled teacher who finds the instrument in a young person and all too often they are forgotten when another comes along and starts to mould the second layer of instruction on the young student. There are of course many eminent teachers of voice worldwide who do not have the courage, or indeed the experience, to work on the young voice. It is vital that a beginner is in safe hands. Often the voice at this time is a natural instrument and the teacher must find a way to build a technique without getting in the way of the God-given talent. It is important too that a teacher does not dictate their own singing voice on a youngster but rather build surely and honestly the voice of their student.

I believe that most young people have a certain ability and are free from most bad vocal habits; it is often the teacher who is not strict enough with a beginner's approach to singing. But normally, young singers are open and willing to receive instruction and rely on their teacher wholeheartedly. It

is so important that a young singer finds the right teacher at an early stage in their development.

I have to say that I was very lucky to find the right teachers at the right time and so I can speak from experience. It is no good if a young singer starts with a teacher who has to be satisfied with their own vanity. A teacher must have integrity, honesty and be able to inspire a young singer as well as teach the best vocal health during the early days especially.

I think this explains why only a few talented beginners become great singers. Of course, as has been already mentioned, a singer, no matter what age, must have musicality, intelligence and real commitment. They must learn how to practice and find the balance between performing and learning. All too often, young singers attempt repertoire which is totally unsuited for their embryonic voices. Of course, a young singer needs luck – the luck to find the right teacher with the right amount of patience.

Manuel Garcia, the famous teacher stated that the main inner prerequisites for a beginner are:

- a) a sincere love for singing and music in general
- b) the ability to memorize melodies and hear the harmonic
- c) combinations of a piece of music, a positive spirit and always an open mind.

I also believe that a young singer must have the ability to sing in tune with ease and to be able to develop a sense of good intonation. The latter comes from the ear initially before becoming part of the focus and the general technical approach to singing.

Gracia also mentions that it is also important that a young singer has good physical aspects to add to the voice – ‘the voice is the body and the body the voice.’ Physicality is all-important in a singer's approach but a young singer can ill-afford to be too physically forceful in the early stages of their learning.

Lotte Lehman, a very famous singer in her time, once said that a singer should be “completely” talented if they are to learn how to sing properly. She also believed that singers were born with a good voice but had to develop through a good education the aspects of the art - stage craft, acting ability and above all to be able to express open emotion. She believed that six years of elementary

training was essential before starting advanced training and performance. (Lehman, 2004: 21)

These two great singers and teachers mentioned above have the same starting point but it is rare that a young singer has everything at the beginning. Perhaps they have been given a voice from God and their gift is special. Yet, luck can play a big part too in the career of a singer - meeting the right person who can encourage their art - and luck to have been born into a musical environment.

Grace Bumbry, a world famous singer once remarked:

“From the very beginning, as soon as I became aware of my voice, I wanted to be a singer. It's a wonderful feeling to be able to communicate with people in this seemingly unnatural and bizarre manner. People come to an opera house or to a concert hall to experience something special.” *

Grace Bumbry also said that this is the starting point but it was necessary to form a sound technique or else a singer can commit vocal suicide! Again, we return to technique and the foundations of good singing practice.

Finally, as young singers we have to be very careful about choosing the correct repertoire because that can be a big step in building your instrument and technique. And we also need to take care in every day living and in ordinary life because our instrument is very sensitive and fragile if used incorrectly. For example, speaking in an over-crowded room or in a smoky atmosphere and even shouting is bad for the voice. The human voice is the most sensitive of instruments and from an early time young singers must learn to treat their voices with respect and care.

What teachers have to do?

In my researches, I came across an interesting story about the famous singer, Magda Olivero who had many teachers before she found the right one. (Note what I mentioned earlier - finding the right teacher is all-important.)

Miss Olivero had some very bad experiences with teachers and as a result her technique was very fragile and faulty.

* www.trubadur.pl, *Interview with Grace Bumbry*, Tomasz Pasternak and Krzysztof Skwierczynski

The critical press were extremely tough on her and her performances, stating that she was unmusical, sang with no personality and basically she had nothing to offer. (Again we come round to the fact that it is not possible to sing without a technique if the singer is to rise to the vocal demands of an operatic role.)

During an audition the panel thought Miss Olivero's singing was not even worth discussing. However, in a part of the hall there sat a famous teacher and conductor, Luigi Gerrussi who disagreed. He saw that she had a great deal to offer but she had been allowed to develop bad singing habits and mannerisms. In turn he took her on as his pupil and months later she recovered her natural singing voice but this time with the required technical approach to underpin her musical intentions.

In some years she enjoyed a great career and sang many Rossini roles to great acclaim. She went on to say that in all the years she had been learning singing, no-one had discussed technical issues, not least the use of the breath and the diaphragm together with the idea of sustaining the sound. Her new teacher also spoke for the first time about the use of energy together with the inter-costal muscles. She too had to recover her confidence.

“I passed those hours in the studio in terror, but slowly, slowly, after six months of studying every day, I changed completely.....?an absolute metamorphosis. Another voice came out. Then we began to study arias and scores. He made me use my imagination, which I already had by nature, and I have always used it.” (Hines, 2003: 204)

To develop any voice one needs great care and patience from both the student and the teacher; even moreso in the mezzo 'fach' which is my voice type. Ideally, it is good to study with a teacher of your own voice but it is not altogether necessary. Most teachers have been performers at one time in the careers although it is not always so that a good teacher has been a good performer and vice versa. Teachers need to start with simple exercises, the use of breath and the physicality without tension - often a difficult balance. Also, as I discussed already a teacher must open the eyes of their

student to the emotional approach even in simple exercises. Again, voice is not everything.

It is also very important that teachers don't try to make a voice bigger than it naturally is; the instrument should be allowed to develop at its own rate and not forced. Too many young voices are ruined by teachers who demand big sounds too early on in the training.

In an ideal world, it would be good for a beginner to study about 10 - 15 minutes per day with the professor and never on their own - at least to begin with. After a year, the time should be increased to 30 minutes and so on. . (Kalinski, 1975: 25)

Of course this is not always possible.

