

1. The first generation of the second Bel Canto School of Italian opera lasted from 1811-1829 and was established by Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868). Following the operatically stagnant period between 1790-1810, Rossini, like his predecessors, continued to use “secco” recitative to carry out the action in Opera Seria and Opera Buffa. Rossini’s old yet new again style involving secco recitative and other innovative internal operatic forms, led to the adoption of the label “Code Rossini”, most palpable in two of his first masterpieces: 1813’s *Tancredi* and *L’Italiana in Algeri*, the former opera seria and the latter opera buffa. Though Rossini’s style and methods, like any great composer, evolved and changed over time, common forms in his opera, especially the earlier ones, exist in a unified manner. A primary Rossinian development is the drama placed into the kinetic sections between roles in a duet. Unlike some of his predecessors’ operas, Rossini’s opera’s duets do not involve a plot change or even much emotional transformation. Rather, characters unleash their feelings at each other in an explosive, emotional manner, leading to no resolution or change in mindset; stagnant as far as plot development, but rich in unbridled passion via their interaction. Thus, Rossini elevated the role of a duet to a more dramatic highlight and de rigeur operatic tool, albeit relinquishing the dryer job of simply transmitting information to further carry out the changing synopsis. Known as “The Grand Duet,” it generally has a Scena for an introduction, in which a range of moods and tempi occur in recitative (unrhymed verse alternating between 7 and 11 syllable lines) and harmony is unstable. The Allegro Tempo d’Attacco follows, where rhymed metrical verse begins as well as a steady tempo and phrase rhythm. An “A” section appears in which the two characters sing parallel stanzas along to identical music. Sometimes A is followed by a “B” section where the characters sing in parlante dialogue.

Here, the tonic key is founded, but the plot and action remains to be unfolded. A, B or the two may occur. The Slow Movement or *Adagio/Andante* follows. Due to the settled entirely stable section of the form, a new far-away key is often brought up here. While the characters mull over their scenarios in divided stanzas, eventually singing together in parallel 3rds (a due) or 6ths, an arpeggiated accompaniment supports an expressive melodic voice line(s). This call and response between the characters ends in a due singing with coda (also a cadenza), before the *Tempo di Mezzo* (allegro) “Middle Tempo” begins, in which the confrontation persists. The tonic abruptly returns unprepared, and the kinetic action occurs in parlante dialogue over an orchestral melody. The harmonic surprise of the tonic’s return (in addition to the entire *Tempo di Mezzo* as a whole) acts as a bridge to the final section, sometimes repeating music from the *Tempo d’Attacco*. The fast *Caballetta* closes the Grand Duet. The second stable section of the form, it encapsulates the climactic surge of released emotions between the two characters. The form is generally: a (I) – a – b (V) – “Ritornello” or Retransition – Repeat of the opening: a (I) – b (I) + coda (I).

This general Grand Duet outline can be clearly applied when discussing Rossini’s 1813 *Tancredi* Act II Grand Duet. As somewhat of an aside, but related to the use of parallel 3rds among the duet’s characters’ vocal line and the overarching development of the thirds cycle in Romantic music as an equally weighty cycle as the previous eras’ fifths cycles, Rossini’s *Tancred* Grand Duet employs a 3rds cycle as follows: E-flat (I) – G (III#) – C-flat (Flat VI) – B-flat (V) – E-flat (I). This destabilizes the tonic at least temporarily as it lacks in any pull toward the tonic in its potentially ever-expanding fifths, and eventually is responsible for the advent of atonality in years to come. Following the

