

Vincenzo Bellini, opera *Beatrice di Tenda*, *Finale secondo*.

PhD Nicoleta Ardelean

Abstract: *Beatrice di Tenda* is a *tragedia lirica in due atti* on Felice Romani's libretto after the historic tragedy *Beatrice Tenda*.

From the entire opera I chose to analyze the final part. In comparison with the other scenes, this ending, part of act II, scene 2, is shorter, but it is remarkably expressive, with a balanced construction.

The scene is structured into four large fragments. It is remarkable the gradation mingling of voices: one can notice how the composer starts from presenting the theme with one voice and eventually combines three voices.

Keywords: Bellini, *Beatrice di Tenda*, *Finale secondo*, Musical analysis.

Short history of the opera

*Beatrice di Tenda*¹ is a *tragedia lirica in due atti* on Felice Romani's libretto after the historic tragedy *Beatrice Tenda*.² It is Bellini's opera before last, created a year after *Norma* and two years before *I Puritani*.

The premiere took place on the 16th of March 1833, at Teatro *La Fenice* in Venice, among the protagonists being the famous Giuditta Pasta (the *primadonna* applauded for the dramatic intensity of the interpretation), Giovanni Orazio Cartagenova, Anna Dal Serre, Alberico Curioni and Alessandro Giacchini.

Musical analysis

From the entire opera I chose to analyze the final part.

The protagonist dominates all the other characters with constant authority throughout the opera even when she is not on the stage. Often the interpreters of *Beatrice* have been tempted by an interpretative line opposed to the lyrical one, in order to highlight the romanticism, the pathetic agitated determination which characterizes the part. It is important that the fluidity and looseness of the melodic line not to be neglected in the name of the contemporary judgement of solving conflicts and characters' behavior. *Beatrice*'s vocal tessitura is conceived for voices with a clear *bel canto* technique, endowed with profound esthetic sensitiveness and which have to aim the value of those subtle, discrete colors, those nuances so dear to Bellini.

In comparison with the other scenes, this ending, part of act II, scene 2, is shorter, but it is remarkably expressive, with a balanced construction. *Beatrice*'s ladies of companion leave the castle's prison weeping for their mistress' fate, while *Beatrice* is praying. Inside the cell she says that although she has been tortured she didn't confess anything: (Aria: „*Nulla diss'io...*” - Nothing I have said). Agnese enters the cell and she admits that she was the one

¹ *Beatrice di Tenda*, the wife of Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan between 1412-1447. The opera is based on an event in Italy's history at the beginning of the XVth century which happened at the Binasco castle near Milan where after the assassination of the second Duke of Milan, Giovanni Maria Visconti, his brother, Filippo, who became duke, marries *Beatrice di Tenda*, the widow of military commander Facino Cane (also dead in the battle to restore order in the city), in order to seize his enormous fortune and military power. The opera starts with the moment when Filippo leaves *Beatrice*, for the love of Agnese DeiMaino, one of the ladies of companion. To get rid of her he accuses her of adultery and sentences her to death.

² Carlo Tedaldi-Fores (1793-1829), *Beatrice Tenda, tragedia storica*, Società tipografica de' classici italiani, Milano, 1825.

who out of jealousy „*a morte ti spingo io sola*” (I alone pushed you to death), because being in love with Orombello, she believed Beatrice to be her rival.

From his cell, Orombello’s voice can be heard asking for his guardian angel to help him forgive all those who accused him and were to kill him. Agnese leaves, and Beatrice, in a painful aria says she will pray for Filippo and Agnese more than for herself („*Ah! se un’urna*” – Oh! If an urn), then in a cabaletta („*Ah! la morte a qui m’appresso*” - Oh! Death here surrounds me), she embraces the idea of death as a victory over the trials on earth, a triumph, not a defeat. In Aria finale („*Deh! se un’urna è a me concessa*” - Oh! If an urn was given to me) she prays for the forgiveness of those who caused her so much suffering.

