

# STRUCTURE OF THE VOCAL DISCOURSE OF THE CHARACTER LEONORA FROM THE OPERA "IL TROVATORE" BY GIUSEPPE VERDI

EDITH GEORGIANA ADETU<sup>1</sup>

**SUMMARY.** The opera "Il Trovatore" crowns the famous Verdi trilogy ("Rigoletto", "Il Trovatore", "La Traviata") leaving as a legacy in the history of lyrical theatre vocal archetypes relevant to the Italian romantic opera. This research aims at the formal and stylistic analysis of the vocal discourse of the character Leonora, considering the solo moments and outstanding overall moments, attributed to the role. In carrying out this approach we will highlight the vocal peculiarities of the character, as well as relevant technical and interpretive aspects. In essence, the research represents a correlation between the structure of the moments that make up the vocal discourse and the nature of the character's Verdi vocality, Leonora's role summing up various technical and interpretive requirements.

**Keywords:** Verdi, Il Trovatore, Leonora, Structure, Discourse, Vocality

## 1. Introduction

The reality described in the works of Giuseppe Verdi remained during his creation a poetically stylized reality. In the realization of this approach, an extremely important role was played by the evolution of vocality and the distinct approach of solo roles, receiving the dramatic force and expressiveness of the human voice at the expense of a frivolous vocal exposure. Verdi saw the weak parts of Italian opera, which hindered his development. With few exceptions, the music of Italian operas was not yet linked to stage action. The composer realized that Italian opera could not be elevated to a new, higher level without overcoming the softness of dramatic action, without eliminating outdated conventionalism. Verdi also introduced many new elements in the vocal style of Italian opera. Always taking into account the importance that the vocal performer presents for the opera and paying a lot of attention to the cast, the type of voices of the

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD student at "Transilvania" University Braşov, E-mail: edithadetu@yahoo.com

singers and their interpretive talent. The voices were to be entrusted with a singable declamation that could be transformed at any time, either into a recitative or a freely structured melody. From the first stage of his creative path, Verdi fought hard against the whims of the performers, if they contradicted the content of music. Following the dramatic truth, Verdi often gives up in his areas of opera, the passages of virtuosity, if they do not result from the content and if they do not contribute to the revelation of the artistic image. However, in his early works, between 1840 and 1850, there are still many *cavatines*, arias, *cabalettes* and choirs made according to certain patterns. Parallel to this conventionalism, many features of the same works speak of the persevering pursuits of the innovative playwrighting. Thus, new vocal typologies are outlined - the dramatic *coloratura* soprano, the dramatic *mezzo-soprano*, the dramatic baritone - marking the evolution of the Italian romantic opera towards a realistic musical theatre. The role of Leonora in the opera "Il Trovatore" is a vocal-interpretive prototype, whose structure highlights the transition from the *belcanto* style, to a new way of vocal expression, more dramatic, more personal. "Crucially, I believe that Trovatore's focus on singing helps to highlight a transition, a historic evolution in operatic style that expands ways to exploit the vocal utterance – the aria, 'song' – as a powerful emotional sign, a marker of a new kind of theatrical 'realism'".<sup>2</sup>

The work of Giuseppe Verdi has over time has been a vast field of analysis, which has allowed much research. Both interpreters and musicologists have learned in his work an interesting study material, whether we refer to the evolution of the vocal technique, to the emancipation of a school of singing, whether we refer to the musical structure and analysis of the musical language and its poeticity. It is appropriate to mention the following researchers and studies by them: Abramo Basevi - "The Operas of Giuseppe Verdi" (1859), Philipp Gossett - "Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera" (2006), Joseph Kerman - "Opera AS Drama "(1956)," Opera and Morbidity of Music "(2008), Julian Budden -" Master Musicians Series) "(2013), Elizabeth Hudson -" Narratives in Verdi: Perspectives on His Musical Dramaturgy "(1993), Grigore Constantinescu - "Giuseppe Verdi" (2009).