“Code Rossini” Grand Duet Form, a Scena starts off the duet between Tancredi and Amenaide with a descending cycle of 3rds introduced from B-flat (V) – gm (iii) – E-flat (I) – A-flat (IV) – B-Flat7 (V7). Remaining in the 4/4 Scena time signature, the Tempo d’Attacco follows moving from E-flat (I) – B-flat (V) ---- E-flat Aug.6<sup>th</sup> collapsing into a D7 (V7/G) before moving into the relatively distant harmonic area of III# for the Andantino Slow Movement in  $\frac{3}{4}$ . As previously discussed, the Tempo d’Attacco here employs an answer-response dialogue in stanzas with open-ended action. In the slow movement, the meter changes and binary form is used, beginning with a Rossinian innovation of a “thematic block” (a-a1) followed by b/c - c1 + coda + cadenza. The Allegro Tempo di Mezzo follows with an abrupt return to tonic harmony of E-flat major. However, it moves through the parallel minor, then to C-flat (Flat VI) to A natural diminished 7<sup>th</sup> harmony before reaching the dominant B-flat (V) and ending (and simultaneously introducing the Cabaletta) on a B-Flat 7 half cadence. Parlante dialogue is sung over an orchestral melody before transitioning to a due throughout for the closing section of the form, the Cabaletta proper. In tonic harmony, it flows from an a section to a repeat of the a and then to a b section, centering around B-flat (V). A ritornello appropriately follows, moving from E-flat 7 (I) – A-flat (IV) – B-flat7 (V7) – E-flat (I). The a-a-b order of the Cabaletta is then repeated before reaching the coda in tonic harmony (E-flat/I).

In addition to the Grand Duet, a hallmark of “The Rossini Code” is the Central Act Finale. A prime example of this is the Finale to Act I of Rossini’s 1813 *L’Italiana in Algeri*. In opposition to the Grand Duet form, here the dramatic scenario is altered between the beginning and end of the finale. The typical introduction involves the

establishment of the tonic and is usually sung by chorus, but may begin with an ensemble or aria; in the case of *L'Italiana in Algeri*, it starts with a Chorus in C (I) followed by a Duet between Pasha and Isabella in E-flat (Flat III, the missing pitch)! The first Tempo di Mezzo follows. Here, action begins, though it remains open-ended. Freely accompanied dialogue (parlando) is sung over unstable harmony with an orchestral melody. Beginning in C (I) and moving to G (V) departure from the tonic begins with a move to gm (v), a switch into the parallel minor (formerly hinted at in the Introduction with the noteworthy delve into flat 3<sup>rd</sup> harmony, albeit major, an extremely distant pitch from the tonic of C, involving a system shift), moving to B-flat7 (V7/E-flat). A slow movement follows, called Pezzo Concertato or “Concerted Piece.” Action comes to a halt here as characters’ inner thoughts are exposed, generally in pseudo-canonic imitation. The new key area of E-flat (Flat III) is stabilized here, but nevertheless extremely dissonant from the C Major tonic. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Tempo di Mezzo ensues, in which action recommences over parlando dialogue, though still kinetic. G harmony or V/C begins the section, but avoiding a quick resolution to tonic C harmony, a deceptive cadence follows in A-flat, moving to fm, then to an arpeggiated A-flat augmented 6<sup>th</sup> chord which collapses back into G (V), finally cadencing on C (I) for the beginning of the fast Stretta. Utilizing the main characters as well as the chorus, it follows a – a- b form (replete with a “Rossinian crescendo”) to a ritornello. The a section is in C (I) and the b in G (V). The stretta (a – a – b) section repeats, followed by the conclusive coda in tonic C harmony.

The two huge innovations of the Grand Duet and Central Act Finale that established “The Rossini Code” through their placement in 1813’s *Tancredi* and *L'Italiana in Algeri* respectively greatly influenced composers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of the

Italian Bel Canto School, namely Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835) and Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848). Specifically, Bellini borrowed heavily from and adopted/altered Rossini's five part structure of Scena – Tempo D'Attacco - Slow Movement - Tempo Di Mezzo – Cabaletta form of the grand duet, and embellished the Scena with extended arioso passages and maintained the often kinetic and partitioned action used by Rossini and the Baroque era. A contemporary of Bellini, Donizetti also followed in Rossini's footsteps in many respects, one being the little differentiation of characters in ensembles, with all parts singing basically identical music. He also maintained the popular five-part structure and imbued his operas heavily with French grand opera influence in 1830s and 40s Italian opera, as seen in Rossini, among others.

2. Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835) and Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) spearheaded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Italian Opera. Based on a French drama by Alexandre Soumet with a libretto by Romani, Bellini's 1831 *Norma* is a “political opera about revolt against oppression from foreign domination (a disguised commentary on Italy's hope for independence from the Austrian Habsburgs)” (Burnett, Lecture 8). This is in line with the relatively permanent new trend at the time in which melodrama permeates Italian opera due to the influence of Sir Walter Scott and Victor Hugo's novels, as well as plays by William Shakespeare. Bellini was father to a galore of stylistic traits, more than a few inspired by and built off of Rossini. Firstly, he maintained the five-part structure established by Rossini (Scena – tempo d'attacco – slow movement – tempo di mezzo – cabaletta) of the grand duet, but featured elaborate arioso passages of great pathos in the Scena section. This is exemplified in the opening of *Norma's* Act II. Another Rossini adoption involved the separation between expression of sentiment and rendering of

action, reminiscent of the late Baroque era's idea of opera, where all action occurred in recitative and arias were a showcase of emotion. A uniquely Bellini innovation is his concentration on repeated rhythm and on a lone, continuous melodic line whose climax is pushed toward the utmost end. In this way, "Bellini became the supreme master of an elegiac style, a lyricism which transforms even the scenes of action" (Burnett, Lecture 8). The continuity and focus on a sole melodic line was unlike Rossini and a sort of refutation of the somewhat robotic splendor resplendent in earlier Italian opera. Within his continuous melody, Bellini abandoned the Rossini-popularized use of fioritura, in which the melodic line abruptly transitions from an 8<sup>th</sup>-note motion to a tense 32<sup>nd</sup>-note quadrupling. The most far-reaching and Bellini-esque stylistic trait is his applied lyricism to all elements of opera; that is, to recitative and even to ensemble. Rather than solving the age-old problem of how to achieve action and plot development without losing musical interest, development and tension, Bellini simply ignores it. In *Norma*, for example, even in huge, important choruses as the call to war and the procession of the Druids, the "action" is kinetic (Bellini has essentially no action ever even in kinetic sections); rather, characters are frozen in emotional states – lyricism outweighs plot development, thus demolishing the inevitable issue of action in music. The plaintive melodic lines of Bellini did not catch on widespread during his time, but found its way richly imbued into later Romantic composers, especially on the piano – Frederic Chopin being the most obvious example. The background contrapuntal progression of *Norma*'s Act I/iv: Double Aria "Casta Diva" – "Ah! Bello A Me Ritorno" is indicative of Romantic harmony in general in that its tonality (or lack thereof) is unstable and progressive. The scena starts on E-flat and then moves from D-flat (I) to A-flat (V/D-

flat), which acts as a pivot as the flat II of G, the key area of the next slow movement. The tempo di mezzo then follows a flat-VI above G, or the II of D-flat, E-flat major, then moves to C then to F; the harmonic areas are locally related at best and Bellini has little interest in preserving the strength of the tonic, in line with his ever-flowing continuous melodic line. Thus, the tonality is progressive. A single tonic center (a la Rossini) is replaced by many tonic areas with Bellini. Another Romantic harmonic aspect involves his use of the cycle of 3rds in *Norma's* Scene, composed as a string of chromatic 5-6 exchanges. The cycle starts upon arriving at the V/V (D-flat) where it moves to A-natural – D-natural – B-flat – B-flat dim. 7 – G-flat, then back to D-flat before a half cadence on A-flat. Lastly, a Romantic operatic hallmark is the thematic block of a – a1 used in a – b – a phrases in the slow movement. Here, Norma sings the thematic block, with 4-measure a then a-prime phrases, followed by a 4-measure b phrase + chorus, concluding with another 4-measure a phrase followed by a cadenza.

