

## **Is the Interpretation of the Tenor in *Tombe degli avi miei* from *Lucia di Lammermoor* by G. Donizetti, Lyric or Dramatic?**

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**Abstract:** *This study is an analysis of the tenor interpretation of the aria Tombe degli avi miei from Lucia di Lammermoor by G. Donizetti. It studies 4 different recordings of tenors with 30 years approximately between them. It analyses the interpretation perspective of them. Should it be more dramatic or lyric? there have been both tenors performing this role with acclaimed reviews. The dramatic tenor has an easiness on showing the drama and the passion aspect of the aria. The lyric tenor has a refined phrasing and beauty of line that fits well the character and the belcanto style.*

Key-words: *tenor, interpretation, dramatic, belcanto, Lucia di Lammermoor.*

### **1. Introduction**

As we all know opera is about showing emotions through your voice and acting. It captivates the audience through their emotions and feelings as also through their singing. Drama is always a captivate flavour that reflects interest from the public. The listeners of opera have always had a special inclination to appreciate more dramatic voices. Why? Because they are more powerful, thrilling, and exciting. Does that mean that the other types of voices, such as lyric, *leggero*, *coloratura*, are less interesting? Of course not, it's what you make of your own instrument and the interpretation you give that delights the audiences. Let's focus now on the tenor category. We have had exciting and thrilling tenor voices that belonged to monotonous interpreters, and we have had the opposite, simple lyric voices that belonged to exciting and intelligent interpreters, such as Tito Schipa (1888-1965), a fabulous interpreter with a very lyric voice and a reference of interpretation in all his roles *Nemorino* in *L'elisir*, *Almaviva* in *Barbieri di Siviglia* and *Ernesto* in *Don Pasquale* to name few. Potter (Potter 2009, 90) referred that Schipa "could seduce

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and charm the ear with his elegant shaping of a phrase”, as he could shape a phrase with the most elegant tone and distinction, but the same author referred that Schipa’s singing “is very hard to categorise”. The profile of the tenor has also changed immensely in the last century, as have the music education of singers, variety of classes in schools, preparation for competitions, society in general, etc. The industry now demands that singers should not only interpret but also act. Nowadays it is required for a tenor to have acting skills, move and represent the role and, on top, it’s also a plus to have a good physical body condition to showcase on stage as the main lover, which is something to applaud. Comparing nowadays to when a tenor would just perform a love duet just staring still in the stage, the evolution is, in my opinion, immense.

When we have a specific tenor role that allows different categories, i.e. a lyric role that can be also performed by a dramatic tenor, some curiosities arise in my the mind. In the period of *belcanto* there are several examples, such as *Pollione* in *Norma* by Bellini, *Edgardo* in *Lucia di Lammermoor* by G. Donizetti. Fun fact is that I performed the role of *Flavio* in *Norma* with the dramatic tenor Johan Botha (1965-2016) in 2009. The excitement of listening to his sound next to him it was a wonderful, thrilling experience. His voice was a metallic sound with such richness and easiness on his top register that was capable of taking more lyric roles if the industry allowed him. After this performance and listening to the performance of *Norma* live at the Metropolitan Opera House of New York with the tenor Joseph Calleja in the role of *Pollione*, the experience was different as his voice was on a lighter lyric side. He had full command of his phrasing and of his technique, but the result was discussable.

## 2. Objectives

In this study I want to reflect on the interpretation of the *recitativo Tombe degli avi miei* and *aria Fra poco a me ricovero*, and to understand what differs a performance of a lyric tenor from a dramatic tenor performing the same *aria*. Characteristics regarding timbre, colour and vocal range have also to be considered in the tenor voice because they establish the category. So, the main goals are:

1. To understand dramaturgy of the aria and if there are other tenors rather than dramatic ones performing the aria.
2. To analyse, from the interpretation perspective, which are the advantages of having a lyric voice performing the referred aria.
3. To study if it is the dramatic tenor the one that should perform the aria.

