THE RECITATIVE AND ITS USE

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ID 499
Partial Fulfillment
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Recitative is an attempt to imitate the natural inflections of speech. It is used for narration and dialogue in the opera and oratorio. Recitative is frequently heard in sequence with the aria, a formal song. In these instances, the recitative states the facts and the aria then reflects upon these facts.¹

Before illustrating the various uses of recitative by different composers, I shall define the different types of recitative. There are two kinds of recitative: secco or dry recitative and accompagnato or stromentato recitative. Secco recitative is quick moving and is accompanied with either sustained or staccato chords. The accompagnato recitative is more expressive, and as the name suggests, is accompanied by the orchestra. Usually this accompaniment consists of a repeated rhythmic figure.²

The secco recitative was introduced about 1600 and accompagnato recitative about 1630. Another difference between the two types of recitative is the freedom given to the singer.

In the secco recitative, the singer is free in tempo to deliver his part. In accompagnato recitative, the tempo must be restricted in rhythmic freedom due to the orchestral accompaniment.3

In the early Baroque period, there were a number of reactions against the music of the late Renaissance. One of these reactions was against the inability in polyphonic music to understand the words. At this time, a group of men called the "Camerata" were meeting. They discussed, among other things, the music of their time. They also felt that something should be done to make the words more understandable. In reaction to polyphony, Caccini and Peri started writing music in a new style consisting of one melodic line and a bass line supporting the melody. Arabic numerals were provided to show the chord structure. In this style, the composer tried to avoid melody and tried to imitate the way people would speak. Usually there would be one note per syllable of text.

Between 1670 and 1687, Jean Baptiste Lully was working in France on the recitative while his contemporaries were working on the aria. He was attempting to accomplish the reforms set up by the Camerata. He developed a model for the

3 Scholes, op. cit.
French recitative. His recitative dealt with syllable accent and speech stress. Through this background then, one can see the beginning of the development of recitative. Originally recitative contained both declamatory and lyrical elements. Gradually, however, these separated into just declamation alone and lyric melody alone, giving us the recitative and aria.

Now that some of the background of the development of the recitative has been given, I shall touch briefly upon the use of recitative by Bach, Handel, Mozart, Wagner, Puccini, and Barber.

Bach wrote over two hundred cantatas. His recitatives are very much different from the Italian secco recitative. The cantata I shall use to illustrate Bach's treatment of the recitative is "Christen, atzet diesen Tag" ("Christians, grave ye this glad day"). This cantata has no arias, but has three recitatives which are all different. The first recitative is for alto accompanied by strings. It blends declamation and arioso. Bach wrote the music to depict the narrative. When he tells of the chains of Satan, he writes an adagio. The second recitative is for tenor. The secco recitative becomes an andante arioso as it narrates of the Savior's love

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6 Ibid.
and mercy, then returns to secco recitative as it announces the appearance of Christ. The third recitative is a bass recitative. It is accompanied by three oboes, strings, and fagotto, organoe continuo. This recitative is very melodic and jubilant. 7

Handel is a master of the oratorio. One of the most famous of his oratorios is the "Messiah." This oratorio, familiar to so many, will serve as a good illustration of the two main types of recitative. The soprano soloist has four recitatives together which are examples of both the secco and accompagnato recitative. "There Were Shepherds Abiding in the Fields," is an example of the secco recitative while the next one, "And, Lo! The Angel of the Lord Came Upon Them," is accompagnato. The fourth one, "And Suddenly There Was with the Angel," is also accompagnato while the third one is again secco recitative. The difference between the secco and accompagnato recitatives is clearly seen when one looks at these examples. The singer is bound in the second and fourth recitatives to a strict tempo because of the orchestral accompaniment. He has more liberty, though, in the first and third ones because of the chordal accompaniment.

Mozart's recitatives are simple and fresh. In the motet for soprano, *Exultate Jubilate*, K 165, there is an example of the secco recitative. This recitative is fairly characteristic of Mozart in that it is very simple and to the point.

Wagner, well known for his grand operas, carried the accompagnato recitative to a new high point in expressiveness. The declamation of the recitative is very dramatic and the orchestral accompaniment is very elaborate. Gradually the division, in his works, between the recitative and the aria became smaller and smaller. The singers part was in semi-recitative throughout, building up to lyric melodies and then falling back into narrative.