Gaetano Donizetti, a contemporary of Bellini, was responsible for officially establishing the Romantic tenor as the Romantic male lead in his 1835 opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Similar to both Rossini and Bellini is the continued disuse of character differentiation in ensembles, where all parts sing basically the same music. However, perhaps as a more detailed exploration of Bellini's advent of extended colatura, voices are now "individually characterized in the music: soprano will sing coloratura only and in moderation; lower voices avoid coloratura altogether and sing long lyric lines (Burnett, Lecture 8). As hero, the tenor accentuates the top register and the villain, a baritone, inhabits the lower registers; the music, however, as stated before remaining essentially the same. Another similarity to Bellini and overall Romantic characteristic is the shift of

story importance to post-classical or modern history as opposed to the ancients of earlier areas, complemented by prominence of opera seria. In addition, Bellini and Donizetti shared affection for lyrical melodies in 6/8 or triple time. Following the five-part form established by Rossini and adopted by Bellini, Donizetti's cabalettas present a new range of emotional dynamics, expressing a spectrum of feelings, between shining, jubilant, mournful and plaintive. Thus, his tonal range is generally larger than Bellini's as well. Similarly to his Italian contemporaries, Donizetti aimed at dramatic intensity via vocal contour instead of harmonic nuance; hence "the somewhat generalized emotion of the many cabalettas based on simple major-key harmonies in a tragic context" (Burnett, Lecture 8). Another Bellini characteristic (taken from the Classical sublime) is the Pezzo Concertato in *Lucia de Lammermoor*'s Central Act Finale featuring a ground-swell to climax. The Finale of Act II is tonally progressive in general Romantic fashion and in some ways similar to Bellini's *Norma* in its move to a diminished 5<sup>th</sup> away from a key area (Bellini moves from D-flat to G from the scena to slow movement, while Donizetti moves from G to D-flat between the intro and pezzo concertante; both moves are achieved through a pivot Flat II harmony), but doesn't feature any prominent 3rds cycles. The Intro of the finale begins in G (IV), and the Tempo d'attacco moves to A (V) – cm – A-flat to D-flat (Flat II) (or tritone above the IV/G) for the Pezzo Concertato. This extremely distant key area is, fittingly, where the ground-swell to climax takes place. The tempo di mezzo returns to dominant (A) harmony, moving to V/V (E) – A – parallel minor (am) – A (V) back to tonic harmony D (I) for the Stretta.

Thus, Bellini's *Norma* and Donizetti's *Lucia de Lammermoor* are significant operas of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of Italian opera after Rossini. Each composer introduced

innovative stylistic traits harmonically and melodically while paying tribute to form and action-sequencing techniques established by Rossini, thus advancing the overall Romantic style in an overarching, progressive tonality.

3. German Romantic Opera became its own completely individual separate entity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most firmly anchored by Carl Maria Von Weber's (1786-1826) 1821 opera *Der Freischutz*. An early seed of Romantic German opera was sowed in Mozart's 1791 *Die Zauberflote*. Firstly, its serious and psychological topic of Forces of Evil vs. Forces of Good became a hallmark of German Romantic Opera, in preference over the common temperaments of either romantic and over-brimming with love and passion or light and comedic. A much more intellectual plane of thought and emotion was adopted, distinctly separating German thought from its Italian and French contemporaries. This naïve vs. Enlightened dilemma of *Die Zauberflote* found its way into many later German operas, including, of course, *Der Freischutz*. Further, *Die Zauberflote* was the best singspiel with spoken dialogue. This evolved into early 19<sup>th</sup> century Singspiel, as exemplified by Ludwig Spohr's 1813 *Faust* and E.T.A. Hoffmann's 1816 *Undine*, which emphasized the fantastical and magic, employed folk-like melodies and chorus, spoken dialogue, and reminiscence motives. This was influenced by French "Rescue" operas of the 1790s and beginning in 1802, French rescue opera was performed in Vienna translated into German. Weber, who directed the German Opera at Dresden from 1817 as Kappellmeister to the King of Saxony, was the first to speak of a Gesamtkunstwerk (total artwork), an idea Wagner ran with to an extreme in his opera dramas. Weber premiered *Der Freischutz* ("The Charmed Bullet," in Berlin in 1821. The story tells of a love story between Agathe (heroine) and Max (tenor). The villain (baritone, as becomes common

practice around the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) attempts to have Max sell his soul to the devil, thus setting up the to-be traditional Good vs. Evil struggle. The powers of good are represented through C Major, the overall tonic of the piece, and the powers of evil in c minor (in which Samiel, the Devil is portrayed by a dim. 7<sup>th</sup> derived from cm), with its relative of E-flat major being fittingly, the heroine Agathe.

