ABSTRACT

Title of Document: BEYOND THE LIBRETTO: HOW THE

COMPOSER GUIDES THE CREATION OF

**CHARACTER** 

THREE CASE STUDIES

Melissa Angela Schiel, Doctor of Musical Arts,

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Directed By: Professor Leon Major, School of Music

When performing in opera, a singer portrays a character. A libretto is used as the principal resource for the research. Music can also reveal insights into the composer's ideas regarding characterization. This performance dissertation examines how musical devices such as genre, texture, meter, melody, instrumentation and form can be used to inform choices of characterization. Three roles from diverse operas were examined and performed. The first role, Estelle Oglethorpe in *Later the Same Evening* (2007) by John Musto (b 1954) was performed November 15, 16, 17, 18 2007. The second role, Dorabella in *Così fan tutte* (1789) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) was performed April 20, 25, 27, 2008. The third role, Olga in *Eugene Onegin* (1878) by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) was performed on April 19, 2009. All operas were presented by the University of Maryland Opera

Studio at the Ina and Jack Kay Theater in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland College Park. DVD recordings of all performances can be found in the University of Maryland library system.

# BEYOND THE LIBRETTO: HOW THE COMPOSER GUIDES THE CREATION OF CHARACTER THREE CASE STUDIES

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

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# **Dedication**

To Larry and Joyce Schiel and Nikolas Caoile, thank you for all of your support, dedication and love.

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# Chapter 1: Così fan tutte

#### 1.1 Introduction

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) was a remarkable dramatist. He felt poetry "should be the obedient daughter of the music," and the libretto should only provide "a well-constructed plot, and the words should be written with the purpose of serving the music." Perhaps this is why some of Mozart's most popular operas use well-constructed plots written by Venetian librettist Lorenzo da Ponte (1749-1838). The Mozart/Da Ponte operatic triptych, which is comprised of *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786), Don Giovanni (1787) and Così fan tutte (1789) serve as exemplary operas in the Italian buffo style. Così fan tutte, which translates to All Women Do the Same, premiered at the Vienna Burgtheater on 26 January 1790. It was Mozart's last commission for the Viennese Court and the last opera premiere in the reign of Joseph II.<sup>2</sup> Da Ponte's original libretto was initially intended for Antonio Salieri (1750-1825) who was Joseph II's *Hofkappellmeister* (music chancellor). However, Salieri refused to work on it further and the commission was then given to Mozart.<sup>3</sup> The premiere cast featured Adriana Ferrarese del Bene (b c1760; d after 1800) as Fiordiligi, Louise Villeneuve (fl 1786-99) as Dorabella, Vincenzo Calvesi (fl 1777-1811) as Ferrando, Francesco Benucci (b c1745-1824) as Guglielmo, Dorotea Bussani (b1763; d after 1810) as Despina and Francesco Bussani (b1743; d after 1807) as Don Alfonso. Mozart was familiar with the vocal abilities of this cast: he was well acquainted with

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Janos Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage* (New York: Prager Publishers, 1972): 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Peter Branscome, "Così in Context," The Musical Times 122 no 1661 (1981): 461.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Bruce Alan Brown, W.A. Mozart Così fan tutte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 10-

According to Brown the souring of their relationship may have been due to the librettist's exclusion of Salieri's favorite singer Catarina Cavlaieri from the librettist's pasticcio *L'ape musicale*.

Benucci and Bussani (a husband and wife team) as they had performed in his 1786 production of *Figaro*;<sup>4</sup> Del Bene (Fiordiligi) was Da Ponte's mistress (he claimed the libretto was specifically written for her)<sup>5</sup> and Mozart composed "Al desio, di chi t'adora," as an alternate aria for Del Bene's role as Susanna in the 1789 *Figaro* revival; Mozart also composed alternate arias in Martín y Soler's *Il burbero di buon core* for Villaneuve.<sup>6</sup>

#### 1.2 Synopsis

In traditional *opera buffa* fashion, *Così* contains both noble and servant characters. Dorabella and Fiordiligi's maid, Despina is quick witted with "life experience." The upper-class noblemen, Ferrando and Guglielmo, are sweethearts of Dorabella and Fiordiligi respectively. Some *buffo* stock characters used in *Così* include a notary and a physician, both played by Despina in disguise. Ferrando and Guglielmo also disguise themselves as Albanians in an attempt to woo each other's fiancées. By the end of the opera, the men have lost their wager with the philosopher Don Alfonso that their fiancées would remain faithful to them. Fiordiligi and Dorabella fall for their new "Albanian" suitors and, with a fake marriage contract, Despina marries the girls to the Albanians. In the final act, all deception is revealed and lessons are learned.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Julian Rushton. "Così fan tutte." In The New Grove Dictionary of Opera, edited by Stanley Sadie. Grove Music Online OxfordMusicOnline,

http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O003389 (accessed December 10, 2009).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Daniel Heartz, *Mozart's Operas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 217.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Brown, *W.A. Mozart Così fan tutte*, 18. Villaneuve's alternate arias were K582 "Chi se, chi se, qual sia" and K583 "Vado, ma dove".

#### 1.3 Original Cast Consideration

When studying a role, a singer should be aware of all things, both textually and musically, that are written in the score. However, one must try to differentiate what the composer wrote for dramatic intent and what he composed out of necessity based on the original singers' vocal strengths and weaknesses. For example, Del Bene, the first Fiordiligi, had a very agile voice with an extremely large range. The passagework of "Come scoglio" was sculpted perfectly for her voice. Villaneuve, the first Dorabella, had a voice that was "darker, lower in tessitura, and generally less agile" than Del Bene. The triadic figures in both of Dorabella's arias showcase Villaneuve's strengths. It is important for the performer to take the historical background of Mozart's musical choices into account. The singer must use all facets of the score for character research.

