

Form and style in Verdi's famous arias

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Abstract: *This paper brings into attention of participants and / or readers aspects related to the specific musical language of Verdi's works. The text refers both to the overall creation of the well-known composer and to some representative moments from his operas. The analytical recommendations were focused exclusively on the famous baritone's arias, for two reasons: Verdi's well-known affinity for this type of voice and the fact that those arias are part of the current repertoire of the author of this report.*

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1. Introduction

It is difficult to capture in a few pages a synthesis of the evolution of Verdi's musical language along of his 28 operas that cover his work, even if the presentation would take into account, for example, all areas for baritone - voice to which the composer showed a special interest - or for the soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor or bass. Very demanding to himself, with a high critical sense, with every one of his operas Verdi moved further away from the Italian melodrama, from the divided traditional forms, permanently seeking a perfect characterization of the dramatic and theatrical expression of the characters - both by singing, orchestra, text and action -, succeeding to triumph in the perfect creation of their psychology. I have selected to present further only three Verdi areas (the minimum possible to outline an idea about Verdi's way of creation) from three operas completely distinctive in style, written in the middle time of the composer's life at almost equal intervals from each other: *Attila* (1846), *Traviata* (1853) and *A Masked Ball* (1859).

(Also, for reasons of space, orchestral accompaniment is presented as a piano reduction, and the final conclusions are left to the readers / listeners of this report.)

2. Elements of form and style in three Verdi's areas

2.1. The area "*Mentre gonfiarsi l'anima*" from "*Attila*"

In *Attila* (1846), the aria *Mentre gonfiarsi l'anima* / "As my soul seemed to swell" represents the beginning of the third stage of the second act. These are the moments when *Attila*, in his tent, wakes up anxious from his sleep and tells the slave *Uldino* the terrible dream that he has just experienced, and then he calms down ashamed of his fears, mobilizes his army with which he intends to attack Rome and, confidently in his victory, defies the memory of the image that tormented him in his dream.

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Referring to the music and text content, that portrays the feelings of the barbarian hero, the area is made up of three sections. First, in *Andante piuttosto mosso*, F minor, six quavers, piano, is introduced by two measures of the orchestra in the serious register, which suggests the character's anguish in the dark atmosphere of the night. (Example 1)

Andante piuttosto mosso ♩ = 100

The rhythmic-melodic formula of the beginning of the introduction becomes the ostinato rhythmic formula of the first 15 accompanying measures, suggesting the continuous tension that Attila feels about his dream.

The first two phrases of the solo line - the second is the varied repetition of the first - begins in *sottovoce*, with rises in the end. The square symmetry and the constant down beat attacks of the phrases and the simplicity of rhythmic-melodic construction are the expression of the simplicity of the character itself and of the original content of his dream. (Example 2)

Men - tre gon fiar - si la - ni-ma pa - re - a di nan - zia

Ro - ma, m'ap - par - ve in ma - ne un ve - glio,

che m'a fferro la chio - ma...

The modulating inflections that support the melodic line of the next phrase, the fragmented construction on its continuous ascending course and the dynamic growth betrays the tensioned amplification of the scene, (Example 3)

il sen - so ebb' io tra - vol - to, la man - ge-lo sul

bran-do; ei mi sorr ise in vol - to, e tal mi fe'co - man - do

everything evolving towards a climax, that of the old man's "sentence": "You can make them suffer only the dead. So, stop! Your road ends here, because this is the land of Gods!" (Example 4)

Di fla ge llar l'in - car - co con - troi mor ta - li hai

sol... Tar - re-tra!...or chiu so e il vat - co;

que-sto de' Nu-mi e il suol!

It is noted here the initial attack in fortississimo, the sequentially fragmented construction on a general descending course to the touching C of the small octave in sottovoce, the quave of the orchestra, all expressing the climax of the state created of terror that the character experiences.

