

Reflections on Italian Song, 1820-1930

Pleasure to speak tonight about the M. W. concert -> a concert stressing Italian SONG more than operatic arias
Song -> a special

7:02

I. When one thinks of Ital. ^{vocal} music of the 19th c -> obv. that it is opera that comes at once to mind. Opera: the high-prestige genre of 18th + 19th c Italy, the grandest, most elevated, most durable product of that time. We might begin by thinking about it.

A. In Italy, of course, opera was the great overwhelming backdrop against which all else was set. The Italians had invented and perfected opera in 17th + 18th c: it was all theirs. Tonight's concert w/ Marilyn Horne begins by evoking this powerful tradition - formal extracts and arias from Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* (1600 -> one of the very first operas ever written: opera's birth, as it were), and from the high Baroque style of Giovanni Lippugnani, from his opera *Meropis*, 1742. The Lippugnani aria, for us, can represent a point of departure for the 19th century to come -> the grand tradition "in place" before Italian Romantic Opera.

found
aria

B. Most important point is a very well-known one -> Italian tradition of opera is formal, elevated, dignified, and very grand.
1) Arias crystallize and elevate standardized emotions - each aria crystallizes an "affect" in simple emotional state - Lampugnani's "Superbo di me stesso," for instance, evokes PRIDE
2) This is "emotion-on-a-pedestal," as it were, monumentalized -> even "objective" emotion in a way -- Pride ABSTRACTED, universalized - ~~Prize~~ "P" -- let's LISTEN TO A BIT.

NOTICE the "formal schematic" PITCH INTO...
A VIVALDI-LIKE CHAIN OF METRICAL FIGURES
Liken RED CARPET
7:07

Lippugnani (M. Horne) "Superbo di me stesso" is terribly important. THIS EMOTION is not "spontaneous" - it is NOT individualized - it is not a "formalized poetry" in a formalized genre + conventions of "aria-making" and "aria-singing" as anything else. This is a crucial point.

3) Such arias are "about" ARIA-NESS - we refer to this as "GENERIC" style -> a style devoted to fulfilling + articulating its genre: formalistic + somewhat non-personal + objective.

4) Worth stressing because elements of the objective "generic" remain powerful in Italian opera and Ital. vocal music, through much of the 19th c -> Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and early + middle Verdi. And this more "formalized quality" is often misunderstood or ignored, especially by those who expect all Italian music to be spontaneous and emotionally immediate.

II. Italian music, then -> principally at highly stylized/formalized OPERA - but of course Ital. composers + publishers turned out many other kinds of music in 18th + 19th c for private/domestic consumption... often more "relaxed" things, like arrangements, marches, and solo songs... Things on a less "inflated" level than the opera itself.

A. So tonight we are principally concerned with Italian song - a kind of less intense ~~genre~~ genre in the 19th and 20th centuries, and Marilyn Horne is going to perform 4 Rossini songs, 1 by Verdi, a couple of later more popular Neapolitan songs by Donizetti and Paolo Tosti, and a very earnest 20th c song by Respighi.

B. Tonight before the concert, we might think about this genre, the Italian Romanza a Canzone - about how it developed and changed in the 19th c, because we are going to hear a real panorama of the genre on the concert tonight. So - a few brief comments on Italian song!

7:10

7:10 III At first one might be tempted to compare ^{Ital. songs} with the German Lied -- that tremendous Austrian/German flowering in Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, that important, even more personalized German song. But to do this would be misleading. 19th. c Italian composers NEVER treated their music this way, ~~as a major personal/national statement~~ ^{as} a major personal/national statement. The German Lied aimed deep: mystical folklore, deep personal feeling, the individual ^{unique} statement. This concept of song (we'll hear it in Brahms tonight) → totally foreign & incongruous to ^{early} 19th. c Italy!

2 - Nothing judgmental here implied... but Italian *romanza* or *canzone* is not a German Lied → it aims more for charm, for objectivity (at first), for ^{charm} ^{humor} + wit.

A. More "detached" + "objective" than German Lied, with fewer "ultimate" claims -- a genre for the home and the salon... ^{social music} for frank enjoyment + ^{right} pleasure.

