

9. PERSONAL CONCEPTION ON THE WAY OF INTERPRETING THE AREA FROM ACT I OF THE OPERA *LA BOHÉMA* – *SI, MI CHIAMANO MIMÌ* BY GIACOMO PUCCINI

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Abstract: *Giacomo Puccini's artistic creation spans a period of 40 years, from 1884 to 1924, during which time he composed 12 works. This small number proves once again the great artistic exigency of the composer. The enormous success that Giacomo Puccini's works have enjoyed since his life, continues to this day and is constantly growing. We aim to analyze the area SI, MI CHIAMANO MIMÌ from LA BOHÉMA's work with personal interpretative aspects.*

Key words: *verism, Italian opera, soprano*

1. Introduction

The general linguistic terms of an aria are:

- the tempo – *andante lento* (the quarter = 40)
- the indication of expression – *con semplicità*
- the measure – 2/4, 4/4 respectively
- the dynamics - *ppp*→*ff*
- the rhythmic formulas used imply both the whole palette of binary values (from the sixteenths to seconds), exceptional divisions (complete trio or with breaks), and specific formulas of the recitative declamation (quartet, quintet and decimolt)
- the ambitus – mi1-la2
- the ornamentation of the vocal plane uses the simple, double, superior and inferior appoggiaturas
- the indications of expression placed during the discourse concern both the interpretative side - *con semplicita, dolcemente, con molta anima, con grande espansione, con espressione intensa, molto espressivo, agitando appena, calmo come prima, con naturalezza, sostenendo* – and the tempo variations – *lentamente, andante calmo, allegretto moderato, a piacere, andante molto sostenuto, poco allargando, poco rallentando, rallentando molto, col canto, ritenuto, rallentando, senza rigore di tempo*
- the vocal timbre right for the interpreting corresponds to the vocal category of a lyrical soprano, but the aria can be tackled as well by the lyrical legere voices through the implementation of certain technical and interpretative logistics
- general observations regarding vocalisation:
 1. it is an aria that needs sustaining (both in the little nuances and the grand ones, which implies a long phrasing on *legato*)

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2. the vocal malleability is absolutely necessary during the continuous changes of dynamics and tempo
3. the necessity of a compact and homogenous sound, as well as of a varied colour palette, of a constant vibrato, of absolute fluency during the unfolding of the melodic line, without too many interval leaps (encompassing the interval palette from second to seventh)

2. Aria analysis

The long pause which precedes the debut of the aria offers the soloist the possibility of adapting themselves from a dramatic and vocal standpoint to the ambiance generated by the ending of the tenor's aria, marked in the opera by the applause of the audience. Therewith, from an expressionistic standpoint, a certain correspondence between the character's attitude, underlined by the indication in the score preceding the debut of the aria (*è un po' titubante, poi si decide a parlare*, mark 35) and the ulterior general atmosphere materializes. The soprano's aria represents in the dramatic plane the mirrored image of the tenor's aria, both arias presenting two musical portraits combining both the practical side being linked to the existentialism of the concrete, and the emotional and intimate side. From a vocal point of view, the soloist's intervention takes form with the help of the almost imperceptible accompaniment of the violin, in the tonal context of the tenor's aria, which facilitates the placement precision of the aria's debut. (Eg. 1)

MIMI (è un po' titubante, poi si decide a parlare) (sempre seduta) con semplicità
 Si. Mi
 dir!
 (35)
 ppp allargando e dim. molto pp
 due 3da

Following the expression indication, *con semplicità*, the first sound (in hindsight, the whole initial phrase, *a*, which is executed in an inferior tempo to the indicated one) is longer than the value written in the score (even though it relates with an affirmation in the text). The next two measures (m. 2-3) are executed in a superior nuance to the one indicated by the composer (*pp*), both to serve in the audibility purpose and to support the affirmation while precisely following the melodic arc of the segment. (Eg. 2)

AND: LENTO ♩ = 40
 MIMI
 chia - ma - no Mi - mi ma il mio no - me è Lu - ci - a.....
 AND: LENTO ♩ = 40
 p pp

The emphasis of the word *Mimi* from the second measure (measure 2) is realised through an ample portamento combined with a dynamic rise, followed by resting on the tonic accent of the word. The sonority is maintained constant on *fa2*

until the end of the segment, the descent from the acute sound being emphasised through another portamento accompanied by a decrease in the vocal intensity. Even though the most acute sound of the segment is the peak of the melodic arc, the expressive culmination is placed near its ending – the second syllable of the word *Lucia* (m. 5). In the second phrase (*a'*) there takes place an imperceptible change of tempo, the textual connotations conferring latent traction to the discourse, landing on every sound, particularly on the word *breve*, which necessitates an opening on the vowel *e*, with superior intensity compared to the one in the score (*ppp*). The execution of the sixteenth measure from the rhythmic formula has to strictly abide the tempo, in spirit of the aforementioned traction, with a passing landing on the word *seta* (silk) and immediately taking over the tempo on the word *ricamo* (to stitch). The ending of the segment is done without changing the dynamics, the last sound being short and followed by a pause crown. (Eg. 3)