#### 1.4 Text Painting

Text painting is the musical technique of writing music that enforces the literal meaning of the text. It is used throughout *Così*, and aids in underlining character. In the duet "Ah guarda sorella" both Dorabella and Fiordiligi's distinct personalities are outlined. From the onset of the opera, Mozart draws attention to a fiery, passionate and playful Dorabella. When she describes Ferrando's picture she remarks, "What fire in his glance, it flames, it seems to shoot darts." It is on her line "se fiamma se dardi" that Mozart creatively emphasizes the text by using pizzicatos in both the lower strings and upper strings to imitate the darts. Scalar patterns in the violins are used to imitate the flames of desire (see Example 1.1). The unsettling

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Brown, W.A. Mozart Così fan tutte, 160-1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

pizzicatos could indicate fickleness in Dorabella's character. Whereas Dorabella desires "glances of piercing darts and fire," Fiordiligi refers to Guglielmo's visage as a "soldier" and "lover." "Guerriero" is emphasized with a string fanfare and "amante" is emphasized by a vocal melisma (see Example 1.2). From these two examples of text painting, the differences in both of their characters are revealed.

#### 1.5 Meter

Throughout *Così*, Mozart prudently uses *fermatas*. In the duet "Il core vi dono" an astounding ten *fermatas* are written. Mozart wrote some *fermatas* to allow for stage action (the transferring of the lockets), and others are scored for dramatic tension. To take advantage of the spectrum of dramatic possibilities these *fermatas* allow, Dorabella cannot give in to Guglielmo too quickly. The audience must see her wavering fidelity, her burning sexual desire, and her love for romance. Every *fermata* is a kiss that could happen, a touch, a melting of two hearts. Conversely, in some of the other *fermatas* Dorabella could be remembering Ferrando, experiencing a twinge of guilt, or glancing to see if they still are alone. By using these *fermatas*, the sexual tension builds and her surrender by the end of the duet is inevitable, and more exciting.

Following the Dorabella/Guglielmo duet is a noteworthy use of meter,

Dorabella's Act Two aria "È amore un ladroncello." On 7 May 1783 Mozart, having
received the newly written libretto, commented on the "two equally good female roles
one *seria* [Fiordiligi] and one *mezzo carattere* [Dorabella]." What we can tell from
this comment is that Mozart had a specific idea of Dorabella's character. She was part
serious and part comical. The comical side of Dorabella is displayed in this aria. Gone

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Brown, W.A. Mozart Così fan tutte 11.

are the hysterical, hyperventilating rants of the earlier Dorabella. At this point in the opera Dorabella is an unfaithful woman, and, as a disciple of Despina, she takes over the compound 6/8 meter used in Despina's aria "Una a donna quindici anni." The direct meter correlation between Despina's arias and Dorabella's "È amore un ladroncello," indicates a change in Dorabella's ideology. She has taken Despina's advice and is now fully committed to her adultery without regret; furthermore she now wishes to convert Fiordiligi. In addition to losing a fine comedic scene, the omission of this aria in productions does a great disservice to the development of Dorabella's character.

#### 1.6 Dry vs. Accompanied Recitatives

The alternation between recitatives, arias, and ensembles help keep the pace and flow of operatic stage action. In *Così*, Mozart tends to use *secco* (dry) recitative for more conversational exchanges and accompanied recitative for more emotionally charged situations. Dorabella's Act One aria "Smanie implacabili" contains the accompanied recitative "Ah scostati." In "Ah scostati," the intermittent scalar flourishes of the violins almost mimic her searching mind as she is making some self-realizations; "odio la luce" (I hate the light), "odio l'aria che spiro" (I hate the air that I breathe), and finally realizes in the end, "odio me stessa" (I hate myself). The comedic moment occurs immediately after this point when she realizes her audience, Despina and Fiordiligi, who are used to her histrionics, are not listening. Mozart scores this moment of realization by using a descending, lyrical line in the first violins, which lands on an unresolved chord before she asks, "chi schernisce il mio

duol?" (Who mocks my pain?). (Example 1.3) In Act Two, Mozart does not use accompanied recitative for Dorabella's second aria because she has accepted the prospect of her new lover and is no longer emotionally conflicted.

#### 1.7 Instrumental Introductions vs. Attacca Entries

Attacca entries and instrumental introductions aid in characterization. If singers have an attacca entrance, they must ask themselves: why does the character enter suddenly? What has occurred in the previous recitative or scene to indicate a change in the character? An example of an attacca entrance is found in Dorabella's aria "Smanie implacabili." Dorabella's quick entrance is reactionary; she has made discoveries in her recitative and she now, expresses her feelings in a rush of emotion. The aria starts with her entering quickly blurting out her racing thoughts (see Example 1.4). An attacca entrance can also show persistence and determination in a character such as Dorabella's immediate entrance in the duet "Prenderò quel brunettino." This attacca entrance is noteworthy because, contrary to Act One, it is Dorabella who is more determined because she immediately starts the duet.