Reasons for doing this method are very obvious and in many ways this is how I found my own voice in my native Croatia. I can remember finding my voice and then practicing too much. As a result I tired and all the good practice was lost. Now I practise a few times a day but in very concentrated short periods. A good teacher can instill good practice habits from the beginning and thus mould a singer's future. This is one of the most important issues in teaching - good practice.

“The throat does not exist. The throat must always be like gum rubber, completely relaxed. You can make any movement without interrupting the sound ...sing with the head laid completely back ...in any position ...because it is independent. The breath works by itself. The muscles of the throat don't exist.” - Magda Olivero, (Heins, 2003: 208)

These words inspire me and also remind me of the things my teachers have told me in the past. I think it is important for singers to revisit the words their teachers say.

It is true to say that some voice, mezzo for example, cannot sing all the repertoire for their voice type. It is important to sing the correct repertoire which suits the voice. Some mezzos will be unable to sing the Rossini roles while others can only attempt the big Verdi & Puccini roles.

Singing the right vocal material is best for the voice and keeps the instrument in good shape and in

good healthy order.

Teachers also need to be aware of this - too many teachers encourage the wrong repertoire but it is also very important to tackle repertoire which is technically challenging too, provided this is done in the correct manner.

Challenging repertoire can develop the voice and put strength into the voice provided this is done without 'pushing' and force.

"Voice lost once is lost forever". (Garcia, 2002: 32)

The teachers should make their young students aware of the early Italian repertoire - the old masters like Caccini and Monteverdi who both wrote beautiful melodies to the open Italian vowels which are perfect for a young singer.

Rossini's music requires the proper use of the breath - another important aspect of good singing. Without good breath control, Rossini is impossible to sing especially the long florid lines which run through all the registers like an instrument.

Technical Observations

About breath

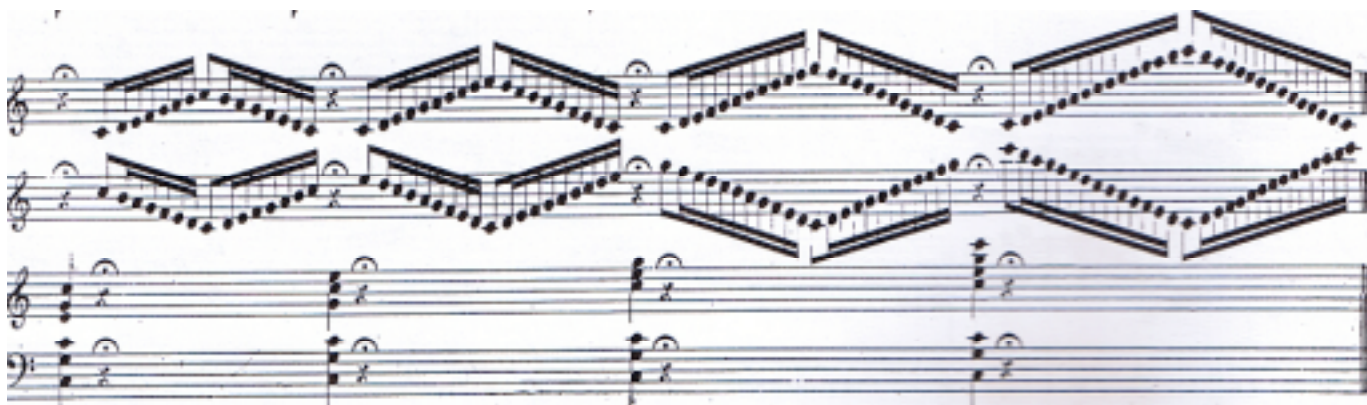
Technique and the use of breath has changed throughout the years. In the early Italian era, singers used the breath inhaled mainly in the chest. In many ways, this technique suited the music but when scores took a more harmonic structure and were more heavily orchestrated it was necessary to think about greater strength in the breath by the use of inter-costal breathing - deeper breathing and making more use of the lower muscles and the back muscles. In this technique the lower parts of the rib cage and the upper parts of the abdominal wall expand during the taking in of the breath and at the same time the diaphragm goes down but not with force. The diaphragm is an important muscle in the breathing process and in the sustaining of the sound.

“This is the most acceptable type of breathing and will enable the singer to reach their interpretative heights. “ (Cvejić, 1994: 24)

As singers we do not feel the diaphragm like we can feel our hearts beating and a teacher can find difficulty in helping the young singer find the correct use of this important muscle which can help to control the flow of air and also help with the sustaining legato feeling which all singers need. When this issue is achieved the singer must progress to find some flexibility in the sound - some coloratura passages - which are found in most Rossini opera arias.

The use of legato within the coloratura sections is necessary for an evenness of tone. Singers also need to find the art of palatal focus in the mask - and at all times using the breath to achieve *martellato*, staccato and coloratura.

Example for practicing coloratura made by Manuel Garcia:



Example nr. 1

It is impossible to sing Rossini's demanding music without the proper use of the diaphragm and the constant use of the support, what we usually call *apoggio*. Rossini's music consists very much of staccato and *martellato*. By my own experience I can say breath is the most important thing in making nice phrases specially in some very coloratura parts like *La Cenerentola*, *Il Barbiere di Sivigli*, *La Donna dell Lago*, *Semiramide*, etc. by Rossini.

Rossini's music is not usually too dramatic so we shouldn't sing it with full power of the voice; actually it is much easier with less voice but with good diaphragmatic support and the necessary energy. If the singer starts to push on these demanding phrases then the voice tires. If on the other hand we can ride with the breath and the *coloratura* sounds even, then the singer is on good track.

I have found a very useful explanation of this idea in one interview with the great singer Magda Olivero whom I have previously mentioned.

“I sometimes have the impression of seeing my breath with inner eyes. When I breathe, I am aware of my diaphragm. If I breathe and I am aware that my diaphragm has not moved, it is a sign that there is something in my body that is not functioning. But when I feel right, the mouth relaxed, the throat relaxed above all ...breathing lovingly, gently through the nose. ...I feel this breath going down. ...Beautiful! The throat enlarges, and then, at a certain point at the end of the inhalation, I feel my diaphragm engages too.”