The last phrase of the first period represents the repeat of the initial segment, but in a superior nuance, having the most acute and prolonged note as culmination, followed by a dynamic and agogic tempering of the whole segment. (Eg. 4)

From the point of view of vocal colour, the sound *mil* is accomplished through a mixture between chest voice and head voice (especially for the more acute sopranos). The general tendency is to emit the chest sounds in an euphemistic manner, but the same effect can be obtained through a larger opening of the oral pharyngeal cavity¹¹⁷. An especially important aspect is represented by diction, serving the purpose of emphasising the meaning of the text showing narrative and communication aspects and abiding by the Italian language pronunciation rules. The accuracy of the diction is lightened by placing the vocal range in the comfort zone (respectively ninth on the first octave). We will provide, pertaining to this, a few examples of phonetic emphasis:

¹¹⁷ Area of the nasal part continued anteriorly with the nasal cavity and connected to the auditory tubes, with an oral segment which opens through the nostrils in the oral cavity and a laryngeal segment which leads to the vestibule of the larynx and to the oesophagus, (<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/cavity+of+pharynx>).

- the word *Mimi* contains a single *m*, its doubling happening because of the wish to place the accent on the second syllable of the word;
- the word *nome* is executed with a single *m*, in order to resolve the sixth intervallic leap;
- as an exception, the doubling of the consonant *c* from the word *Lucia* is permitted, trying to emphasize the affirmation presented in the poetic text.

The second verse of the first section (A1) is important at a dramatic level because it sends a message with subjective connotations, the meaning of the text being concentrated in the emotional area, which is obtained, from a musical point of view, through an ample legato and an extension in the acute register of the melodic line. The section begins with a change of tempo, *Andante calmo*, situated at an agogic gradation superior to the anterior articulation and containing in its core the dynamic culmination. The attack of the first sound is preceded by a pause having a double use in the unfolding of the discourse: it both gets the ulterior vocal extension technically ready and changes the atmosphere. The attack does not entail vocal issues, but it must be emphasized through an agogic enlargement of the anacrusis, through accomplishing a tenuto on the first sound (noted in the accompanying party), as well as on the sounds of the three successive measures.

The change in atmosphere is accomplished through the imperceptible modification of the vocal colour, consisting in emitting the sounds in a centred manner, but without exaggerating, through mellowing down the sounds without excessively covering them, as well as through toning down the double consonants (*piaccion, quelle*). The continuation of the segment has the purpose to gradually conquer the acute space, this endeavour being readied by two trio formulas achieved with a little agogic enlargement between the composing sounds. In order to obtain the necessary time for readying the reach of the passage and acute zones (*mi2 fa#2 sol#2*) a placement on the first syllable of the word *dolce* will be made, as well as the imperceptible shortening of the last syllable of the word *malia*. (Eg. 5)

MIMI

AND^{te} CALMO ♩ = 54
dolcemente

Mi piaccion quel - le co - se che han si dolce ma -

(36) AND^{te} CALMO ♩ = 54
dolce

molto piano

MIMI

- il - a, che parla no d'a - mor, di pri - ma - ve - re...

col canto

pp

rit.

In the vocal plane, the placement of a portamento between the last syllable of the word *parlano* and the first syllable of the word *d'amor* is very welcome, facilitating the emission of the *sol#2* sound (which necessitates a little extension, not being in line with the sixteenth value), without omitting the possibility of

another portamento existing between the *sol#2* and *mi* sounds, in regards to placement on the latter, correlated to a substantial agogic and dynamic enlargement. According to the logic of music, dynamism should follow a natural evolution towards the maximum nuance, a process which is not marked in the score with the exception of a *crescendo*, paradoxically doubled by a *pp*. The achievement of this vocal prodigium is justified by the intention of suggesting a poetic image of the word *primavere*, essential in the making of the heroine. Reaching the sound *la2* in *pp* is followed by a considerable enlargement of the final melodic formula, both from a dynamic and agogic point of view. Corresponding to the end of the phrase, the cadence sound is prolonged at the term level, endeavour correlated with a progressive and maximum decrease of dynamic, overlapping with the debut of the successive segment.