Many 19th c Italian songs, ^{of course} written by opera composers → Luigi Cherubini, Gasparo Spontini -- One of most famous → Rossini (dominating figure of Ital. opera 1813-30)... Rossini's songs -- he wrote dozens for individuals, for friends, for special occasions -- mostly works of absolute clarity, charm, and that wonderful Rossini wit. -- By-products, little ^{unassuming} chips from the block of the master... + ~~many of these have been the first or later specialties.~~

7:13 ONE of the songs tonight comes from ^{EARLY} in Rossini's career → "Se il vuol la molinara" ("If the miller-maid so wishes")
 Exact date of composition unknown → publ. 1821 as "Rossini's first song" → ^{part. written before} ~~publ. written before~~ ^{ON HANDOUTS} ~~publ. written before~~ → Notice the "standard" TEXT, a typical popular/comic text, ^{about} miller-maids + their suitors -- With the often-encountered ambiguous eroticism and standard double entendres... A humorous, but standardized text, using ^{generic} symbols (mills, mill-wheels as symbols of fertility) in a predictable, non-personal way.

As you listen you will find 1) Music → also "objective" + standardized... Charming, to be sure (in a quasi-comic opera style, easily recognizable), but not what we'd call a "confessional", private style -- More "generic" than personal -- But we do sense Rossini's great wit and his great melodic gift... Here the style, again, is analogous of Italian opera buffa; This song begins with the tune nearly fully stated in the accomp... it cadences and hands the tune over to the singer. Piano Accomp. → Clean staccato, uncomplicated, ^{features}

Vocal part Expressively: purely Italian → very, very CLEAN-EDGED, spare, directed, focused... Notice the explicit "old-fashioned" text painting of the last line, "Io la farò girar" - turning figure in accomp. and voice.

7:16 ^{Marilyn Horne} Let's hear first part of song 1'30"

Se il vuol la molinara through & line

 → Again → engaging, quite immediate... but ABOVE ALL, CLEAN, RAZOR-SHARP, pointed, ^{melodically} characteristically early 19th c Italian. Direct, but non-personalized (PHASE 1) of Italian song in 19th. c.

2) Let's touch on another example → again, the clean operatic style transplanted into a song → This from one year later, 1822, the "Addio" of Rossini → his humorous farewell to Vienna after a particularly successful season of opera for him there
 1) The humor lies in the parody of the Italian style, or its witty wordplay. Begins serious, minor mode, like an opera seria aria...

7:18 Once again NOTICE how clean, simple, Italian ^{the} accomp (PHASE 1, objective)

Metro 1st 4 lines 1'00

7:18

But there's a catch!
 2) So far → ^{the song is} serious, noble, elevated, ... ~~But~~ it progresses, we hear more + more ornamentation + decoration, ~~effect for~~. By the end it's virtually exaggerated → Rossini names himself ("This is Rossini who expresses his feelings," who make the Seine [in the Dumb] resound" -- And as if to illustrate the "resounding," the last 2 lines are repeated (re-sounded) twice!
 -- Then follows a cadenza on the word "resound" → more text-painting -- and so the operatic song that began so seriously ends with a kind of exaggerated parody, punning on "resound" -- Again, Phase 1, highly melodic
 clean accomp. / vocally melodic + agile

actings
 "Dite pur"
 2'05"
 M. Horn

"L'ultimo ricordo"

Such humor interacting w/a style is possible chiefly in a "phase 1" generic world where styles and musical options are relatively standardized.
 IV One of the Rossini songs tonight, however, is far different -- from 40 years later, a different world. You may know the outlines of Rossini's career in opera → tremendous success, an Italian + European sensation from 1813 (Tancredi) to 1829 (Wm. Tell), when upon he gave up composing operas altogether! Retired, lived in Paris for almost 40 years → an EMINENCE, well respected, and so on... But composing very little, leaving Ital. opera to be dominated a younger generation, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi during the stormy Risorgimento.

7:23

A. Yet in his retirement Rossini composed numerous small pieces + songs -- especially innovative are about 100 songs + short pieces from 1850s + 1860s... songs for performance at his famous "Saturday evenings" -- his salon, to which the whole Fr. fashionable world flocked. . . . Called these late short pieces Sings of Old Age (Péchés de vieillesse).

mostly unpublished (L'ultimo ricordo)

A) Often short + witty -- or sly parodies of fashionable music, like Offenbach + so on.
 B) But also → often have an abstract or intellectual bent, like puzzle-solving (artificial scales + the like) -- Good examples are two pieces from this late period in which the "puzzle" or problem was to write a vocal line based on either two pitches only or one pitch only... "Ave Maria on two notes," entire voice part consists of G4 and Ab, facets of an intellectual game or puzzle... typical late Rossini. or ^{Facets of life} ^{or less} ^{in one note}