(Hines, 2003: 207)

The Attack of Tone

The 'attack' on tone is the starting point of the sound and is the coordinated action between the amount of pressure of expired air and the muscular strength that provide assistance to the entire breathing mechanism. (Cvejic, 1994: 107)

The production of proper sound coordination between 'attack' and *appoggio* is indispensable; and I further believe that this method should be mastered before any serious attempt is made at performing Rossini's music. Otherwise, a faulty technical approach to his music is grossly inadequate for a singer and even more so for the listening audience. A Rossini singer has to be in full technical command.

According to Dr. Cvejic good 'attack' should be preceded by a light and deep inspiration, then we keep the breath, during which time we create aural and visual images of the tone which serves to stabilize the position of the larynx. After all, we produce the tone in this area of the throat. (Cvejic, 1994: 110)

This technique has to be worked on for many years and it is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of singing; the balance between breath and the proper 'attach' on the tone which makes for a healthy production.

Palatal perception

A most important issue is the relaxed palatal feeling which opens the throat naturally and at the same time the larynx goes down and is free from tension. This technical point is the only way to achieve a beautiful sound which is of a high quality.

Head tone

Head tone is very close to the idea of palatal perception. The spaces and cavities in our skull help to project the sound and use these natural resonating chambers. But of course, it is difficult to feel these holes and we as singers must rely on sensations in this area of the head.

The famous American teacher, Arnold Rose said that it is possible to sing much longer using head tones without tiring the voice and it is also possible to use much higher intensities without damaging the vocal cords. Sustained singing without head tone is one of the main causes of vocal deterioration. (Rose, 1962: 148)

Head resonances

Resonances of the head consist of a system of resonating cavities above the vocal cords which also includes the upper part of the larynx, the pharynx, the mouth, the nose and the sinus areas. There are some elements of resonance that can be mobile like the tongue, the lips, the lower jaw, the soft palate, the nostrils plus the bone under the tongue and the epiglottis (the cover of the larynx) while the immobile parts are the hard palate, the teeth, and the sinuses. (Cvejić, 1994: 145-146)

In order to find suitable head resonance a singer must feel the sensations in the mask; if the sound vibrates in the mask then normally the soft palate is slightly raised while the larynx is relaxed and in a free downward position.

Chest resonance

It is important to find a balance between the head and chest resonating areas. A singer must feel the sound within the body - the chest being the main resonator. All too often singers use the chest more readily than the head resonators which add a natural brilliance and give a cutting projection to the sound.

This aspect we feel only in low register, it is not possible in the middle or high register of the voice. Mezzo-sopranos need it much more than other voice types.

Chest tone or chest resonance is something that we can do in many ways, but as proper as we use those muscles we will save our cords from tiredness and illness.

I have to say that different singing schools have different opinion about chest resonance. Some say, that practicing of the chest voice is very dangerous for singing technique in general, but some schools have been using this part of singing technique as well.

Dangerous chest tone is made by using only the muscle *vocalis* (inner muscle of vocal cords), actually if it works alone. Its antagonist, like the muscle *cricothyroideus* and all other muscles that should work together, are relaxed and do nothing. Therefore, the muscle *vocalis* makes contractions that can for sure make the cords ride broad which can destroy the voice if one use it more often. However, if the muscles of chest tones are functioning together with muscles that make cords ride longer, it will not be dangerous; actually, it will produce a nice sound and a safe voice. (Kalinski, 1975: 37)

My experience is that if these muscles work together with the head tone feeling, there is no more tiredness for cords. One association that my first teacher Olivera Jovanovic learned me is to put my hand on my chest and sing, then I could feel the chest resonator, and at the same time feel the tone in my mask.

I think that every Rossini mezzo-soprano should have chest tones, because his music needs them. He wrote many deep roles, actually with some very deep notes, impossible to sing with only head resonance, because we would not be heard in audience or the quality of those tones would not be nice.

I also have to say that proper singing of deep notes is also very important for middle and high registers. Sometimes I hear mezzos that sing with “holes” in the middle register even if that register should be the best part of their voices, but then I hear how they sing deep notes and everything become clear in my head. It is “over chest singing” that makes their voices heavier and with holes.

Specialising in Rossini's music

Once a singer (and in my case, a mezzo-soprano) works on all the technical points mentioned above they become proficient and ready to specialise in particular styles and indeed a particular composer.

Of course, all singers should perform in as many styles as possible - from the baroque masterpieces of J S Bach to contemporary composers of the day such as Henze, Stockhausen and all the wonderful Scandinavian composers.

However, it is important career-wise to be able to specialise in a particular composer, such as Rossini, and it is doubly important that a teacher recognises that a pupil has the possibilities to rise to the challenges of a composer's vocal demands. Often this can be too late for the voice can develop in a different direction and lose its flexibility which Rossini's music dictates.

Undoubtedly Rossini's music needs a sure technical foundation which enables the singer to navigate the long complicated melismas or coloratura sections. The voice needs to be incredibly flexible, almost instrumental, like a flute or an oboe and there also needs to be a lightness in the sound. Voices are very sensitive instruments and in many ways there is nothing as simple as a natural technique. We all need to vocalise and practise in order to find a secure technical foundation. (A house would fall down without a foundation!) It is true to say that many singers (and singing teachers) develop their voice to meet the demands of the bigger orchestrated music such as Verdi and Wagner; singers tend to make their voices darker, bigger and less beautiful in quality. Of course, there are always exceptional cases but it is true to say that when voices are heavier and darker the flexibility is less accessible. Often a bigger voice which attempts to sing florid music finds that the sound is breathy, unclear and unfocused, possibly because the air leaks between the cords or the diaphragm is used in such a strong forceful way that a wide vibrato appears. This technical approach to the singing of Rossini's music is flawed and articulation is well nigh impossible leaving little opportunity for the singer to produce a clear crystal sound which is highly necessary for the execution of this particular composer's music.

In today's professional world of performing opera it is true to say that young singers have to be versatile and to be able to sing in various styles. Without question, flexible music, such as the Rossini repertoire, keeps the voice fresh and focused but all too often young singers are required to sing repertoire outwith their particular fach (voice type) in some opera houses particularly in Germany where house singers have to deliver roles most nights of the week, and often roles which simply do not lie well in their range or style.