## 2. Vocal peculiarities of the role of Leonora

Due to the character of its dramaturgy, the opera "Il Trovatore" is perhaps closest to the opera "Ernani" but revealing new features. Verdi pays more attention here to the psychological shaping of the characters.

---

<sup>2</sup> Hudson, Elizabeth. „From Orpheus to Opera – Singing about Singing in Verdi's Il trovatore Verdi, 'Tacea la notte' (Leonora), Il trovatore, Act I"

"What makes *Il trovatore* work is, unsurprisingly, Verdi's music. By turns passionately lyrical and headlong in his best manner, the score has a density of feeling and sound, as well as a distinctive *tinta*—color—all its own, and a mood which one might stretch a bit to call melancholy exaltation."<sup>3</sup> Leonora's characterization is achieved through a lyricism - justified from a psychological point of view - which will acquire dramatic tones towards the end of the work. Among the most beautiful *solos* moments attributed to the role is the *cavatina* from the first act of the work - poetic and bright, in which the soprano highlights her vocal ambit, agility and timbre versatility. No less expressive are the recitative and the aria from act IV, through which Verdi creates well-defined contrasts, true sound effusions. We notice in this point of Leonora's vocal discourse a gentle nuance of the character, rendered by a dynamic diversity, by a wide phrasing. Verdi's way of writing - to bring the voices to the upper register and to obtain effects through maximum sonority acquires new connotations in the context of this role." We see that Verdi wanted singers to be individuals "who have something to say." Verdi wanted singers who can sing with the technique of the Old Italian School, but he wanted more than just "vocal finesse." He knew very well that only the perfect mastery of the voice allows the singer to sing with true feeling and emotion—in other words, with heart and soul."<sup>4</sup> The soprano's vocal range is exploited so that the expressive valences, the timbre richness can play both lyrical episodes and dramatic episodes, where the action of the work requires it. Regarding the vocal typology, we consider this role as being written for a dramatic soprano of coloratura or dramatic agility, the exigencies related to the ambit of the score and the timbre versatility being present throughout the vocal discourse.

### 3. Analysis of the relevant moments of the role

Within the *cavatina* "*Tacea la notte placida...*" (act I) we notice a quarter-tenth ambitus, The shape of the *cavatina* is *bistrophic*; AB (A: *Andante* B: *Allegro giusto*). From a harmonic point of view, A: *E flat minor* – *E flat major* (in transition modulates to minor then the end in major), B: *A flat major*. "Her opening scena passes from recitative through a delicious moment of *arioso* ('Come d'aurato sogno') to her *cavatina* ('Tacea la notte') which shows Verdi's melodic craftsmanship at its finest. Even his earliest arias show a tendency to throw their main musical weight towards the end."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Lederer, Victor. *Verdi: the operas and choral works*, pp. 135-136

<sup>4</sup> Bloem-Hubatka, Daniela. *The old italian school of singing: a theoretical and practical guide*, pp. 151

<sup>5</sup> Budden, Julian. *Verdi*. Third Edition, pp. 230-231

Section **A**, is highlighted by the minor harmony, the song having a descending profile. The nostalgic character can be noticed due to the *Andante tempo*, the reduced dynamics, the airy accompaniment, also the indication of the *mezza voce*, being a significant landmark in the interpretation of the area. "But the essential interpretive element is the imagination of the soprano." "Tacea la notte placida" is dominated by the idea of silence. After a breath, "e bella in ciel sereno" has a broader scope and already calls for a rounder voice."<sup>6</sup>