The following two phrases, of great expressivity, takes place in another register of the hero's emotions, who is now describing the state of mind created by the terrifying dream: "I still hear the gloomy, fatal words and the soul is freezing of horror in Attila's chest." The melodic line is doubled in octaves in acute, while in the lower register the original rhythm returns to the original tension. The tonality, however, is bright - F major - and it is preserved until the end of this first section of the area. (Example 5)

In the last phrase of the section it is noted the ascending melodic line reaching the highest point - the sound *FI*, (Example 6)

as well as the final cadence, when culmination on the name Atilla suggests hero's ego, proud of his position and confident in his strength despite the moments of weakness caused by the terrifying dream. (Example 7)

In the very short middle section - Allegro, A-flat major - Attila confesses his shame to being dominated by fear. In anger, he orders army mobilization to attack Rome. Here, the motifs are no longer in cursive phrases; they are short, firm, strong and almost recitative. The orchestra / the piano initially double the simple structure melodic fragments, (Example 8)

for then to mark only the moments between voice interventions. (Example 9)

The end of the section, in the thunderous voice of the hero, sounds like a terrible sentence that the barbarian king gives to Rome ("You cursed Rome, I will fly to you faster than the wind!").

The third section of the area coincides with the beginning of the fourth stage and expresses the defiance of Attila - the one who thinks he is the winner of the world - to the dream spectrum. In Allegro, three quarter notes, F major and fortissimo, the orchestra performs an introduction of two phrases that will be resumed (with varying final cadence) by the voice. (Example 10)

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line (bass clef) and piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are: "Où - tre quel li - mi-te fat - ten - do, o spet - tro! vie -". The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "tar - lo ad At - ti-la chi mai, chi mai po - tra?". The piano accompaniment consists of rhythmic chords and arpeggiated figures.

The accompanying formula - percussive, full of verve - announced in the measure from the very beginning of the section will be kept almost uninterrupted until the end of the area. The major-minor balance of the following phrases expresses the alternation of the character's feelings which is still pursued by the memory of the spectrum, but the belief in his final triumph seems to be stronger. An orchestral interlude concludes the first representation in this section and prepares through the last measure the full and identical replay of the representation. Coda - *più mosso* - is the culminating moment of the whole area, and it is the expression of hero's total confidence in his own strengths and of the hero's ego, which already sees himself as the conqueror of the world.

Mentre gonfiarsi l'anima is an area of great dimensions, of strength and great difficulty, which implies impeccable technique, remarkable resistance and interpretative availability.

2.2. The aria "Di Provenza" from "Traviata"

In "La Traviata" / "Traviata" (1853), the aria Di Provenza is sung in the second act of the opera. Overwhelmed by the bleak prospect of his son's relationship with a young woman with a questionable fame, Germont tries to persuade Alfredo to give up Violetta Valéry's love. The moment is exciting, the suffering - just as great on both sides.

The strophic structure of the area and the motivational replay on which it is built express ideally the repeated attempt of the old father to convince his son of the evil his inappropriate love affair could make to his family. The simple melodic line, in *Andante piuttosto mosso*, is the mirror of simple, pragmatic feelings as well as the sincere feelings of the man who is willing to beg for understanding and renunciation if that gesture is the price to pay for what he wants. The tonality D-flat major and the major natural performance - melodic major, the accompaniment - conducted from one end to the other by almost the same pattern - and the rhythmic uniformity outlines the tense, stressed atmosphere of the scene. The architecture of the stophe is bipartite, type A (8 measures) - B (9 measures at the first representation, 13 at the second), each of the two representations being preceded by an

introduction of 5, respectively 4 measures, made on the first melodic line of the soloist. (Example 11)

Andante piu ttosto mosso.