In earlier times of the 17th and 18th century singers sang mainly within their voice type - and coloratura specialists were plentiful. Because of this Rossini and such like composers were more able to write florid music in their era since this tradition was carried on throughout the centuries. Unfortunately in the 20th century opera managers were more demanding and a broader repertoire was expected. For my voice type, it is important, particularly as a heavier mezzo-soprano, to maintain the flexibility for Rossini's music even though I sing other repertoire equally demanding in other ways. On the other hand, singing the Handel 'trouser' roles for a mezzo-soprano are also a great challenge and use all the technical resources which are required for the interpretation of Rossini's roles.

Famous singers in recent years especially, try various styles and often not for the best. Grace Bumbry, the celebrated mezzo-soprano said that everything depends on the individual singer and a singer should perform repertoire which is best for them.

“There is no value in trying a role because another singer sings it and so should I...”

-Grace Bumbry *

The Diva went on to say:

“If you know your voice really well, if you've become friends with your vocal apparatus, you know which roles you can sing and which you shouldn't even touch.” - Grace Bumbry

* www.trubadur.pl, Interview with Grace Bumbry by Pasternak and Skwierczynski,

She was one of the few singers of her generation that could sing many different styles including the dramatic role of Acucena from Verdi's opera *Il Trovatore* to the big contrast of Rosina in Rossini's opera *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. In the latter years of her career she started to sing soprano roles and she made a great impression in this kind of repertoire too. She was able to do this because she kept her voice flexible and fresh singing Rossini's music.

Another example is the celebrated Greek singer, Maria Callas. Even as a soprano she was singing contrasting roles from the lyrical repertoire to the dramatic roles of *Turandot* and *Tosca*. But her career was short and she latterly ran into vocal crisis with the critics writing:

“Things work out differently for different singers. Some of them, more prudent, perhaps, have long and distinguished careers with very few risks and a carefully chosen repertoire (if limited by today's standards). Others, like Callas, burn out relatively fast, but leave an indelible trace long after they are spent. In that light, it would be useless thinking about what could have happened if only Maria Callas had chosen a more careful approach to her singing and choice of roles.” *

Again we return to choice of repertoire and the repertoire to suit the voice - not the opera Intendant! These facts are of huge importance for the young singer and this is why I choose to sing Rossini at this juncture of my career; also his roles suit fresh young voices but particularly mezzo-sopranos.

I will always remember one sentence that one of my teachers said. During a lesson with Professor Neil Mackie singing Rossini's “Una voce poco fa”, he stopped me and I noticed the worry on his face. I will never forget the moment. “How old are you?” “24 years” I replied. “Then you must sing like 24 years and not 44 years”.

This association was perfect for me and I understood his point. I was making my voice too dark, heavy and undisciplined. I have heard since this conversation many young singers - and especially mezzo-sopranos - sounding old with worn voices.

*www.opera-l.com archives, “*A further look on Callas*” by Milan Petkovic 2000.

Rossini studied singing and sang a young boy. He knew the possibilities of the voice and never wrote music which was impossible or dangerous to sing. He wrote florid passages for all voice types but is best known for his mezzo-soprano writing.

My experience of finding Rossini's music saved my voice. I had been badly advised and as a result, I was singing repertoire which was too heavy for my vocal resources. One of my former teachers remarked that a singer needs to have a perfect legato and has to be able to sing coloratura at one level without changing the position of the voice between every note. Rossini's music helped me enormously to find that legato and to sing through my registers with ease and with no change to the overall sound. Without question the advice which my teacher gave me saved me from vocal suicide and now my teachers in Norway encourage me to continue with Rossini's roles - the arias are in many ways like technical exercises, singing on vowel sounds rather than words; just as I mentioned previously.

Mobility of the voice

If you have the ability to sing in fast tempo, through swift movements of the vocal apparatus, you can achieve flexibility of the phonation, which in turn facilitates execution of even the most difficult sections of a vocal score. (Cvejić, 1994: 202-203)

In Rossini's time, this ability was called *agilita*, but today a more common name is *coloratura*. This voice ability is one that makes Rossini's music so difficult and Rossini's singers so special.

According to Manuel Garcia, we have two types of *coloratura* (*agilita*):

1. *Coloratura legata*
2. *Coloratura granita* (grainy)

I have written about *coloratura legata* before. Now I will give some information on the *coloratura granita*.

Coloratura granita suppose to mean different types of separated *coloratura*:

agilita martellata, *agilita pichettata*, which is called *staccato*. (Garcia, 2002: 47-49)

Agilita martellata is a type of singing which means hitting with voice like a hammer (*martello* in Italian means hammer). We should sing it with more power (compared with *staccato*) and with every tone separated from the other. However, not too much support from the stomach, but more from elastic diaphragm.

Agilita pichettata has fast, short, and easy tones without making accents on them. We shouldn't sing them with huge breath and strong *apoggio*.

The voice flexibility exercises are ideal to avoid constricted notes and a forced voice. A fixed, constricted voice cannot even execute coloratura. Through quick movements, one develops the flexibility of the voice. An elastic, flexible voice is capable of executing the most difficult vocal phrases. (Cvejić, 1994: 203)

The Trill

Mastering a trill is one more thing that makes a coloratura mezzo-soprano so special.

They are two notes that follow each other in range of small or great seconds. We usually sing them fast and with *martellato* on the first note.

Trills are properly executed when is proper the coordination between the vocal muscles; when we have an open throat, proper breath, and soft palate feeling.

The trill is not unlike the other types of the voice flexibilities. It will serve for them to achieve brightness of the voice, and also to relax and make the larynx flexible, in use for a better tone control.

Warming up and practising the Rossini's music

It is extremely important to find out the meaning of the story behind the opera and in particular the character of the role one is studying even before a note of music is uttered. All too often young

singers rush to music shops to buy the latest CD recording or video and let others do the hard work for them. Young singers try to cut corners but in the end the result is less good than those who study in a structured fashion.