## E.g. 1

## Aria "Tacea la notte..." (measure 1 – 10)

The contrast found in measures 16-25 is induced by the modulation towards the major key and the arching of the melodic line in ascending direction. During this musical period, the orchestra supports the *solo* discourse and the indications *animando un poco* and *con espansione* contribute to the remark of the jovial character. The doubling of the musical line can be observed in measures 26-30, this time the melodic profile reaching the acute register, the orchestra being a point of support, both in terms of character and intonation. The following musical periods are similar in terms of melodic and harmonic construction, the changes occurring at the level of the literary text. The only element that defines the rehearsal is its end, highlighted by the *solo cadence*. Within the *solo cadence* we notice a first moment in which the vocal extension of the character is presented, the end of this section being crowned with a descending walk from Reb from the third octave to the lab from the first octave

<sup>6</sup> Singher, Martial. An interpretative guide to opera arias, pp. 549

## E.g. 2

Allegro vivo. ( $\text{♩}=80$ )

ra un ciel sem - - bro!  
those ten-der accents rang

## Aria "Tacea la notte..." (mäs. 69-70)

The **B** movement, it stands out by capitalizing on the tone of Lab Major and by the melody built through jumps and ornamentation. It should be noted that the orchestra supports the segments with interval jumps, thus contributing to the support of the character in the exposition of the vocal discourse (measures 79-81). At the same time, the virtuosity and the interpretive technique can be observed in this section, the melodic line being organized from the succession of sixteen descendants, also supported by accompaniment.

## E.g. 3

la, il cor, il cor, il cor s'inne-bri - ò. Il mio de-sti - no  
der My heart, my heart, my heart to be his own. On him my faith be -

## Aria "Tacea la notte..." (measures 85-87)

Towards the end of the section, we notice the insertion of some measures based on an ascending-descending range (measures 99-101), with the role of interpretive virtuosity.

The next relevant moment of the role is the aria "*D'amor, sull 'ali rosee*", a moment of great expressiveness and vocal exposition. Here we

find the living presence of the *belcanto* style, with its dynamic effusions. The aria has a hexadecimal ambit, and the form is bistrophic (A, B), with orchestral and recitative introduction. From a harmonic point of view: A: *F minor*, B: *A flat major*. The recitative of the area is highlighted by the development of discourse and by the use of the middle to acute register. Also, towards the end of it, the interventions of the accompaniment with an interrogative-expressive role can be noticed, whose answer will be the lines of the character Leonora. At the same time, we find the capitalization of the vocal technique (the well-known Verdian *staccato-legato* procedure, on the F note of the second octave - a difficult sound within the character's vocalism, marking the transition from the middle register to the acute register). The sweet indication highlights the versatility imposed in the vocal exposition of this moment.

E.g. 4

au - ra, che in - tor - no spi - ri, deh, pi - e - to - sa, deh, pi - e -  
breez - es, I hear la - ment - ing, oh fly and tel him, oh fly and

*dolce*

to - sa gliar - re - caj miei so - spi - ri!  
tell him his love doth near him lin - ger!

*ppp*

#### Aria "D'amor, sull' ali rosee" (measures 31-37)

Section A capitalizes on a musical idea, organized based on sequencing. The indication *con espressivo* and the dynamic *pp*, gives the elegiac, melancholic character. Also, in this *Adagio* section we observe the use of a small cadence as a link between the treble and the note in the

middle register, which can be performed in the manner of a *portamento* (measures 38 - 44). Section B, is distinguished by the modulation to the major key, the compositional manner by sequencing being used in measures 45 - 50. At the same time, we can see that this movement is wider than the previous one, intensifying the acute register by touching the *Reb*, the culmination of the area. In this aria the voice of the soprano must prove itself highly skillful. "It is still a *Lirico spinto* capable of great dramatic strength, but it is used here with the flexibility, the tenderness, and the refinement of a string instrument of the highest class. The result of the performance must be stunning."<sup>7</sup>

E.g. 5

The image shows a musical score for the aria "D'amor, sull' ali rosee" (measures 56-59). The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in a soprano register. The piano accompaniment features a prominent flute and clarinet part. The score is annotated with various musical markings and boxes highlighting specific passages.