The Overture to *Der Freischutz* is historical in its influence on Romantic symphonic thinking. Weber, through the use of manipulating the orchestra (instead of just the voice to tell the story), its roots in German folk-song, its psychological and literal German setting, and the gruesomeness of the tale rendered unflinchingly for the first time in German and internationally. For example, the Adagio introduction features an emphasis on a horn melody in tonic harmony, while the Closing, after the Exposition features a solo clarinet for Agathe's Theme in E-flat major, the powers of good. Weber employs a 3rds progression at the end of the Development leading to the Recapitulation by moving from D-flat (achieved through moving a chromatic step up from G7 (V7) to A-flat, forming a deceptive cadence, then moving to D-flat as A-flat acts as V). This jarring deceptive cadence and move into a distant harmony catapults the cycle of 3rds from D-flat – b natural diminished 7<sup>th</sup> – G7 (V) – cm (i), the minor being necessary at the conclusion to fulfill the gruesomeness of the tale and hint at the darkness to come. These methods influenced symphonic thinking as they opened up a new palette, purely orchestral speaking, in terms of the potential range of instruments a composer could use and the folk-like qualities native to Germans that could be rendered through them.

The Finale of Act II: The Wolf's Glen involves a comprisement of the 3 complementary tritone systems of the 3# tonic matrix. It begins in the 3# system of f#m,

then moves to the opposite side of the 3-flat system of cm, staying there for its relative major of E-flat, then back to cm, then to am, initiating the “0” system. The 3-flat system returns when returning to cm, only to revert back to “0” for am and back again to the 3-flat system for cm (where the overture is quoted), finally returning to the original 3# system of f# minor. Thus, the whole finale arpeggiates an F#-A-C-E-flat diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord for the devil, or Samuel’s, motive, an original Weber innovation. The 3 complementary tritone systems of the 3# tonic matrix are enveloped as tritone symmetry occurs through beginning and ending the finale with f#m – cm and cm – f#m.

Meyerbeer’s 1836 Act IV Finale to *Les Huguenots* and Weber’s 1821 Act II Finale of *Der Freischutz* share some similarities. Both rely heavily on the major and its parallel minor to delineate characters and the mood of the action. While Weber moves from CM (Good/Agathe) to cm (Evil/the devil), Meyerbeer switches from f minor (Raoul) and F Major (Valentine). While Weber outlines a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord on a grand scale, outlining 3 different tritone systems, Meyerbeer, in the Finale’s slow movement, initiates a descending chromatic diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord in which D (Flat-VI) travels to B-Flat to F, then to E-flat diminished 7<sup>th</sup> – E natural diminished 7<sup>th</sup> – F diminished 7<sup>th</sup>, then ascending chromatically to F# diminished 7<sup>th</sup>, to G diminished 7<sup>th</sup>, to an A-flat in the bass that forms a V6/4 of G-flat, the flat-II of tonic harmony (an irrational Romantic progression). In the national sense, both Meyerbeer and Weber sought to write opera to appeal to comparatively uncultured audiences seeking entertainment and exhilaration, unlike the Theatre Italian’s operas whose clients consisted of almost sole aristocracy. Thus, Weber and Meyerbeer’s grand opera was filled to the brim with never before seen excitement and passion, built upon folk songs the audience was already familiar with, and

with stories psychologically and emotionally unrelenting resplendent with supernatural effects and magic to make for utter lack of boredom throughout an entire opera. While Meyerbeer stuck to the Rossini code, Weber created a fully through-composed opera. German Romantic opera was established and imbued itself into the symphonic and piano works of composers to come, not to mention the new operatic realms constructed by Wagner.