Longer introductions are used to set the scene, such as the thirteen bar introduction of "Ah guarda sorella," the Act One finale and sextet. These long introductions give ample time for stage action and wordless character interaction, in addition to giving characters time to think before they speak. The contrast between the introductions of "Smanie implacabili" and "È amore un ladroncello" shows a change in Dorabella's character. The spontaneous *attacca* entrance in "Smanie" implies her overly emotional and histrionic character. The lengthier woodwind

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Hearst. *Mozart's Operas* 246.

introduction of "È amore" reveals a more collected Dorabella. She chooses her words judiciously and uses them to try to convince Fiordiligi to be unfaithful.

#### 1.8 Form

Mozart uses different aria forms in *Così* to delineate character. Fiordiligi's multi-movement arias indicate an emotionally complex character; Guglielmo's are less emotionally conflicted. This is shown in the simplistic form of his arietta "non siate ritrosi." Dorabella's first aria "Smanie" is more complex compared to the more straightforward ternary form of "È amore un ladroncello." The first aria shows Dorabella's hysterical temperament whereas the second reveals a change in her emotional state. In the second aria, Dorabella is less melodramatic and her actions are more calculated.

#### 1.9 Texture

The vocal texture in *Così* can aid in understanding character relationships.

Mozart cleverly pairs certain voices creating allegiances between those characters.

Throughout the opera, Fiordiligi and Dorabella sing in thirds in similar rhythm.

Whenever they are experiencing their sisterly solidarity moments, Mozart scores them thus. In the trio "Soave sia il vento," Don Alfonso has similar rhythmic motion as Fiordiligi and Dorabella implying emotional commonality between the three.

Although Don Alfonso is feigning sadness, Fiordiligi and Dorabella believe his fake sincerity to be genuine.

#### 1.10 Melody

Melody can help delineate character. Range, phrasing, embellishment, chromaticism, and contour can provide clues to a character's state of mind. Example

1.4 shows the opening phrases of Dorabella's aria "Smanie implacabili." Before her entrance, her frenzied mood is already stated by the off-the-beat triplet figure in the strings. Additionally, Mozart reveals Dorabella's overly emotional state by scoring a disjunct, opening melodic line. To further heighten her flamboyant character, Mozart scores rests between the syllables of the words "Smanie" and "[D]entro." It is as if Dorabella is so distraught she cannot finish these words without gasping for breath. Later in the aria, on the line "de miei sospir," the short phrases of descending couplets are used to indicate her "sighing." Dorabella histrionics continue and reach ultimate heights in the two chromatic lines at a higher tessitura on the word "horrible" thus coloring the text.

In the duet "Ah guarda sorella," Fiordiligi describes Guglielmo as a soldier and a lover. Dorabella, in her younger sister fashion, goes on to further describe Ferrando as having "a face that entices and menaces." Throughout this phrase, Mozart scores a descending chromatic line. The descending chromatic line coupled with textual repetition gives the impression that Dorabella is uncertain and unsure, seemingly searching for the next word. This indecisiveness calls into question Dorabella's emotions; is she truly describing Ferrando or is she embellishing Ferrando's description as she is getting caught up in the excitement of the moment?

Ornamentation in *Così* can be used to indicate a state of mind or to heighten the text. Whether it is the dreamy vocal turns of Fiordiligi and Dorabella's in "Ah guarda sorella," or the bubbling melismatic runs in their duet, "Prenderò quel brunettino," ornamentation can be used to highlight certain emotions. In "Smanie," Dorabella uses the appoggiaturas to try to gain the attention and possible sympathy

from Despina and Fiordiligi. Her leaps to *appoggiaturas* on words "esempio misero" (a miserable example), and "d'amor funesto" (doomed love) emphasize her "supposed" emotional pain, thus highlighting her melodramatic personality (see Example 1.4). We see a difference in Dorabella's character in her second aria "È amore un ladroncello." On the return of the opening melody of the aria, the appoggiaturas are on unstressed, ultimate syllables. Dorabella can use these appoggiaturas playfully, showing off her newfound, sexually carefree nature that she would like Fiordiligi to adopt.

Throughout *Così fan tutte*, the use of form, melody and meter give clues into Dorabella's character. In addition to examining the music piece by piece it is most informative to compare duets and arias. The changes of form and melody in the two arias of Dorabella and the two duets of Fiordiligi and Dorabella show changes in personality. By the end of her second aria, Dorabella's attention seeking, fickle character changes into a more determined and decisive character.

# Chapter 2: Later the Same Evening

#### 2.1 Introduction

The opera, *Later the Same Evening* (2007) was a joint collaboration of the University of Maryland and the Washington's National Gallery of Art.<sup>11</sup> An innovation of Leon Major (b 1933) director of the Maryland Opera Studio, the opera is based on the artwork of American twentieth-century realist Edward Hopper (1882-1967).<sup>12</sup> Written by composer John Musto (b 1954), librettist Mark Campbell and directed by Leon Major, *Later the Same Evening* is the third operatic collaboration of this creative team.<sup>13</sup> Five Hopper works create the inspiration for the opera: *Room in New York* (1932), *Hotel Window* (1956), *Hotel Room* (1931), *Two on the Aisle* (1927) and *Automat* (1927). Set in 1932, the opera follows a cast of characters who happen to meet by chance at a Broadway show.<sup>14</sup> Although comedic in sections, Hopper's themes of detachment and solitude are prevalent throughout.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> The world premiere occurred November 16, 2007at the Ina and Jack Kay Theater of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The Maryland Opera School is a division of the University of Maryland School of Music.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Past productions of Musto, Campbell and Major include: *Bastianello* (2008) for the New York Festival of Song and *Volpone* (2004) for Wolf Trap Opera.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> In the premier production at the University of Maryland and consequent production at the Manhattan School of Music, the designer, Erhard Rom's, set resembled a stark, modern, twenty-first century art gallery. Rom hung replicas of the five Hopper works on one of the walls. In addition, larger images of Hopper's works were projected onto other walls of the set. Major's direction included moments in which characters would freeze miming one of Hopper's painting compositions.