After understanding the plot, the meaning of the text and the character behind the role (for example, Rosina) I begin to read the text and articulate the spoken Italian concentrating on the double consonants and perfecting the open Italian vowel sounds. These in themselves are good for the health of the voice and singing in the Italian language encourages a sound technique. It is important too to understand the connection between the text and the music and to get behind Rossini's intentions. After work has been done by the singer themselves then I believe it is useful to listen to the great singers' interpretations. It is then possible to understand why certain phrases are sung in a particular way or it can be interesting to hear how an established singer gets round a difficult passage from the technical aspect. It also makes sense to have lessons from a singer who has performed the role but a young singer must avoid becoming a mere copy of another singer's interpretation. We as young performers need to make a piece of music our own.

At all times I learn my Rossini score with a small voice and lightly in approach. Rossini demands this in his music. As I have mentioned previously, it is impossible to sing his coloratura sections with a heavy voice but also it is bad to learn with too much sound when the voice is unsure of the twists and turns of the melodic line. I believe this approach is also appropriate in the heavier music of Verdi and Puccini. The voice must know where it is going before a singer attempts to sing with full voice. This brings me to mentioning how I warm up my voice even before I start singing the arias of Rossini.

Normally before starting to sing Rossini arias, I exercise first of all with a closed mouth and speak the sound 'brrrrrrrrrr' and then in a five note scale. Then I move on to doing the same exercise but with an open mouth while pronouncing the consonant 'rrrrrrrrrr'. These exercises help to find the right placement and focus and at the same time to feel the correct use of the breath.

When this short exercise is finished I usually do some legato notes in a major scale or a major chord and sustain the sound with good breath control.

After then I move to coloratura exercises like the example from Manual Garcia:



Example nr. 2 (by Garcia)

I begin this exercise slowly and then get faster and faster while singing on the breath but not with a breathy emission. I open my throat and try to feel the sound spinning in front of the mouth. It helps too to think about the placing of the tone near the brow and in the cheek bones in this exercise. The other example is faster and more complex which helps to stretch the voice and make a good connection between the registers and also encourages a good legato sound.



Example nr. 3

These exercises can be more useful if mezzo-soprano practices with a constant dynamic. In that way we make better control of the respiration and diaphragmatic support. It is vital not to push particularly on the higher notes. (This idea has been given to me by my professor Poul Erik Hansen from the Kristiansand Conservatory, and I am grateful for that)

I also try to imagine that the air doesn't go outside but into the mouth which is called aspiration. I found this helpful because I save more air when singing the coloratura and my larynx goes into a relaxed position and my throat is open. All these exercises prepare me for the art of singing Rossini's arias.

The technical aspect is indispensable and without it the singer finds difficulty in interpreting the music of Rossini. We need to consider also:

1. The presentation of the composer's thoughts through the music
2. The style and approach to the music
3. Characterisation of a role

Characteristics of a Rossini mezzo-soprano

Rossini is one composer - maybe the only one - who normally allocates his heroines to the mezzo-soprano voice.

This is not common practice in the works of Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi and Puccini. Rossini paints his heroines with bright colours and above all, in a joyful spirit. But this is not the only aspect of his writing for the mezzo-soprano voice.

This takes me to my next question about Rossini's choice in using the mezzo-soprano.

Why does this great composer choose this voice type over all others when there are a number to choose from?

Rossini's female characters are full of serenity yet they are also sexy and full of seduction – for example, Isabella & Rosina. They can love but they can also be lively; yet on the other hand they can be full of coyness.

Even in a more subtle character, such as Cinderella, we hear the joy and happiness in the music but her character needs to be realised with a kind and positive spirit.

From Rossini's music we can conclude that the composer demands a mezzo-soprano with the ability to portray the characteristics of the role not merely one who can sing the notes. Both music and the character of the role work in tandem. 'Joi de vivre' must be upper most in a mezzo-soprano's mind when she plays a Rossini role - the spirit must have joy to convey the emotion required for such a role as Rosina, for example.

Rossini's mezzo-sopranos need these characteristics of personality but above all, the technical resources to negotiate the demanding coloratura writing which is perhaps the most virtuosic in all opera. I believe all light mezzo-sopranos who have this technical ability also have the necessary personality to play a Rossini role - it has been said that Rossini mezzo-sopranos are born not created in the rehearsal studio!

But perhaps Rossini had in mind the greater warmth and depth of the mezzo-soprano voice compared to, for example, the lyric soprano. Often this timbre (quality of sound) in the mezzo-soprano displays the tenderness which the composer wishes for in his characters. Yet his use of the coloratura sections indicate a playful side of the characters too – often childish at times, and particularly in the lower register where it is possible to find the humour in the sound; something the soprano voice would find difficulty with. So in short, Rossini has created his heroine characters with a distinctive mezzo-soprano quality of sound and one who has a special palette of colours.

A good example is Isabella's "Cruda sorte". During her first appearance on stage she sings a lyrical and gentle recitative which in turn changes her mood, so much so, that she starts the aria with maximum enthusiasm and happiness while the dazzling coloratura indicates her laughter. (A lyric soprano would be unable to get to the heart of the character because of the lack of the mezzo-soprano sound qualities.)

A Rossini 'woman' is immediately recognisable and authentic - just like his music. It is true to say that Mozart's operatic characters influenced Rossini's approach to writing for the mezzo-soprano. Without the qualities aforementioned a Rossini mezzo-soprano's interpretation would be sterile and bland.

We can resume that Rossini's mezzo is specific: by its timbre, its coloraturas, the big diapason, by its technical equivalency of the registers, its capability of transformation, but also by its capability of gentle timbre changing for better interpretation of the character.

So, everyone who interprets this music should take into a consideration all of these aspects, and if any of these parts are missing, the performance wouldn't be complete.

Performing the Rossini's operas

To perform an opera by Rossini, I think a mezzo-soprano should be well prepared within three aspects: singing, performing and acting.

Today it is not easy to amaze the audience, because there are too many singers that have amazed them before. However, we should always have on our mind why we should have all these aspects:

To make the audience satisfied.

The singing part is maybe the most important, because whether we like it or not the audience usually first come to listen to and to compare different interpretation, second the performances.

It is obvious for the audience that primer part in some opera play is the singer and the colour of her voice, and than follows acting and stage deportment.

I think that Rossini's operas are very difficult to sing on the stage, because singing is combined with different demands such an interpretation and acting.

As I said before, performing his music requires great technique and voice abilities, which are specialised for that kind of music.