The second phrase has a conclusive role, necessitating resuming the nuance, the tempo and the vocal colour from the beginning of the articulation. Obtaining the portamento between the first two syllables of the word *chimere* is absolutely necessary, justifying the tempering of the phrase through the textual connotations. In the same sense of correlating the musical expression with the poetic meaning of the text, the end of the musical phrase will be resolved at a vocal level through a few particular elements: keeping the same intensity during the whole course of the passage, placing an ample portamento between the syllables of the word *cose*, maximally flattening out the sound *re2* on the crown, gradually repeating the temp, executing the appoggiatura strictly on tempo, emphasising the word *poesia* by introducing a breath before its apparition, by thinning on the first two syllables and coming back to tempo on the last two syllables. (Eg. 6)

The image shows a musical score for two characters, MIMI and ROD. The score is in 2/4 time and D major. The MIMI part is on a soprano staff, and the ROD part is on a tenor staff. The piano accompaniment is on grand staff. The score includes lyrics in Italian and dynamic markings like 'pp', 'a tempo', and 'rall.'

MIMI: che par.la.no di sogni e di chi - me - re..... quelle

ROD: co - se che han nome po - e - si - a... Lei m'in.tende? (commosso)

MIMI: Si.

The cadence complement (m. 24-25, the last two measures of the aforementioned example) of the middle phrase which, in the plane of expression, can or cannot have the role of a question, is executed following the tempo and the rhythmic values. The dictions needs pristine accuracy and it can be accomplished by following the tonic accents (out of which, the most important is the accent of the word *intende*), and the open colour is obtained through the clarity of the letter *e*. The final phrase of the first section (m. 26-30), respectively reiterating the anterior poetic and musical idea, initially requires (the first three measures) a

tempo and a nuance superior to the primary ones, as well as a more detached vocal attitude, without omitting the expressive aspect. The double cadence complement follows both the previous nuance and the tempo, only needing to change the quality of emission by emphasising the malicious attitude of the characters, brought to light through the two final values marked by *staccato*. (Ex. 7)

The middle section contrasts with the anterior one, both on a tempo level, *Allegretto moderato*, and through the meaning of the text, strictly correlated to the music and, implicitly, the vocal part. The discourse possesses a particular traction, marked in the score by the staccatos from the accompaniment, which, from the line of song, are executed in a staccato-legato manner. The first segment of the first period (the first 5 measures) cannot undertake any tempo modification, as they follow a certain dynamic path (*mp*), being characterized by supple and open vocal quality (*con semplicità*). (Eg. 8)

The middle phrase (6 measures) undertakes a progressive thinning of the tempo used anteriorly, resulting in its augmentation, its transformation in the sense of a certain liberty in unfolding suggested by the marks in the score (*a piacere, col canto*), process which is facilitated by the complete lack of accompaniment. Through analysing in detail the manners of interpretation of the consequent segment, there can be retained a few aspects of vocal nature. Thence, the first two measure go through an imperceptible thinning followed by a breath or caesura (corresponding to the rhythmical pause), that is justified by explaining the anterior textual idea. This interruption in the sound flow transforms, from a musical point of view, into a crown, followed by resting the next measure on each note. The end of the musical phrase relatively follows the score values, the emphasis falling on the symbolism of the text (for example, the placement on the last two syllables, compressing the second one and creating suspense). (Eg. 9)

The last phrase of the articulation constitutes of reiterating the previous one, the second time of the measure 46, suddenly entering a zone of agogic thinning

and of maximum diminution of dynamic. At a vocal level, this modification is correlated with an unexpected legato accomplished by introducing a *portamento* and a *portato* among the last three sounds. The existing ornaments in this alert section follow the same pulsating path manifested on a general level and requiring their execution strictly in tempo. (Eg. 10)

MIMI *a tempo*
 là in u - na bian - ca ca - me - ret - ta:
p
a tempo

MIMI *poco rall.*
 guar - do sui tet - ti e in cie - lo,
pp poco rall.

The cadence sound of the segment can be accomplished from a vocal point of view through two different ways: the first one, in a traditional manner, by prolonging the value of the sound on the crown marked in the score on time 2 and transforming it in an anticipation for the initial sound of the successive articulation; the second way, preferred by the contemporary conductors and soloists, consists in executing the sound strictly following the indicated composing frame. The last component of the middle section represents the moment of maximum sound expansion of sound and expression of the aria (changing the tempo to *Andante molto sostenuto*). The first phrase (the first 4 measures) makes its debut in an imperceptible nuance, needing to be placed on the rhythmic divisions, on the ornamental notes, as well as on certain vowels (*u* from the word *quando*, *e* from the word *sgelo*). The first two phrases are placed in an evaluating dynamic route, which will have two culminations— (m. 53 and 55) and the acute sounds *la2* respectively. (Eg. 11)

MIMI *ANDANTE MOLTO SOST.to (si alza) con molta anima*
 ma quando vien lo sge - lo il pri.mo so.le è
ANDANTE MOLTO SOST.to
 (38) *pp* *cres. poco a poco*

MIMI *con grande espansione*
 mi - o il pri - mo
allarg.