#### 2.2 Synopsis

The first act opens on an apartment scene in New York. Elaine and Gus are married. They are in their apartment (Room in New York). They have tickets to a Broadway show tonight, and as Elaine has been looking forward to the event, she plunks the tunes from "Tell me Tomorrow," a song in tonight's performance, on the piano. As they converse, it becomes clear the couple is experiencing marital problems and they are both unfulfilled and unhappy in their current situations. Dissatisfied with his job and marriage, Gus uses his work as an excuse not to attend the show that night. Once Elaine leaves for the show, he goes to the local bar, Clancy's, to forget, for a while, the underlying issues at home. In the following scene, Estelle, a recently widowed lady in her fifties anxiously awaits in a hotel lobby for her date, Ronaldo. They are also attending the above-mentioned Broadway play. Looking out from the hotel window, she reflects on her late husband, James, and realizes how much she despises him (*Hotel Window*). In another part of the city, in a Hotel Room, we see Ruth, a failed ballet dancer from Indianapolis, writing a letter to her boyfriend, Joe (*Hotel Room*). She writes, citing her failed ballet career as the reason for leaving him. She realizes her insignificance in a city where everyone is "unconnected yet connected," and leaves for her train. Meanwhile, Ronaldo picks up Estelle at the hotel lobby to go to the show.

All of the characters convene at the Broadway show. Thelma, a somewhat gruff and abrupt usher, shows people to their seats (*Two on the Aisle*). The audience is comprised of Estelle and Ronaldo; Elaine, alone; Jimmy, a young gay man new to New York who received Elaine's extra ticket; Sheldon and Rose, a bickering yet loving couple; Valentina, an elegant Italian woman who speaks little English; and

Joe, Ruth's boyfriend, waiting for her with an engagement ring. Before the show begins, all in attendance, freeze, and Jimmy comments on the beauty of New York; where he can be in a room full of strangers who are "ready to laugh together and weep together...here it doesn't make a difference: you simply can't be stranger than anyone else." ("It's Just as I Imagined") When his aria ends, all in attendance unfreeze and watch the show except for Joe, who leaves in the middle in search of Ruth. Valentina, perplexed by the whole spectacle, sings of the ridiculous "tip tapping" and other frivolity onstage.

As the show ends, Ruth is already on the train back to Indianapolis. The characters leave the theater and disperse, battling the downpour of rain. Rose and Sheldon go out for a bite to eat, Jimmy goes for a drink at Clancy's, and Ronaldo escorts Estelle home. At the same time in another part of town we see Joe, with Rose's letter in hand, wandering the city aimlessly. Gus meets Elaine in the street. He drunkenly laments to Elaine about the dissolution of their marriage. He realizes that he has lost her. Elaine, unable to deal with the painful situation takes his arm and they walk home.

After the show, we see the usher, Thelma, at an automat. She sits at a table with a cup of coffee (*Automat*). She discusses her job as an usher and realizes that musicals are not like real life. Even though she is tired, she stays up to finish her coffee. Joe enters the automat and Thelma recognizes him. She remembers the woman he was waiting for at the theater never came. They talk and Joe invites her out for a drink. However, she has to get home so Joe offers to walk her to the train

station. As they leave the automat, they make introductions, walk outside and notice the rain has stopped.

#### 2.3 Meter

Throughout *Later the Same Evening*, Musto uses both simple, common time and complex, mixed meters. He uses complex and mixed meters for Elaine and Gus to indicate their complicated relationship. In contrast, Musto gives the relationship between Ronaldo and Estelle a heartbreakingly simple and "dreamlike" quality.

Because Estelle is an older, elegant lady and would have been familiar with the waltz, Musto uses a waltz tempo as her primary tempo. Her aria "It's Really Rather Silly," starts in waltz tempo. In fact, all of her time signatures are derivatives of three except when she refers to her past husband James. Whenever Estelle refers to James, her waltz tempo switches to 4/4. The 4/4 coupled with a diminished triadic melody, is used to indicate James' square, unromantic personality.

Musto also sets Ronaldo's text in simple meter yet in a different manner from James. Ronaldo's text flows effortlessly into singing the Broadway show number, "My Star." Estelle follows his lead except at the points in which Ronaldo's energy and affection are too much for her. Here, Musto slows down the action by switching back to her original waltz tempo. We also are aware of Ronaldo's devotion and patience with Estelle because he diligently adheres to her tempo.

Later the Same Evening is inspired by Hopper's artwork, but it is also an homage to New York City. To imitate the buzzing energy of the city, Musto uses a repeating rhythmic cell of staccato sixteenth notes in the asymmetrical time signature of 5/8. At the start of the opera, this rhythmic cell is played by marimba and repeated

in minimalist fashion (see Example 2.1). Musto also couples this repetitive rhythmic motive with a syncopated counter-rhythm (see Example 2.2). Musto uses both of these rhythmic motives in the opening of the opera. The minimalist repeating pattern is used throughout the first scene and is used as transitional material throughout the rest of the opera. Both motives are also used to indicate the movement of time and to switch characters into "real time" in the stage action. For example in the trio "Move On," Elaine, Ruth and Estelle are having their own separate introspective moments. Elaine wishes to be out of her marriage, Ruth wants to stay in New York but can't, and Estelle needs to let go of her past and her former husband James. Throughout the trio, the quarter note is the pulse; at the end of the trio, Musto uses the opening rhythmic motive in sextuplets (Example 2.3), which builds the dramatic tension of the piece. In the last two bars of the trio, the characters sing, "we move on." On the word "on," Musto changes the sextuplet rhythmic motive back into the original motive in 5/8. This use of the 5/8 snaps the characters out of their dreams back into reality.