Some of Puccini's arias are recitative in form. One of Liu's arias from *Turandot*, "Signore Ascolte," is very moving and dramatic and melodious; yet, it has only a chordal accompaniment, leaving the singer very free in tempo.

Samuel Barber has written his opera, "Vanessa," almost completely in recitative style. He has written the music to follow the rise and fall of the words in the sentences. One of the songs I did on my recital, "A Nun Takes the Veil," is basically in recitative style also. The singer is very free in tempo with the chordal accompaniment.

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8 Scholes, *op. cit.*, p. 865
9 Einstein, *op. cit.*, p. 182
Tracing the recitative through history, the reader finds it at one time composed of both lyrical and declamatory elements, then it by itself with the aria as its counterpart, and finally as we see it today again mingling the lyrical and the declamatory. What form will it take next?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


The Division of Music
of
BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
presents
PATRICIA LEE EVANS, Soprano
in
Senior Honors Recital
assisted by
Janice Holly, piano

O Had I Jubal's Lyre
from the oratorio "Joshua"
George Friedrich Handel
(1685-1759)

Exsultate Jubilate—K165
Motet for solo soprano
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

INTERMISSION

Two Operatic Arias
Signor Ascolta
from the opera "Turandot"
Giacomo Puccini
(1858-1924)

Quando Men Vo
from the opera "La Boheme"

Three Songs
A Nun Takes the Veil — Op. 13, No. 1
Samuel Barber
(1910-)

Sure On This Shining Night — Op. 13, No. 3
Sea Snatch — Op. 26, No. 6
from "Hermit Songs"

The Theatre
February 5, 1967 8:00 p.m.
Exsultate Jubilate:

Exult, rejoice
O happy souls
And with sweet music
Let the heavens resound
Making answer, with me, to your song.

The lovely day glows bright
Now clouds and storms have fled,
And a sudden calm has arisen for the just.
Everywhere dark night held sway before
But now, at last, rise up and rejoice,
Ye who are not feared,
And happy in the blessed dawn
With full hand make offering of garlands and lilies

And Thou, O Crown of Virgins
Grant us peace
And assuage the passions
That touch our hearts
Alleluia

Signore Ascolta:

Oh, I entreat thee Sire,
Oh Sire, to hear me
Liu can bear no more
Her weary heart will break
Worn with her wandering;
Thy name alone to sustain her
Thy name alone to revive her.
But if on the morrow thy fate should be decided
We must die on the countryside in exile!
He will have lost his only son,
I, lost the smile I lived for!
Liu can bear no more
Hear her cry!

Quando Men Vo:

As through the street I wander onward merrily,
I wander onward daintily.
See how the folk look round
Because they know I'm charming, a very charming girl.
And then 'tis mine to mark their hidden longing.
And all the passion in their eyes,
And then the joy of conquest overcomes me:
Everyman is my prize!
And thus their hearts I capture
As if by magic all my own,
Ah rapture! 'Tis mine alone!
Now you that once your passions once betrayed,
Why should you be dismayed?
Yet though deep in your heart
Rankles the smart you'd never, never confess
But rather die!

Feb. 6—Recital—Jo May, mezzo-soprano—Mary Lou Younce, french horn—Theatre—1:00 p.m.
Feb. 10—Concert Series—"Rigoletto"—Emens Auditorium—8:00 p.m.
Feb. 12—Artist Series—"Porgy and Bess"—Emens Auditorium—2:30 and 8:00 p.m.
Feb. 13—Student Recital—Larry Hall, saxophone—Theatre—1:00 p.m.
Feb. 13—Faculty Recital—Ars Musica String Quartet—Emens Auditorium—8:00 p.m.
Feb. 15—Varsity Concert Band and Womens Chorus—Earl Dunn, Al Spangler—Band Conductors; John Campbell—Chorus Conductor; Emens Auditorium—8:00 p.m.
Feb. 15—Muncie Musicale Opera Workshop—"The Transposed Heads" P.G. Hicks—1:00 p.m.
Feb. 18—Muncie Symphony Orchestra—Robert Hargreaves, conductor—Zabaleta, guest artist—Emens Auditorium—8:00 p.m.