The first system of the score shows the vocal line with the lyrics: "pe - ne, le pe - ne del mio cor, fate ev - er - more our hope be - trays, dehl non dir - - gli im - my". The piano accompaniment includes markings for "Fl." and "Cl." and "cresc.". A purple box highlights the vocal line from measure 56 to 58, and a red box highlights a specific passage in measure 57. The second system shows the vocal line with the lyrics: "prov - vi - do le pe - ne del mio cor, le heart will break, if fate ev - er - be - trays, if". The piano accompaniment includes markings for "con forza" and "dolce". A purple box highlights the vocal line from measure 59 to 61, and a red box highlights a specific passage in measure 60.

Aria "D'amor, sull' ali rosee" (measures 56-59)

<sup>7</sup> Singer, Martial, op. cit. pp. 563

The end of the aria is based on a complex *solo* cadence, with compound intervals and ascending chromatic ranges. The *ambitus* imposed within the cadence is *twelfth* (*E flat* from the one-lined octave – *B flat* from the two-lined octave). The free construction of this scene is determined by the dramatic conception. The expressiveness of this episode is accentuated by an unusual stamp colour. With an equally delicate sense, the composer finds the appropriate orchestral colours for the concluding phrases from Leonora's Adagio, when on the trembling background of the oboes, flutes and clarinets his soft song is heard, not without the virtuosity necessary for such a moment. This song is a remarkable example of attributing emotional content to a vocal colouring. The particular character of the dramatic voice of *coloratura* is thus highlighted.

Another important moment in the structure of this role is the duet from act IV, between Leonora and Count de Luna, the duet "*Mira, di acerbe lagrime*". At this point, the ambition of the character Leonora is fourth. The form of the duet is bipartite: **A** - *Andante con moto*, transition -: *Più mosso / Allegro assai vivo*, **B** - *Allegro brillante*, preceded by the recitative. From a harmonic point of view: **A** – *A flat major*, **B** - *F major*. "At the beginning of the duet for the count and Leonora there is a very vivacious and natural *parlante*, in typical Verdian style, that leads to an *Andante mosso*, in which Leonora has a very clear, symmetrical, and pleasant cantabile."<sup>8</sup> In section A, some phrases from Leonora's speech are supported by the accompaniment, the punctuated rhythm present at the level of the vocal speech gives the whole scene an agitated, dramatic character. Therefore, we observe the transition from vocal lyricism to the accentuation of vocal drama. „The replacement of solo arias with duets and other types of musical dialogue, an issue that had been prepared at least since the middle of the eighteenth century, accelerated; these dialogued episodes were much less adapted to the pre-established patterns, such as those of the Rossini duet in several parts."<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Basevi Abramo, *The operas of Giuseppe Verdi*, pp. 262

<sup>9</sup> Abbate Carolyn & Parker Roger, *A History of Opera. The Last Four Hundred Years*, pp. 190



Andante con moto. (♩ = 88.)  
**Leonora.** (throws herself in despair at his feet.)  
 Mi - ra, di a - cer - be la - gri - me  
 Here at thy feet a sup - pli - ant,

Strings.  
*pp* *Fag.*

spar - go al tuo pie - de un ri - o!  
 Oh, — let my tears im - plore thee!  
 non ba - stia pian - to?  
 If nei - ther tears nor

**Duet "Mira, di acerbe lagrime" (measures 57-62)**

Also, in measures 72-73, the interventions from the acute register are doubled, these being a support for the character, both from a rhythmic point of view, but also in terms of the contribution of some rhythmic-melodic impact structures. In measures 93-95 we notice the fusion of the musical lines of both characters. We notice in these measures the use of the sequences outlined upwards; these being doubled by the orchestra. The first period of the transition is devoted to interpreters, in measures 109-112. The ascending profile contributes to the amplification of the dynamics, elements that can be observed through the composer's indications (*ppp*, *più mosso*). The continuation of the transition is organized in the manner of a melodic recitative, which is organized by the exchange of quick lines between Leonora and the Count de Luna.