#### 2.4 Melody

The transitional material before the beginning of Estelle's aria, "It's Really Rather Silly" is very melodic. Unlike the driving rhythmic motive of the opening of the opera, this melody meanders until it ends on a sustained G-sharp. This G-sharp is a moment of realization for her: she is going on a date! Underneath the held G-sharp over six bars, Musto introduces meandering "waiting" melodic motive. Musto indicates Estelle's nervous energy by using the meandering motive in two-bar phrases, which gains momentum to a four-bar phrase accelerando. It is here that she enters, excited and nervous (see Example 2.4).

The melody and phrasing change when Estelle speaks of her former husband James. The meandering melody is replaced with a square melody outlining harsh, diminished chords. This jarring change has a comedic effect. Estelle sings that James would disapprove of everything about Ronaldo - his job, his race and his charm. "James was allergic to charm. No, charm was allergic to James" (p. 84, mm. 401-4). The memory of James enters Estelle's psyche a second time. Estelle has just sung excitedly of the upcoming Broadway show and this abruptly changes into James' diminished theme. It is at this point where the memory of James ruins her fun, and she comments on his disparaging "clucking." Her seething distaste of him is emphasized with the text "God how I despised that." Musto shows her defiance by using a rising vocal line that lands on a sustained high A on the word "God."

The text in *Later the Same Evening* is set predominantly monosyllabically. However, Musto emphasizes Estelle's feelings of inadequacy by scoring a melisma on the word, "foolish." She sings, "and in here in this empty shabby lobby sits a foolish woman, smartly dressed." To further emphasize her insecurities in the end of the first part of the aria, Musto reintroduces the meandering "waiting" motive used at the beginning of the aria.

In the second half of the aria, "Just for a Moment," Estelle looks through the hotel lobby window. The symbolism of the window is used in the scenes of Elaine, Estelle and Ruth. Estelle looks out the hotel lobby window in the stillness and realizes the possibilities beyond that window. Like the exposed G-sharp in the beginning of the aria, Musto scores exposed B-naturals during which the "Just for a Moment" part of the aria is sung. The wide vocal range and ever-changing intervals makes the end

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<sup>15</sup> The lack of punctuation in the libretto is intentional.

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of the aria bubble with hopefulness and excitement (Example 2.5). Each of the exposed B-naturals brings Estelle's attention back to the window. After some textual discoveries, the exposed B-natural at the end of the aria, has a different meaning for Estelle, she casts her initial insecurities aside and decides with hope in her heart to discover truly how to live.

After Ruth's scene, Musto scores a trio for Elaine, Estelle and Ruth. The trio is through-composed comprised of canonic entries of the three separate melodies sung in their corresponding scenes while each character gazes out the window. Musto restates their "window motives" in the first half of the trio and the text changes in the midway. Elaine realizes that she cannot continue in her dysfunctional marriage. Ruth realizes she cannot live in New York any longer. Estelle realizes that her husband, James, is not here; therefore, she is alone. Musto notes this emotional change by introducing new melodic material in all vocal parts.

#### 2.6 Instrumentation

For *Later the Same Evening*, Musto uses a chamber orchestra. Winds, brass, percussion, piano and strings make up the ensemble. The single winds include the flutist doubling on piccolo and the oboist doubling on English horn. Woodwinds include B-flat clarinet, bass B-flat clarinet, and bassoon. Brass instruments include two horns in F, B-flat trumpet and trombone.

Because of its bright, penetrating sound, Musto uses the glockenspiel judiciously. Musto uses it in Estelle's aria when she mentions James. The church bell sound of the glockenspiel gives an omnipotent presence to Estelle's deceased husband. Musto also uses the glockenspiel to indicate a character's recognition or

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realization. This "aha!" moment occurs with both Estelle and Elaine. In last part of Estelle's aria when she looks out the window, Musto scores a grace note leap up to a high B-natural for the glockenspiel. It is in this moment that Estelle makes the realization that beyond the hotel window lies the possibility of happiness. Musto further emphasizes her realization by restating the same glockenspiel motive before the last line of her aria, "There is a chance through that window Something thrilling Breathing asking me out…"<sup>16</sup>

Although there are many musical devices that help define Estelle's character, most noteworthy are the use of meter and melody. The waltz tempo Musto uses for Estelle's music, help define her age and elegance, which contrasts to the other tempos used for other characters in the opera. Most of Estelle's main characterization developments occur in her arias in scene two, "It's Really Rather Silly" and "Just for a Moment." During this scene, Estelle makes numerous personal discoveries, which are aided by transitional material, rhythmic changes and melodic motives. Her emotions change from lonely, insecure and scared to giddy, hopeful and excited. By the end of her aria, she is a woman who is ready for excitement and change in her life.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> The lack of punctuation and capitalization in the libretto is intentional.