Rizzardo, accompanied by judges and soldiers, arrives in front of the prison to execute the sentence. Beatrice walks with dignity to the execution place, all those present kneel.

The scene is structured into four large fragments.

The first fragment starts with a short introduction by the orchestra which establishes the tonality in F major followed by the mob’s prayer sung by the choir. This introduction contains a theme of 8 measures which lies on the basis of the entire fragment.

Ex. 1, V. Bellini, *Beatrice di Tenda*, the 8 measures theme from the introduction:

The choir moment with the 8 measures theme from the introduction is large, counting 42 measures as a whole. It has a structure which I shall present as follows:

A		Av1		Av2		Av1'		Av2'	
a	a'	m(av1)	c(av2)	av3	av3'	mv(av1')	cv(av2')	av4	av4 cad.
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	6

In the second and fourth periods, instead of naming the phrases only with *a* I chose *m* and *c* because these two phrases have a character of a median phrase the first one and of consequent phrase the second, both still keeping the same musical motive.

It is also worth mentioning the fact that on their turn, each phrase knows a more complex structure, being formed of two measure motives. Even on the level of the first period we notice the different four time repetition of a single two measure motive, which proves the combination of talent and natural so characteristic to Bellini.

The second fragment is in contrast, being recitative. The main tonality is also in F major, with a stress towards D major. It starts with an orchestra introduction, again with melodic role, and it continues with a short recitative (Beatrice) accompanied by material from the introduction of this fragment. After this recitative there is a dialog among Beatrice, Orombello and Agnese, and the orchestra will have only a role of harmonic completion.

Regarding the musical writing one can observe that to each begging, questioning, wondering, corresponds an ascendant melodic line (for example in measure 164, the word „*Pietà... !*”); on the other hand to an accusation, a cry, a sorrow, corresponds a descendant

Regarding this systematization and the previous description, it is remarkable the gradation mingling of voices: one can notice how the composer starts from presenting the theme with one voice and eventually combines three voices. The melodic line initiated by Orombello, which last eight measures, is taken then by Beatrice followed also by Agnese, realizing a development on three voices of the initial melodic line. This makes the melodic line of this section to persist in the listener's ear. To the expressive, sensitive music the well chosen text of the librettist Felice Romani is most fortunately added:

<i>Angiol di pace all'anima</i>	Angel of peace, in soul
<i>La voce tua mi suona</i>	Your voice sounds
<i>Segui, o pietoso, e inspirami</i>	Follow me, o, merciful...
<i>Virtù di perdonar...</i>	Virtue of forgiveness...

It is also noticeable that all Agnese's short lines have a descendant melodic line, suggesting the begging for forgiveness (m. 195): „Egli... perdona!...” (He...forgives!)

Throughout this scene there are indications which help drawing the character and the interpretation, for example: „*Beatrice commossa si appressa ad Agnese*” (Beatrice, moved, comes near Agnese), as well as indications of nuances like *forte* (m. 195, which corresponds to Agnese's line), or *piano* (m. 196, the moment of overtaking the melodic line by Beatrice).

The pitch for Beatrice di Tenda role in this section is of duodecima (*do1-sol2*). In order to express this sensitive section of 34 measures (m. 187-220), the composer uses a melodic line with trios, sixos, fourths, eights, as well as full stop lines. It is not by chance than one can observe that the lowest scale of Beatrice is *do1* and corresponds to the word „*lagrime*”, and to the most high pitched scale (*sol2*), the expression „*amor di pace*”.

At the end of the section, in tempo *Largo sostenuto*, the composer retorts to vocal parallel trio for the melodic lines of Beatrice and her rival Agnese. This procedure through which Bellini wishes to express the emotions and suffering of some passages, in a certain dramatic situation, can be observed also in the duet Giulietta-Romeo from the opera *I Capuleti e I Montecchi* or in the duet Norma-Adalgisa from the opera *Norma*. The melodic line is sung by Beatrice and Agnese sustained by Orombello's long values. In the end, the composer decides to retake the phrase from the beginning (m. 192-195=m. 214-217).