Talent for acting is also very important because his operas need a lot of sense of humour and in it too many different feelings in the same opera play.

What do I mean when I say a talent for acting?

That is, by my opinion, an aspect of our personality that make us present characters very natural on the stage, which make the audience believe in what we present.

To make a good character of the role that we present, we need to sublime all these aspects.

I will give some examples of different operas and roles like Rosina from *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Angelina from *La Cenerentola* and Isabela from *L'Italiana in Algeri*.

Il Barbiere di Siviglia

Cesare Sterbini based a comic opera in two acts on Beaumarchais's comedy with a libretto. It is happening in the 17th century.

Rossini's "*Il Barbiere*" is the most popular opera he ever wrote.

"This Barber is more than a comedy; it is a feast of voices." - Melinda Bargreen*

"Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* is a comedy so expertly carpentered that it can still make an audience laugh 189 years after its premier. It is fun to hear accomplished singers leap over the vocal hurdles and watch them put their personal stamp on the famous comic scenes. " *

Role of Rosina

The role of Rosina is one that every female singer wants to sing, but the interpretation turns out best when a mezzo-soprano sings.

A character of Rosina is very interesting for interpretation. She is young but clever; she plays with all other actors on the stage.

Rosina is the ward of old Dr. Bartolo. He is planning to marry her. She, however, has fallen in love with a student, Lindoro. Lindoro is really the young Count Almaviva in disguise. He has been serenading her, and they have exchanged notes. Now, with another letter to Lindoro in her hand, she vows to foil Bartolo's plans and to follow her romantic longings in the first aria "Una voce poco fa". (Larsen-Gerhart, 1991: 9)

In the text, which she sings in first aria, I found a perfect connection between her character and Rossini's music; he wrote it ingeniously. I suggest to every mezzo-soprano, to listen to the music and the meaning of the words.

*seattletimes.com, Melinda Bargreen, May 8, 2000.

*www.boston.com, Richard Dyer "*The Barber*" 2005.

Una voce poco fa
qui nel cor mi risuono;
Il mio cor ferito e già,
E Lindor fu che il piago.
Sì, Lindoro mio sarà,
Lo giurai, la vincerò.

A voice, a little while ago,
Echoed here in my heart;
My heart is wounded now,
And it was Lindoro who covered it with wounds.
Yes, Lindoro will be mine –
I've sworn it, I shall win.

Il tutor ricuserà,
Io l'ingegno aguzzero;
Alla fin s'acceterà,
E contenta io restero.

My guardian will object,
I, quick-witted, will be sharp;
In the end he will acquiesce,
And I will be content.

Io sono docile,
Son rispettosa,
Sono ubbidiente,
Dolce, amorosa;
Mi lascio reggere,
Mi fo guidar.
Ma se mi tocano
Dov'è il mio debole,
Sarò una vipera,
E cento trappole
Prima di cedere farò giocar.

I am submissive,
I'm respectful,
I'm obedient,
Sweet, affectionate.
I allow myself to be governed;
I let myself to be guided.
But if they touch me
Where my sensitive spot is,
I will be a viper,
And I'll cause a hundred tricks
To be played before giving in. *

As I said “Una voce poco fa” is a beautiful aria which clearly shows the character of Rosina herself but also shows a singer's talents. She is charming, docile but feisty and fiery.

That is why I think one should not sing it just technically perfect; I think that one should concentrate more on expression. Moreover, expression can be shown by the timbre and the warmth of the mezzo voice.

*Translation by M. Gerhart , *Arias for mezzo-soprano* by R. Larsen

Even if this aria is not known as a difficult one, I think, it is difficult. I sang it several times and every time I had to have a substantial concentration, because the music and coloratura parts should not show the mobility of the voice only, but show the character of Rossina.

Because of difficulties of the role, the interpretative aspect and articulation of the text can be unredeemed.

A mezzo-soprano that sings the Rosina role must have the agility and caressing clarity of timbre. She should know how to be humane, tender and brilliant, with grain of the warm voice, for which the clear coloratura passages become bold under the fire of exquisite articulation.

La Cenerentola

This is also a comic opera, based on the fairy tale Cinderella. The libretto is written by Jakobo Ferretti. Rossini's *La Cenerentola* was first performed in Rome in 1817.

Rossini composed *La Cenerentola* when he was 25 years old, following the success of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* the year before. *La Cenerentola*, which he completed in a period of three weeks, is considered to have some of his finest writing for solo voice and ensembles.

A new generation of Rossini mezzo-sopranos such as Marilyn Horne, Cecilia Bartoli, Ewa Podles, Jennifer Larmore, Veselina Kasarova, ensured the renewed popularity of the work.

There are changes from the traditional fairy tale in *La Cenerentola* because Rossini did not want the magic to be a feature in his opera.

Angelina (Cenerentola) has a stepfather (Don Magnifico), and Alidoro, who is a Philosopher and former Tutor to the Prince, replaces the traditional Fairy Godmother. Don Magnifico's spoiled and vain daughters are Clorina and Tisbe, who are very selfish and self-absorbed. Prince Ramiro and his valet, Dandini, change places so that the Prince can find a bride who will love him unconditionally, and not just for whom he is as a Prince. Matching bracelets replace the traditional glass slipper as the means by which the Prince finds Cinderella.

While Ramiro is disguised as a valet, Dandini (pretending to be the Prince) offers his "valet" as a marriage partner to whichever of the two sisters (Clorinda and Tisbe) he does not marry. Both

sisters haughtily reject the offer of the “valet” (Ramiro) as husband, in terms which he later quotes back to them after he has resumed his proper position as Prince.

While Ramiro and Dandini are still pretending to be each other, Cenerentola tells the “Prince” (Dandini) that she is in love with his “valet” (Ramiro). *

The Role of Angelina (Cinderella)

Rossini wrote florid music for Cinderella’s character. She has very agile moments but the performance should be far more impressive than just brilliant. Just the same as in Rosina’s role.

I think that the coloratura sound should be natural and expressive.

In the beginning of the opera Rossini wrote a little aria with simple lines. In this small aria, Rossini made a perfect reflection of Cinderella’s character; fragile, modest and sincere.

Maybe the most interesting and difficult part of her role is the aria “Nacqui all affanno”.