## Chapter 3: Eugene Onegin

#### 3.1 Introduction

I composed this opera because I was moved to express in music all that seems to cry out for such expression in *Eugene Onegin*...The opera *Onegin* will never have a success [at major houses]: I already fell assured of that...I would much prefer to confide it to the theater of the Conservatoire...This is much more suitable to my modest work, which I shall not describe as an opera, if it is published. I should like to call it 'lyrical scenes' or something of that kind.<sup>17</sup>

Pyotr Illich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) was enamored of Alexander Pushkin's (1799-1837) *Eugene Onegin* (1833). The idea of fashioning an opera out of one of the most cherished and famous Russian literary works was not his own. It was suggested to him in 1887 by singer Yelizaveta Lavrovskaya (1845-1919). The realism of the subject matter intrigued Tchaikovsky: "you won't believe what a frenzy I have got myself into over this subject. How glad I am to be spared Ethiopian princesses, Pharaohs, poisonings and all kinds of stilted mannerisms."

Tchaikovsky jointly created the libretto in Russian from Pushkin's verse novel with his friend, actor and poet Konstantin Stipanovich Shilovsky (1849-1893).

Tchaikovsky assembled his première cast from the Moscow Conservatory where he

<sup>17</sup> Caryl Emerson, "Pushkin into Tchaikovsky: Caustic Novel, Sentimental Opera" in *Eugene Onegin*, ed. Nicholas John, (London: John Calder Publishers Ltd., 1988), 7.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Richard Taruskin, "Yevgeny Onegin." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Stanley Sadie *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O008246 (accessed February 1, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Alexandra Orlova, ed., *Tchaikovsky: A Self-Portrait*, trans. R. M. Davidson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 66.

was a member of the faculty. Its first performances occurred on March 17 and 29, 1897, at Moscow's Malïy Theatre. The professional première of *Eugene Onegin* occurred in Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre on January 11 and 23, 1881. Although the work is entitled *Eugene Onegin*, the opera's central character is Tatyana, the lead soprano role. During composition for *Onegin*, Tchaikovsky received a letter from Antonina Milyukova (1845-1919), a former student, professing her love.

Tchaikovsky, deeply sympathetic to Tatyana's plight, was resolute as to not mimic Onegin's dismissive behavior and he hastily married Antonina. According to Matthew Guerrieri, the composer was "conscious of the coincidental similarity between Milyukova's letter and Tatiana's, but he had been considering marriage for some time, as a cover for his homosexuality and a stab at conventional domesticity." Unfortunately, the marriage brought on Tchaikovsky's nervous breakdown and it was dissolved within three months.

Initial reception of *Onegin* was mixed. The original version included Onegin and Tatyana ending the opera in an embrace, but due to critic's protests, Tchaikovsky altered the storyline in 1889 to what is used today.<sup>21</sup> Tchaikovsky's lyrical phrasing was foreign to the inaugural cast of conservatory students; they were used to singing in the Italian *bel canto* style.<sup>22</sup> It gained popularity slowly, first in the Russian provinces, then returned to Moscow and St. Petersburg and is considered one of Tchaikovsky's masterpieces.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Matthew Guerrieri, "When Tchaikovsky met Pushkin," *The Boston Globe*, July 27, 2008. http://www.boston.com/ae/music/articles/2008/07/26/when\_tchaikovsky\_met\_pushkin/?page=1.(acces sed February 1, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "Tchaikovsky, Pushkin and Onegin," *The Musical Times* 121 (Mar., 1980): 167. <sup>22</sup> The bel canto style of singing includes the music of Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868), Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835) and Gaetano Donizetti (1797–1848)

#### 3.2 Synopsis

The opera opens at the Larins' country estate; Madame Larina is making jam with the older nanny Filipyevna, while her daughters Tatyana and Olga sing a simple duet about love. The peasants return from the fields singing and dancing to celebrate the harvest. Later on, Olga's fiancé Lensky visits the Larins' estate with his friend, from St. Petersburg, Eugene Onegin. Upon sight of the new gentleman, Tatyana is smitten and spends the night writing a declaration of her love for him. When given the letter, Onegin reads it and rejects her affections. However, Onegin attends

Tatyana's nameday celebration and dances with Olga. Being jealous, Lensky takes insult from Onegin's actions and challenges him to a duel. Unwilling to back down, Onegin accepts and at the duel the following day, Lensky is killed. Time has passed and by Act Three, Tatyana is a married woman. She and Onegin meet at a ball held in the St. Petersburg home of her and her husband, Prince Gremin. When alone with Tatyana, Onegin admits his love for her. She too expresses love for him but it is too late, she is now married woman.

#### 3.3 Dance Forms

In *Eugene Onegin*, the use of dance numbers aid in delineating social class. Tchaikovsky cleverly interweaves the dancing into the action using dances with characterization appropriate to the story.<sup>23</sup> In *Onegin*, the first chorus number is a *protyazhnaya pesna*, a call and response piece - the chorus responds to the tenor, but with new melodic material. To celebrate the harvest, Tchaikovsky follows the *protyazhnaya pesna* with a *Khrovad*, a circle folk dance based on an original folk

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Roland John Wiley, "The Dances in 'Eugene Onegin'," In *The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, vol. 6 no. 2: 58.

melody.<sup>24</sup> To characterize the *Khrovad*, Tchaikovsky uses strong down beats, monosyllabic text setting and melodic repetition.

At Tatyana's nameday celebration in Act Two, Tchaikovsky characterizes the social status of the Larina estate by incorporating a waltz and a mazurka. Both of these dances would have been appropriate for the Larinas' social standing. (The mazurka, although Polish in origin, was popular in Russia at that time due to the occupation of the Polish territories.)<sup>25</sup>

As the third act is set later in St. Petersburg, Tchaikovsky incorporates two more dance styles of the late 1820's: the polonaise and ecossaise. Both Acts Two and Three open with a dance. The detached processional polonaise, however, which opens the third act, is more formal compared to the more social waltz at the Larina estate. This detached emotion matches the strained interaction of Tatyana and Onegin onstage. Although the several ecossaises used in Act Three and in that time period were quite vogue, they were added in 1885 at the request of the Intendant of the Imperial Theatres, Ivan Vsevolozhsky. Since they were not set requirements of Tchaikovsky's doing, the dances add to the appearance of the opera yet have less character significance.