A burial march announces the arrival of the guard to escort Beatrice to the gallows. Agnese, Anichino, the maids of honor and close people to Beatrice react when hearing the march, all humming on sound Do. In order to emphasize the dramatic moment, the composer notes, starting with measure 221, *Lugubre e maestoso*, an indication of tempo rarely found, highlights the atmosphere of the burial cortege, accompanied with brass in piano, to which from measure 221, a melodic phrase of four measures is added played by violins to express the lamentation. This phrase, which corresponds to measures 222-226, is identically repeated in measures 226-230. The indications for nuances are *piano* (m. 221) and *forte* (m. 230), and the double punctuated rhythm in measures 228-229-230, underlining the text „*il funebre corteggio*,” expresses an atmosphere which can hardly be described in words.

Another interesting element is the fact that again one assists to a *stretto* type of writing, with delayed entrances with one and two measures but despite this, the voices will come together, the theme being exposed simultaneously in all the cases of this trio.

In the last fragment, which closes the opera, the only protagonist is Beatrice. The tonality is till the end *Lab* major. One can differentiate here two arias of virtuosity (with several nuances), which alternate with moments of dialog between the singer and the choir. The second aria is much more moved (of 16 measures) which repeats itself, in the end the choir and Beatrice singing the final cadence.

The essential characteristic of the Beatrice role resides in the vocal firmness and elasticity, in the Italian tradition existing the opinion that for interpreting this role there is need for a soprano *dramatico-d'agilità* or lyrical with agility. The force, the maturity, the sensitiveness and dignity of the character demand decisiveness and vocal technique to allow the singer to fully respect the music.

Conclusions

One of Bellini's major objectives was to accomplish the unity and coherence of the dramatic discourse which the Italian opera seria of the XVIII th century had forgotten.

Through his music, Bellini opened new affective fields, his compositions are full of passion and melancholy, elegy never met at his predecessors.

Melody creator by excellence, Vincenzo Bellini doesn't fail to use in the opera *Beatrice di Tenda* a melodic line which persists in the listener's ear and soul, large intervals being avoided.

Beatrice di Tenda's character is *eroico- tragic*. Almost all phrases start with an ascendant tone and a full stop rhythm, which makes evident the struggle to escape the situation, as if clinging to each beginning as to a unique chance. The composer actually uses a large range of scale values and rhythmic combinations. Mostly used is the sixteenth value, but also the punctuated rhythmic formula: the eighth with a full stop followed by the sixteenth, thus expressing the torment and lamentations the heroine goes through.

The pitch of the entire role is of two octaves (*re1-re3*). To the highest pitch scale (*re3*) corresponds the text on page 150 the systems one and two "Ne fra voi, fra voi si trova... chi si levi in mia difesa? Uom non avvi che si mova a favor di donna offesa?"³, the indication is: *con tutta forza della disperazione*⁴, page 146 and page 149-150. The lowest pitch scale sung by Beatrice is *do1* and corresponds to the word *lagrime* from the trio Beatrice-Agnese-Orombello in the end of the opera (page 243, first system, first measure).

In general, the cadences interpreted by the sopranos cast for this role may be others than those written by the composer, in those sung by me in the production at theatre *Alla Scala* from Milan I improvised, on my turn, trying to maintain the traditional practice and to express my own feelings and I had the joy that this personal contribution be accepted by the director Renato Palumbo.

Bibliography

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About the author

Professor associate at the Art Faculty from Ovidius University of Constanta. Author of many articles in the field. She performed opera roles on the most famous stages in the world. Owner of prestigious national and international canto awards and honorific diplomas.

³ „Is there among you anybody to take my side? Is there a man to protect an offended lady?”

⁴ with all force and despair