This aria is the last one in the opera play, so it should sound like a confirmation and winning of goodness. The other title for the opera is “*La Bonta in Trionfo*”, which means “*The Triumph of Goodness*”, so that is how we should sing this last aria.

Words are very nice and touchable but sometimes it is not possible to hear them because of so many coloraturas. In spite of this, many singers pronounce the words in a very clear way.

While watching a DVD recording from Houston Grand Opera (with Cecilia Bartoli in the main role) I have noticed some, for me, new things in this opera. I found a very interesting place close to the end of the play, where the Prince is proposing to Cinderella in II act, II scene.

While proposing, her stepfather and two sisters are interrupting the Prince, and the Prince becomes angry about that and sings the words “I can’t contain my anger any more...”, but then Cinderella tells him with voice full of forgiveness “Sir, if it’s true that in your heart you have some love for me, then pardon them and let goodness triumph”.

*www.wikipedia.org, the leading user-contributed encyclopaedia. “*La Cenerentola*”

I think this place is the culmination of Angelina's goodness, what was so beautiful for me to hear. Rossini made this scene perfect because every character is painted clearly through the music.

As I said, Cinderella sings the last aria at the end of the opera play. By soft coloraturas and with words of consolation, she finish with her previous life, full of sorrow and loneliness, and looks into the joyful future with her beloved Prince.

Here are the words of this aria.

Nacqui all'affanno e al pianto,
Soffri tacendo il core;
ma per soave incanto
dell'eta mia nel fiore,
come un baleno rapido
la sorte mia cango.

I was born to sorrow and weeping,
My heart suffered silently;
but through a kindly magic spell
in the flower of my youth,
swift as a bolt of lightning,
my destiny changed.

No, no, no, no:
Tergete il ciglio;
perche tremar?
A questo sen volate;
figlia, sorella, amica-
tutto trovate in me.

No, no, no, no:
dry your tears;
why tremble?
Fly to this breast;
daughter, sister, friend-
find them all in me.

Non piu mesta accanto al fuoco
Staro sola a gorgheggiar, no.
Ah fu un lampo, un sogno, un giuoco
il mio lungo palpitar.

No longer sad by the fire
will I remain alone, warbling-no.
Ah, my long-time heartache was a flesh
a dream, a game. *

Here is a music example of most coloratura and the most difficult part of the aria.

*Translation by M. Gerhart , *Arias for mezzo-soprano* by R. Larsen

so - la a - gor - gheg - giar. Ah fu un so - gno un - lam - po, un -

giuo - co - il - mio - lun - go - pal - pi - tar. Ah, fu un

lam - po, un so - gno, un giuo -

co, ah fu un lam - po, un so - gno, un giuo - co - il - mi - o -

Più mosso *brillante*

Example nr.6

I have been practising this aria for two years and I still need to be in good shape to make all those passages with many very high notes. The palatal resonance feeling only, can help in this aria. If I don't worm up properly with that feeling, I wouldn't reach all those high notes softly, otherwise they would be tin and ugly. And no one can look comfortable on the stage with blocked throat and an ugly sound. So I don't suggest practising parts of the aria again and again with wrong placement, because it will make the voice tired and bring you into a wrong habit.

L'italiana in Algeri

L'Italiana in Algeri (*The Italian Girl in Algiers*) is a comic opera in two acts to an Italian libretto by Angelo Anelli, based on his earlier libretto set by Luigi Mosca, a composer who is now forgotten. First performance: Teatro San Benedetto, Venice on 1813. (Music encyclopaedia)

L'italiana in Algeri is part of the standard operatic repertoire. There are a several recordings of it, and it is performed very often today.

Rossini composed the *L'Italiana in Algeri* when he was 21. The opera was composed in either 18 or 27 days. The opera is notable for Rossini's mixing of opera *seria* style and opera *buffa*. *

The Role of Isabela

Isabela, the heroine, is looking for her missing boyfriend Lindoro, now slave of the Bey of Algiers, Mustafa. She is washed up on the Algerian shore where she immediately sings a bravura aria “Cruda sorte”. Mustafa is tired of his wife Elvira and wants to turn her over to Lindoro while he finds an Italian girl for himself. At the end, Mustafa goes back to his wife and Lindoro and Isabella sail off for Italy. (Horne, 2005: 118)

The character of Isabella is a bit different from Rosina and Angelina. She is a strong and decisive person; she does not hesitate to do anything for the safety of her beloved Lindoro. She is also very feminine and use that ability artfully and smartly to get her boyfriend back.

She shows that feelings in the first aria “Cruda sorte”. Rossini has made so beautiful music that paints Isabela’s character, with two different emotions and expressions in one aria.

She starts conclusively with strong words and more legato “Cruda sorte! Amor tiranno!” which means “Cruel fate! Tyrannical love!”, but through the recitative she turns the unhappy feelings into more sensitive ones while singing “Per te solo, oh mio Lindoro” and asking for consolation from God in the words “From whom do I hope, oh God, for advice? Who will give me comfort?”

*www.operajaponica.org, synopsis by Simon Holledge, “*L'Italiana in Algeri*”

Cruda sorte!... Già so per pratica

from
L'ITALIANA IN ALGERI

Giachino Rossini

Andante ISABELLA:

Cru - da sor - te! A - mor ti - ran - no! Que - sto è il

pre - mi-o, di mi - a - fe': non v'è or - ror, ter - ror, nè af -

fan - no pa - ri a quel ch'io pro - vo in me. Per te

Example nr. 7

I have to say that if I make this first part of the aria with dark timbre or if I push my voice, and I do it sometimes because of the text, it could be difficult to make a bright and open sound in the other section. So we should be very clever sometimes giving ourselves to the music, because it can be bad reflected on the voice. This Isabella emotion is deep and we should sing it like we really felt it.

Suddenly she change that emotions and decidedly starts the aria, with a new timber and coloraturas which are faster. This part would be more interesting for me if I have leafing in those bars. I actually think that all those coloraturas are nothing else but Rossini's leafing.

Marilyn Horne makes my favourite Isabela and this is what she said about the role.