#### 3.4 Musical Devices

Tchaikovsky's opera is scored for a typical Early Romantic Period orchestra.

The harp, usually present in Tchaikovsky's orchestral compositions, is used, albeit

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Richard Taruskin, "Yevgeny Onegin," In *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, edited by Stanley Sadie, *Grove Music Online Oxford Music Online*,

http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O008246 (accessed February 5, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Downes. "Mazurka." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/18193 (accessed February 5, 2010)

sparingly; there is solo harp accompaniment in the opening scene during both verses of the duet and quartet. Tatyana and her sister Olga sing a simple, folk-like melody. This melody paired with the pastoral lyrics of Pushkin's poem, "The Singer," and scored with the folk sound of the harp, highlights the commonplace in the opening of the opera. <sup>26</sup> After the first verse, Tchaikovsky broadens the piece into a duet by adding the less lyrical parts of Larina and Filippyevna. Tchaikovsky creates operatic realism in the quartet by creating two separate areas of action. The two girls sing in the background while the two women "converse" while peeling fruit for jam.

Commonplace and casual, this first scene is a contrast to the tragic events that follow.

Tchaikovsky scores Olga's vocal part quite differently from Tatyana's part. Olga's aria, "Uzh kak po mostu, mostochku" is shorter than Tatyana's lengthy "letter" scene. The emotional impetus for the start of Olga's aria comes from the orchestra as Tchaikovsky scores a *subito mezzo forte* on two accented chords following Tatyana's *leitmotif* (see Example 3.1). Olga interrupts her sister's reverie with an unaccompanied declamatory line, "Ah Tanya, Tanya you are always dreaming!" In contrast to her wistful sister, Olga is a realist. Tchaikovsky shows this by setting most of her text syllabically in a speech-like manner. In comparison to the expansive vocal lines of Onegin, Lensky and Tatyana, Olga's vocal lines are not as broad. Tchaikovsky shows her rural, jovial character by restating and dancing to the melody from the peasants, Khrovad "Uzh kak po mostu, mostochku." She is a simple

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Roland John Wiley, "Tchaikovsky's 'Eugene Onegin' in Eugene Onegine ed. Nicholas John, (London: John Calder Publishers Ltd., 1988), 20.

Wiley writes about the lyrics in the opening duet "Could this be an invocation of the muse, in which Tchaikovsky is referring to himself as the 'singer' of the opera, or possibly an allusion, to the poet Lensky and his melancholy fate?"

girl who identifies with country life; she is able to revel and celebrate with the peasant's harvest. However, her aria has some lyrical moments. One such moment occurs when Olga speaks of her carefree and mischievous personality. Her excitement is heightened further with syncopated phrases in the woodwinds (see Example 3.2). At one point, Tchaikovsky slows the harmonic movement of the orchestra as if Olga is pointing her finger at her sister to listen (see Example 3.3). As a last attempt to cheer up her sister, Olga repeats the opening melody. Olga is unsuccessful, and at the end of the aria Tatyana is still lost in her fantasies. The aria finishes with a playful set of descending two-note slurs in the woodwinds. Following her aria, Madame Larina comments on Olga's "warbling" and dancing, Tchaikovsky inserts another quick dance segment. Again, Olga uses her singing and dancing to garner attention (see Example 3.4).

Throughout Act One, Olga's vocal lines are recitative-like. They have a smaller range and follow the prosody of the text, reinforcing her down-to-earth character. It isn't until the end of Lensky's arioso "Ya lyublyu vas" that Olga's more vulnerable side is shown. Throughout his aria, Lensky expresses his love for Olga. At the end of the aria, in the *Andante* section, Tchaikovsky scores a sensual chromatic melody for Olga. Her vocal line is exposed with minimal accompaniment. By contrasting this vocal line to her previous music Tchaikovsky shows her true love for him

Olga enjoys being the center of attention. At Tatyana's nameday celebration, she dances the waltz and mazurka with Onegin. Although her actions put Lensky in a jealous rage, she is truly unaware of what she has done wrong. Olga tries to placate

Lensky by mentioning that Onegin is "very nice," written in the key of B Major.

Lensky doesn't believe her innocence and cruelly repeats her text, "very nice," in a mocking B-flat Minor (see Example 3.5). Jealously and rage get the best of Lensky, and Olga is unable to appease him. In her last lines, she ask him to calm down with pleading appoggiaturas, but Lensky will not listen and bids her farewell.

Because of the role's brevity, most of the information about Olga's character can be found in her aria "Uzh kak po mostu, mostochku." The use of melody helps define Olga's character. Her shorter, declamatory vocal phrases indicate her simple, no-nonsense personality. The use of the *Krovat* (peasant circle dance) melody "Uzh kak po mostu mastochku" in her aria highlights two personality traits: her love of country life and her joy of dancing. Always a realist, yet fun-loving and sometimes mischievous, Olga sheds her jovial exterior in her one truly, emotionally exposed moment when she expresses her love for Lensky in her chromatic melody at the end of his arioso "Ya lyublyu vas."