A is built on a generally downward melodic line, through the free sequencing of the original motif. The grace notes of the down beat attacks emphasize - as sighs - the drama of the situation. (Example 12)

In B - made on rhythmically and melodically derived motifs from A -, the composer interlaces the lyricism of the remembrance with the dramatic feelings of pain and indignation due to the alienation of the son. (Example 13)

The descending tint of melodic motifs is compensated by the ascendant leaps of sixth and by the realization of a culmination at the end of the section by exploiting the higher voice register. (Example 14)

In the second strophe, built on the same rhythmic-melodic structure and architecture, the character asks for comprehension of his suffering and expresses the hope that the request to know Alfredo freed from such an inappropriate relationship will be listened to. The end of the area is accomplished with a short cadence that begins in the super acute area of the voice, in the idea that God will listen to his prayer and he will be able to accomplish his dream of regaining his son. (Example 15)

ma, ma - seal fin ti tro-vo an cor ti tro-vo an cor, Dio me-sau-di, Dio me-sau-di

The aria *Di Provenza* is considered a wonderful study of dynamics and an example of how the composer used to test the baritone voice. The most demanding areas of the voice are acute and super acute, demanding a good mastery of the technique of singing and very well-controlled breathing.

2.3. The aria "Alla vita che t'arride" from "A Masked Bal"

In "Ballo in Maschera"/"A Masked Bal" (1859), the aria *Alla vita che t'arride* is Renato's small aria, sung in the first scene of the first act. Concerned about Riccardo's anxiety - assuming that his condition is due to the threats that lie ahead - Renato addresses him expressing a mixture of reproach, (Example 16)

Al - la vi - ta che t'ar - ri - de di spe - ran - ze e gau dio
pie - na, d'al - tre mil - le e mil - le vi - te il de - sti - no - s'in - ca - te - na!

concern (Example 17)

E su - ra do - vun - que, sem - pre chiu - so il var - co alle fe - ri - te, per - che
scu - do del tuo pet - to - e del po - po - lo l'af - fet - to?

and warning, because - says he - "when it attacks its victims, hatred is more awake than love". (Example 18)

Del-fa-mor piu desto e l'o - dio le sue vit - ti - me... a col - pir

In *Andante espressivo*, the area emits a lot of energy through the tonal context, the melodic, rhythmic and ambitus particularities, and through the accompaniment formulas. In the initial B-flat major, the melodic of the first section of the area is contorted, mostly based on leaps, the biggest leap is that of the sixth that pushes the voice into its higher register so much loved and speculated by the composer for its brilliance and firmness. The lively rhythm, reminding of the bolero, in essence the same throughout the area, is announced even from the first two measures that comprise the introduction. The rhythmic compensation between the solo voice and the accompaniment of the third phrase, as well as the inflection to the G minor, increase tension, although the melodic itself becomes cursive and predominantly descending; The end, again in B-flat major, is enthusiastic, faithfully illustrating the text. (Example 19)

Te per - du - to, te per - duto, o - v'e la pa - tria, te per - duto, o - v'e la pa - tria col suo splen - dido av - ve - nir

f allarg.

pp

The middle section, mostly conducted in G minor, has a tuneful melodic, doubled in the upper plan of the accompaniment, thus borrowing the rhythm of the voice, the lower plan being built on a rhythmic variation of the original cell in the base formula. The multiplication of the sound evolution plans and the permanent vibration of the sixteenth succession give a greater consistency to the overall sound, which is a superior stage of the tension accumulation. At the end of the text, the composer resumes the first section of the area, starting with the second phrase.

The end of the area, with Coda character (measures 32-40), is made on a happy blend of all the melodic-rhythmic means used by the composer so far. (Example 20)

Del - fa - mor piu desto e l'o - dio le sue vit - ti - me, sue vit - ti me a col - pir. Te per - duto, o - v'e la m.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal soloist and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in bass clef with lyrics: "pa-tria, ah! te per - du - to, ov' e la pa-tria col suo splen-di-do avve nir?". The piano accompaniment is in treble and bass clefs. The tempo is marked "Presto".

The soloist concludes his evolution with a splendid melodic cadence - Verdi does not contradict this time either - in which the voice, in an admirable "exercise" of mastery and glamour, is put in a situation of attacking - by ascending leap to the big ninth - sound G in the first octave.

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