But D. We also find more clearly expressive songs, more personally expressive songs (less generic) -- expressive with rich French harmonies + Fr. swavities, Fr. parted sounds, the world of later Meyerbeer + the emerging Charles Gounod. (Phase 2) of the 19th-c Ital. song is FRENCH-INFLUENCED, esp. 1850s, 1860s... De-emphasis on vocal melody ^{agility and} per se and a great enriching of a smoother, more sophisticated, more harmonically adventurous accompaniment. The older Italian razor-edge clarity yields a bit to the French PASTEL.
 D let's hear a short example: Rossini's L'ultimo ricordo, c. 1860 -- FAR MORE

idiosyncratic, really expressive, somewhat + harmonically richer

personalized than our early songs -- and notice how the accompaniment is far more nuanced + MOST IMPORTANT → NOTICE the voice part → quite different; Moves much more broadly, slowly, "less melodically," in fact.

7:24

for the 1st 4 lines: each sung to (basically) a single pitch, each a step higher than the preceding line... All part a large, more "personalized" expressive wave to line 5. The older, cleaner Italian sound here is yielding here to a more modern, personal French sound - PHASE TWO

appealing to a different sensibility... more "modern"
 1'40"

7:26

7:26

V We can follow the style-change in Verdi's songs as well. His earlier songs from the 1830s + 40s are more "generic" + standardized, ^{more} purely Italian (+ often "Risorgimento-like") in feeling + structure → clean-edged, + so on. But the Fr. style interpenetrates into Verdi in the late 40s, 50s, + 60s, esp. in wks. like La Traviata, Sicilian Vespers, Ballo in maschera, La forza del destino, Don Carlos. The song we'll hear tonight -- Verdi's last song published in his lifetime -- is called "Stornello" [meaning here only "popular/rustic song"] + it's from 1869, quite late (written between Don Carlos + Aida)

A. Why did the mature Verdi write songs at all? A good question, and this isolated song has a story behind it. ^{In this case} Verdi's librettist, Piave (Ercani, Rigoletto, La traviata, Simon Boccanegra, La forza del destino) had become ill, and paralyzed in the later 1860s. As an act of charity, Verdi set in motion a project that involved 6 well-known composers each writing a short song to be collected in a special album → The profit from the album would go to Piave + his family. (The six: 2 formidable French: Ambroise Thomas + Daniel Aubert; + 4 Italians: Cagnoni, Mercadante, Ricci, + Verdi himself)

A. Verdi's 1869 song, "Stornello," in the Piave-album shows, like Rossini's "Ultimo ricordo," French influence, but of a diff. sort → a more "popular" sort -- The main clue here is the text, a kind of text structure that creeps ever more into Verdi in the 1850s + 1860s -- 1) Note → 2 stanzas, each ending with same 2 lines (2 "refrain lines") -- Fr. "couplet," a lighter style of poetry, + Verdi had evoked this Fr. style for Oscar in Ballo in maschera, Preziosilla in La Forza, Eboli in Don Carlos, and elsewhere. One could spend a long time tracing out the history of this form, but for now, the point is that it's FRENCH + that it's popular or lighter, and that it concludes with a refrain.

B. Notwithstanding the French structure, the song "Stornello" remains largely generic, nowhere near as pestel + personal as Rossini's "Ultimo ricordo." It's a light genre-piece, very skillfully composed + very characteristically late-middle Verdi, filled with boisterous energy + high spirits.

C. Very characteristic is its declamatory opening -- speech-like over an active accompaniment. ... In 1850s, 1860s this ^{non-melodic opening} is common in Verdi + he was much criticized by Ital. conservatives for it, since melody was assumed to be the cornerstone of the Italian style -- was Verdi "selling-out" to the French + to the Germans? Controversial style. ... In any case we can hear it here → it begins in a speech-like or declamatory style and each line, roughly speaking, becomes increasingly shaped as a melody. That is, there is a kind of "melodic crescendo" in each stanza, a "growing into" the melody of the final two lines, or the refrain, Pure ^{late} middle Verdi. Notice also the pause or hold before the refrain -- the momentary stopping ... that is one of the key identifiers of the Fr. couplet style. ... So, more Fr. infl. in Phase 2. stornello
C. Bezzani

7:30

VI We've traced 2 phases so far in Italian song ① objective, generic, pointed, forward clean edged ② Fr. influence: partial/subjunctive or slipshod couplet ... what happens now is that Italian songs SPLIT INTO 2 STYLIC TRENDS 1870 - 1920 or so ONE TRACK involves a pronounced push into immediate Italian sensuousness or physicality, often with a kind of popular/folklore flavor from the more immediate Southern Italy, + Naples in particular.