Section B, is highlighted by the bright, bright character, once due to the establishment of the Fa Major key but also due to the ascending rhythmic-melodic sequencing interventions in Leonora's speech. Also, the whole melodic line is supported by the accompaniment. "Leonora's and

Azucena's progressions lead from opposite directions towards F major/minor, a tonal center which will dominate acts 3 and 4, connecting events stemming from Di Luna's intrigues."<sup>10</sup>

E.g. 7

Duet "Mira, di acerbe lagrime" (measures 159-161)

The end of this moment is marked by the isorhythmic character of the vocal exposition of the characters, leaving to show the dramatic essence of the whole work. The existing accents in the vocal writing and the ascending chromatic gait of the character Leonora ("*ah! Salvo tu sei per me*") highlight the dramatic potential of the voice, this passage being placed in the middle register, a register that in the context of the voice of dramatic *soprano* agility requires incisiveness and magnitude.

#### 4. Conclusions

The characterization of the characters from the opera "Il Trovatore" is made through a series of embossed scenes, of effect, convincing. At their core, without a doubt, is the force of expression of the human voice. Leonora's role is one of the most demanding solo scores in the Verdi repertoire. Approaching this role requires a series of qualities, both technical and interpretive, as well as acting qualities, being suggested a *summum* of vocal expressiveness. The structure of the character's discourse is complex, being composed of various moments, meant to capitalize on the soprano's voice in all its hypostases, in all registers, in a provocative dynamic. The vocal of the soprano from the opera "Il Trovatore" follows the foreshadowed path of Verdi between 1840 and 1850 in other similar roles, such as: Griselda from

<sup>10</sup> Balthazar L. Scott, "Plot and Tonal Design as Compositional Constraints in Il Trovatore"

the opera "*I Lombardi alla prima crociata*", Elvira from the opera "*Ernani*", Odabella from the opera "*Attila*", Amelia from the opera "*I Masnadieri*", Gulnara from the opera "*Il Corsaro*", Luisa Miller from the opera of the same name. Leonora's role continues this list of roles for the voice of dramatic soprano agility, but marking the transition to a new form of vocal expression, diverse, challenging, highlighting the new stylistic direction of the illustrious composer.

*Translated from Romanian by Cristina Ioniță*

## REFERENCES

- Abbate Carolyn & Parker Roger. *A History of Opera. The Last Four Hundred Years*. Vellant Publishing House. 2019.
- Balthazar L. Scott, "Plot and Tonal Design as Compositional Constraints in Il Trovatore" *Current Musicology*; Spring 1996; 60/61; Arts & Humanities Database. <https://searchproquestcom.am.enformation.ro/artshumanities/docview/224862317/fulltextPDF/9E7C51AAB84843ECPQ/5?accountid=136549> (Accessed on 07.03.2021)
- Basevi, Abramo. *The operas of Giuseppe Verdi*. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London. 2013
- Bloem-Hubatka, Daniela. *The old italian school of singing: a theoretical and practical guide*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers. 2012
- Budden, Julian. *Verdi. Third Edition*, Oxford University Press. 2008
- Hudson, Elizabeth. "From Orpheus to Opera – Singing about Singing in Verdi's Il trovatore Verdi, 'Tacea la notte' (Leonora), Il trovatore, Act I" *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 28, 2, 179–182 © Cambridge University Press, 2016 doi:10.1017/S0954586716000203. <https://searchproquestcom.am.enformation.ro/artshumanities/docview/1824041294/fulltextPDF/9E7C51AAB84843ECPQ/1?accountid=136549> (Accessed on 09.03.2021)
- Lederer, Victor. *Verdi: the operas and choral works*. Amadeus Press. 2014
- Singer, Martial. *An Interpretative Guide to Operatic Arias*. The Pennsylvania State University Press. 1983.
- Verdi, Giuseppe. *Il Trovatore*. R. Stabilimento Ricordi. Cca 1883.