#### Conclusion

When looking beyond the libretto, it is important for the singer to be keenly aware of what is happening in the music. Taking time to closely examine the orchestral score enables the singer to better understand the composer's dramatic intentions. Three case studies: Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*, Estelle Oglethorpe in *Later the Same Evening*, and Olga in *Eugene Onegin* were carefully examined for musical indications for character development. Musical devices such as melody, meter, texture, instrumentation and form all provided clues into the psyche of these characters. The attention to detail required for this type of character study, developed skills that became more facile and discerning as each role was prepared. These case studies will provide scaffolding as additional roles are undertaken and performed.

#### **Appendices**

## Appendix A "The Show" and Wordless Characterization

In the midst of *Later the Same Evening*, all characters convene at the Broadway show, "Tell me tomorrow." As the show commences, all characters are silent, with some vocal interjections but no actual singing. They sit, facing out to the audience watching the show through the fourth wall. Lasting roughly five minutes, the performers react as their specific character would, to the Broadway action implied in the score (Not all characters react in the same manner). Musto brilliantly creates the stage action of a two-hour show in a miniature orchestral interlude.

The show opens with a series of four ascending scalar passages imitating the opening of a curtain. The first section of the show is more comical and action packed. Musto creates a humorous mood in the opening of the "show" by using rising scalar patterns matched with a sixteenth falling rhythmic figure in a call and response pattern (see Example 2.6). In some of these response phrases, the characters audibly laugh reacting to the action on stage.

The second section of the Broadway show opens with arpeggiated flourish indicating the grand entrance of "Gloria Devere," affirmed when Jimmy reverently "stage whispers" her name. Throughout the show, Jimmy, Estelle, Mr. Cabral, Rose and Elaine become more involved in the action of the show. Sheldon unfortunately, starts to nod off. In the second section, Musto uses the melody from the song, "Where is the Man from Manhattan?" which was playing on the radio in Ruth's scene, but this time morphs the tune into a waltz. Musto uses a swaying waltz rhythm, in which the Broadway characters, presumably Gloria Devere and Charles Osgood, are dancing. Because the waltz is synonymous to Estelle character, her character is

especially drawn to this number on stage at this moment of the show. The section ends with the dancers having a large impressive leap. Musto creates tension before the "jump" by using with a rising triplet figure in block chords rising to a cymbal crashing on the exact moment of the jump (see Example 2.7). The loud crash of the cymbals indicates the impressiveness of the dance maneuver.

The third section of the Broadway show is the title theme that Elaine sings in the first scene: "Though your heart's grown as cold as the top of Kilimanjaro, Why waste that moon? Tell me tomorrow." The "Tell me Tomorrow" melody changes the mood of the Broadway show. The slow tempo and wide, almost yearning, melodic leaps played in the higher tessituras of the piccolo and first violins, indicate to the characters that this is a moment of melancholy in the Broadway show. Elaine, who yearns for change in her life, is very touched at this moment of the show. In addition, Musto indicates sadness on stage by orchestrating a "crying" motive in the piano using a descending pattern of rolled chords (see Example 2.8). It is at this moment we hear Rose audibly crying. In the third section of the show, Musto uses "My Star," the song Ronaldo sings to Estelle in their first scene. This is a touching moment for the two, as Estelle recognizes the song and they exchange a knowing glance. Musto's inclusion of a tap number using percussion taps adds the texture icing to the Broadway cake. Each tap solo becomes more and more complex- Musto indicates this by lengthening the rhythmically diverse percussion solos. After each solo the characters clap in awe.

The next section of the Broadway show uses the melody, "Whadaya-say?" Elaine first sings this melody in the opening scene with Gus. Using sparse

instrumentation, Musto indicates the lack of stage action. The "Whadaya-say?" melody is played by the B-flat clarinet and oboe in canon "at the major third." An added triplet descending line played by orchestral bells gives one the impression of the drooping eyelids of boredom. The audible yawn of Sheldon who has been asleep for most part of the show adds humor. Musto changes the dramatic mood by building musical tension as the "Whadaya- say?" motive changes; the triplet rhythm is now syncopated with brushed cymbals playing off beats. This jazz interpretation creates a darker mood, which draws all of the characters into the action. Musto creates a dangerous climax in the action by scoring a full orchestra crescendo. Bolero rhythms are added to some of the parts adding the driving force to the action. The action climaxes to a pause (see Example 2.9). The characters are unsure what will be the outcome of the nail biting action. Musto indicates the grand ending of the Broadway show by using an *allargando* with an unresolved melodic phrase. The unresolved jazz half cadence is Musto's nod to the twenty-first century. However the show ends happily as Musto uses a typical Broadway style playout as thematic material from the first part of the show is restated, complete with the typical Broadway style use of the percussive hi-hat.





Example 1.3



Example 1.4



Example 2.1



Example 2.2



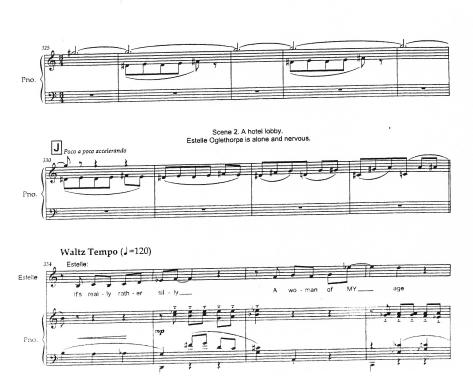
Example 2.3



# Example 2.4



# Example 2.5



Example 2.6



Example 2.7



Example 2.8



Example 2.9



Example 3.1



Example 3.2



#### Example 3.3



#### Example 3.4









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