7:34

first (a kind of Phase 3)
 This offshoot-trade is that of **COMMERCIAL POPULAR SONG**, -- something that had been sweeping up since the 1840s (circled 3)

7:34 A. Very well-known → the spontaneous Italian song: the songs of F. Paolo Tosti, Stefano Donaudy, Luigi Denza (*Funicoli, Funicola*), and Edoardo di Capua (*O sole mio*) sold extremely well in Europe + America as commercial products... that turn-of-the-century popular Italian song that we associate with the early phonograph record and waves of Italian immigrants in America.

Capitalizing on the new sense of music

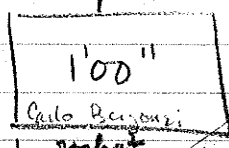
of the French style, this music turned to a sentimentalized popularization of S. Italian folkloric melodies + marketed as and sensual to the core. This is a sweet, high-pressure lyricism, the spontaneous juxtaposing of a personal (regional) emotionalism, so rich, one can almost feel it... so palpable...

[Now, in some ways, a false picture of Italy as a whole -- indeed, now a kind of oversimplified stereotype, not often enough linked to a specific region (Naples) at a specific time (c. 1900).

C. Tonight we'll hear, such songs, by Donaudy and Tosti... two of the best + most famous. We only have time for a taste of one, here, Donaudy's "O del mio amato ben", one of the more conservative, in fact, very 1880-ish or 1890-ish in style, operatic in the Catalani/Puccini vein. (Text in handout) → Notice, as we hear its opening, the sheer richness of texture

melodic line, arching and curved in sensual arabesques, typical of fin-de-siècle art. Such music has a kind of ripe physicality typified by swoops and falls to richly caressed downturns... inviting us to experience the "facility" of the voice itself... now for more personalized, immediate, more readily vulnerable than, say, the stricter Rossini or Verdi would ever be.

7:38



so this first offshoot-trade Am phase consists of richly sensual, Neapolitan folkloric, high-pressure physical vocality, personal + immediate, an all-or-nothing lyricism! aiming at a turn of the century

VII The second offshoot-trade in the road of Italian songs can be dealt with very briefly, for it represents a turning away from the Mediterranean tradition more towards more Northern or more typical Romanticisms.

This is a plunge into a more self-consciously "serious" music, more philosophical or mystical in tone, with more obvious "expressive" individual aims. This happened in late 19th + early 20th century, + our example is a song from 1906 called "Fogs" (*Nebbie*) by the young Ottorino Respighi, fresh back from St. Petersburg after studying w/ Rimsky-Korsakov

1) This is a more self-conscious "art-song" than anything else we've heard tonight -- 180° away from the early Rossini things. Notice the personalized text (no more standardized or generic texts), the voice of the individual, sensing a mystical identification between himself and Pure Nature, Fogs, Clouds, Trees, etc... This is the spirit, really, of Northern Europe, and although *Nebbie* is itself a very successful, even powerful song, for us it can mark the effective death of Italian song... The opening of Italy to the Northern experience + achievements (Wagner + the Russians) seems, ironically, to have closed the door on the clarity, melodicism, + agility of its own part. What remains is the sheer sensuous face of the human voice itself -- VOICE AS TIMBRE (not as melody) VOICE AS SENSUOUS SONIC OBJECT (high pressure) → Notice the vocal writing --

7:42

AS SENSUOUS SONIC OBJECT (high pressure) → Notice the vocal writing -- *bravotti* NB → huge sweep up (stanza 1) then down (stanza 2) → big arch, but not "melodic" return

VIII So in summary → tonight... 4 phases of Ital. song -- and ~~the~~ the first is ^{the most} purely Italian (Rossini) -- clean-edged + focussed

Phase ② French (late Rossini "Ultimo rigordo" + Verdi's Stornello) --

Phase ③ An adapting ^{of the French richness to the task of} + popularization of high-pressure, Southern sensuousness, a last-gasp of the Italian style (Donizetti, Tosti) and the rise of Phase ④,

the true Italian philosophical/mystical ^{high-minded} art song ^{but with it comes} + the simultaneous choking-off of the melodic tradition of the Italian-lyrical... A bird's eye view of the History of Italian Song.

It's a real treat to have a panorama like this in a single concert, and I trust that you're looking forward to it as much as I am.

Then the tradition splits → melodic tradition of the