MIMI *allarg.*
 ba - cio del - l'a - pri - le mi - ol.....
dim.

The first climax (m. 53) imposes in the beginning an attack supported by a *mf* nuance and a mellow colour (contrary to the *ff* indication from the score), necessary for an imperious administration in the economy of the current passage and the next one as well. The first acute sound (*la2*) can be readied through a portamento, the duration of the sound being doubled by its extension. The second climax constitutes in a vocal explosion on the crown, followed by a substantial diminution of the nuance on the next two sounds. The moment following the culmination has a conclusive character and is obtained, from a vocal point of view, through the abundance of portatos and portamentos and through the gradual decrease of nuance and tempo until they reach the initial point of the articulation debut. At the same time, the importance of doubling the letter *m* in the word *mio* has to be brought to light (executed wrongly from the point of view of pronunciation) in order to accomplish an expressive effect. The last formal component of the aria corresponds at a sound level the middle articulation of the first section, except this time it is achieved by using a superior tempo (with the mention of *agitando appena*). The expressionistic and melodic variation reported to the anterior model (m. 62-64) is accomplished through a few interpretative procedures which include the main aspects of the vocal quality: the nuance at the beginning is *p*, the sound *sol#2* is accomplished without a crescendo (*gentil*), while keeping the nuance, the attack of the acute culmination *la2* effectuated in *f*, with a short stop on itself, followed by a considerable thinning, so that *sol#2* reaches *mp* and is maintained to the end of the melodic phrase. This whole endeavour of grand effect the olfactory image of a flower's perfume: *così gentil il profumo d'un fior!* (Eg. 12)

The image shows a musical score for voice and piano. It consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line (MIMI) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with the lyrics "_ mo - glia in un va - so u - na ro - sa...". The piano accompaniment is marked with "1° TEMPO AND. agitando appena" and "Sostenendo". The second system also has a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with the lyrics "spi - oi Co - sì gen - til il pro - fu - mo d'un fior...". The piano accompaniment is marked with "allarg.", "len.", and "calmo come prima".

The melodic and rhythmic structure of the consequent phrase has as a goal emphasizing the poetic sense (the values corresponding to the initial one being augmented), implying a melancholic vocal verbiage, achieved through linear vocal colour, with the emphasis of the consonant *c* from the word *faccio* and an ample portamento among the syllables of the word *ahimè*. During the whole segment (m. 65-67) a little crescendo is achieved, so that the consequent phrase finds itself repeating the previous fragment in order to have continuity and to emphasise the idea manifested at a textual level of despair and desolation. The vocal ways of achieving the moment include an ample portamento between the

syllables of the word *faccio*, accomplishing the making of the crown in *f* on the superior sound, followed by a decrease in nuance and concluding on an audible dynamic step, achieved through decreasing the three sounds previous to the cadence in an inferior nuance. The tempo suffers an enlargement determined by the crown inside the measure, repeating the cadence measure of the phrase. (Eg. 13)

The aria ends with a brief conclusion of recitative and poetic nature, emphasised by the writing rich in special formulas and the expressive connotations of the text. In order to obtain the optimal expressive effect, it is necessary to render a few elements of vocal and interpretative nature:

- developing the expressiveness of the ample pause which precedes, both in the solo part and in the accompanying one;
- respecting the rhythm of the decimoletto in order to achieve the natural tone required by the score, while accomplishing a little crescendo on the divided rhythmic formula;
- doubling with a tonic and expressive accent the consonant *r* in the word *narrare*;
- keeping the value of the quintolet and thinning the quartolet at the same time with emphasising the word *vien* and its values, followed by a pause and a breath (the continuation does not imply an excessive thinning);
- placing an ample portamento between the middle syllables of the word *importunare*;
- coming back to tempo in the cadence measure (the last two sounds are not prolonged) (Eg. 14)

3. Conclusions

The charm and musical construction of the opera Boema start with the libretto which shows multiple sides: dramatic, visual, poetic, choreographic, being a source that offers concretisation and consolidation to the entire artistic complex. This implies: presenting the atmosphere, the local and historical colour, the feelings of the characters, the mental action on the stage, the verbal and textual content (including the choreography on stage), presenting the new characters, events, thematic ideas. It subdues the stage expression to some transformations. What is more, the linguistic analogy of the sound material is convincing. The musical language of the analysed aria correctly positions itself between existential, rethoric and aesthetic. The structure of the text creates the character Mimi with great dramatic force.

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