Isabella is warm and loving; she knows exactly what she wants and makes sure she gets it - and that is how I played the role. (Horne, 2005: 181)

Great singers and Rossini

I mentioned Maria Callas earlier. She had a particularly dramatic voice and an equally dark temperament which was drawn out by her teacher Elivira de Hidalgo. Critics commented that her voice was dramatic because of the darkness and virtual size of her instrument. But she herself felt comfortable in the Italian *bell canto* approach of singing and her preference was Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti even though she sang many more dramatic roles. She once remarked:

“Bel Canto can never ruin your voice if used properly”. - Maria Calas *

I think that her voice was always at its best in this style of singing and in this repertory.

Callas made many recordings of Rossini's music, most notably the role of Rosina.

Perhaps it was her individual interpretation together with her unusual timbre that gave her this personal success in this role.

Her interpretation of “Una voce poco fa” made this aria very popular in the last half of the 20th Century. Callas is unique for although her voice was dramatic she was able to sing Rosinni's music but I personally believe she didn't have the real qualities which the composer would have wished. Nevertheless, she was a great Rossini interpreter.

She has been offered many dramatic roles, even in Wagner's operas. She said once that Italians tended to give Wagner roles to the singers they didn't like much.

At the beginning, she was dramatic and it was difficult for her to sing Rossini. But when she was asked to sing it once, she wished to sing it again and again. Actually, she thought that Rossini's music suited her voice and that it was healthy for her technique.

* www.opera-l.com, archives. “*A further look on Callas*” by Milan Petkovic, 2000.

She was not a real mezzo but while singing those Rossini's roles she was changing timbres in serve to the music. Therefore, she has performed some very deep notes nicely, which is usually written for mezzo-sopranos. She even had the same quality in singing high notes, if character needed it.

That makes her a grate interpreter of Rossini's female roles, and that makes her special compared to some natural mezzo-sopranos.

“Maria Callas surprised some fans when this recording appeared in 1958 by singing some of Rosina's music in the mezzo-soprano range. Originally used by Rossini, the mezzo range helped Callas in characterizing Rosina not as a bird-brained, twittering, helpless ingenue but as a crafty, intelligent woman, smarter than any of the men around her (even the resourceful Figaro). Callas's Rosina knew exactly what she wanted and how she would get it. It is a brilliant performance, made even more enjoyable by the first-class contributions of Tito Gobbi, Luigi Alva, and Alceo Galliera.” *

Marilyn Horne is my favourite Rossini interpreter. I have heard her recording of *L'Italiana in Algeri* many times and I am still not bored when I listen to her singing. She sang Isabela, the main role, and she had in her voice everything that one could expect: technique, beauty, colour, emotion.

“At the height of the career, Marilyn Horne was called ‘the greatest singer in the world’. If great singing means faultless technique, beauty of tone, ease of production, commitment to words as well as music, intelligence of interpretation and communication to an audience, then Horne clearly deserved that lofty appellation. She sang in a great age of mezzos, too. “
- Terrence McNally (Horne, 2005: V-VII)

* internet, www.amazon.com, Joe Mclellan, essential recordings

I have chosen some sentences from her book “The song continues”, which can clearly explain her relation with Rossini.

“I had to work harder and harder to achieve the bravura singing Rossini demands. I slaved because I didn’t want to give any less to the composer closest to my singing heart.

At my finale performance of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at the Metropolitan Opera, I interpolated my own lyrics into one recitative, saying, “Tonight I sing for you my last Rosina”. It was. In 1993, I announced that my appearance as Isabella in *L’Italiana in Algeri* at Covent Garden would be my Rossini swansong. It was.

I said hello to Gioacchino Rossini when I sang *Cenerentola* in Los Angeles in 1956; thirty-seven years later, I said a fond and grateful goodbye. Later, it occurred to me that Rossini stopped writing operas at the age of thirty-seven. I don’t know if there is anything significant in the numbers, all I know is, Rossini served me well and I believe I served him as well.” (Horne, 2005: 235)

Vivica Genaux looks gorgeous and displays the proper minx-like qualities. Her mezzo voice is well produced, her vocal attack is always secure, and she sang the role’s coloratura roulades with much style and remarkable ease.*

Of Vivica Genaux, one must emphasize her keenly drawn portrayal of Rosina, her slenderness and feminine elegance, but also her flawless musicality. *

Cecilia Bartoli, an Italian mezzo-soprano, is a popular opera singer and recitalist, maybe one of the most popular opera singers of recent years. She is best-known in Rossini and Mozart roles.

Bartoli is considered a lyric and dramatic coloratura, with perhaps less of a ‘large voice’ than some other mezzos, but with a highly individual timbre which she uses to create great vocal and dramatic effects.

* www.amazon.com, Jean Cabourg, *Opéra International*

* www.amazon.com, Karlheinz Roschitz, *NeueKronenzeitung*

In 1988, she recorded Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and not long after, she made *La Cenerentola* in the Metropolitan Opera. As a result of her acclaimed performance, the role of *La Cenerentola* has become somewhat associated with Bartoli. She has made Rossini's music very popular in these last years. *

While watching her singing Cinderella, I can see Rossini's thoughts and his reflection, which means she is a real performer and not only a good singer.

* www.wikipedia.org, Italian Mezzo-Soprano, *Cecilia Bartoli*

Conclusion

Since I started to work on this observation, I have studied Rossini's music and I have found that his music suits more the mezzo-soprano voice than some other female voice.

I also observed how one mezzo-soprano can become and exist as Rossini interpreter.

While I have studied singing, I have learned a lot about vocal tuition and vocal pedagogy and that is what my research is based on mainly. I found that teachers have an obligation to discover talented mezzo-sopranos and to develop their technique, otherwise young mezzos could be lost in the sea of different directions.

I conclude that the tuition of a good singing teacher can be of crucial importance in becoming and existing as a Rossini mezzo-soprano.

It is not enough to be born with voice and musicality. A mezzo-soprano should receive a proper vocal tuition and learn how to cope with all the before mentioned technical aspects, such as the use of breath, the attack, palatal perception, head tone and head resonances, chest resonances, coloratura and trill. A Rossini singer should also know how to warm up in way that suits Rossini's music.

My conclusion is that it is almost impossible to perform the Rossini's female roles before we are able to master all these technical aspects.

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