4. To investigate if the singers who are the object of this study perform this aria in the *belcanto* style.

### 3. Methodology and materials

For this study it's important to understand the context of the object of study. The aria *Fra poco a me ricovero* is the last *aria* of the second act of the opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*. It's a tragic and sad scene, because *Edgardo* has found out that his beloved *Lucia* belongs to another man. Therefore, *Edgardo* feels betrayed and wants to meet *Enrico* (*Lucia's* brother) for an agreed duel. *Edgardo* is very unhappy and deeply sad, he doesn't know that *Lucia* is dead at this point of the opera. The meeting point for the duel is at the Ravenswoods Cemetery and *Edgardo* remembers that he is the last of his noble lineage, singing *Tombe degli avi miei* - the *recitativo* before the *aria*. All he wants is to die. *Edgardo* doesn't know what happened to *Lucia*, but for him she is now a woman in whom he no longer puts hope. *Edgardo* performs the aria *Fra poco a me ricovero* claiming to *Lucia* that she is an ungrateful woman and asks her to at least respect those who once died for her, predicting that he wants to die for her. Let's analyze the specific words both *recitativo* and *aria*.

#### *Recitativo:*

<i>Tombe degli avi miei, l'ultimo avanzo d'una stirpe infelice deh! raccogliete voi. Cessò dell'ira il breve foco... Sul nemico acciario abbandonar mi vo'. Per me la vita è orrendo peso!... L'universo intero è un deserto per me senza Lucia!... Di faci tuttavia splende il castello! Ah! Scarsa fu la notte al tripudio! Ingrata donna! Mentre io me struggo in disperato pianto, tu ridi, esulti accanto al felice consorte! Tu delle gioie in seno,</i>	Tombs of my ancestors, the last move of an unhappy lineage deh! you collect. The anger ceased the short fire... On the enemy I steel I want to abandon myself. For me, life it's horrendous weight! ... The whole universe it's a desert for me without Lucia! ... In fact, however the castle is shining! Ah! Poor it was the night to the blaze! Ungrateful woman! While I am pining myself in despair cry, you laugh, you rejoice beside to the happy consort! You of the joys within,
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<p><i>Tu delle gioie in seno, lo della morte! lo della morte!</i></p>	<p>You of the joys within, I of death! I of death!</p>
<p><i>Aria: Fra poco a me ricovero darà negletto avello... Una pietosa lagrima non scenderà su quello! Ah! Fin degli estinti, ah, misero! Manca il conforto a me! Tu pur, tu pur dimentica que marmo dispregiato: mai non passarvi, o barbara, del tuo consorte a lato... Ah! Rispetta almen le ceneri di chi moria per te. Rispetta almen le ceneri di chi moria per te. Mai non passarvi, to lo dimentica, rispetta almeno chi muore per te. Mai non passarvi, to lo dimentica, rispetta almeno chi muore, chi muore per te. O barbara, rispetta almen le ceneri... Ah! di chi moria di chi moria per te.</i></p>	<p>I soon will recover but will give neglect ... A pitiful tear won't come down on that! Ah! To the extinct, ouch, miserable! Comfort is missing from me! You too, you even forget that despised marble: never do not go through it, or barbarian of your consort on the side ... Ah! Respect at least the ashes of those who die for you. Respect at least the ashes of those who die for you. Never do not go through it, you forget it, at least respect those who die for you. Never do not go through it, you forget it, at least respect those who die, who dies for you. Oh barbarian, at least respect the ashes ... Ah! of those who die of those who die for you.</p>

The translation from the Italian gives the real sorrow and deep sadness that *Edgardo* is facing in this moment. Let's look at it on the musical perspective. This *finale aria* begins with a *recitativo* whose instrumental introduction is extensive and of dense color, which creates a perfect dramatic environment to illustrate the moment when *Edgardo* moves to the duel with *Enrico*. We are in this *recitativo* in E flat major, a tonality that I can relate to the solemnity and seriousness of *Edgardo* who, in *Tombe degli avi miei*, recalls that he is the last of his lineage and says in a dramatic way that being without his *Lucia* makes him feel dead. In the *largo* *per me la vita è orrendo peso*, still in E flat major, *Edgardo* considers his life as a weight he carries. There is a transition of tonalities that begins with the *allegro*,

*splende il castello* and that is revealed further on in a chromatic zone based on G minor, when he bitterly pronounces the words *al felice consorte*. In *io della morte* there is the traditional cadence to A4 and B flat 4, made under the chord of A major that I could link to the feeling of trust. It is also worth noting a certain bitterness expressed from the musical point of view in this cadence that passes through a B flat, the ninth minor on the A major chord, to illustrate a tense dissonance in the end of the *recitativo*.

In the *aria*, the previous dissonance contrasts with the beginning of the *larghetto* of the *aria*, in D major and with a ternary division, played by darker instruments such as bassoons and horns and, occasionally, with timbales in *ostinato*. The orchestra creates an atmosphere of romantic colors. The key changes briefly to F sharp minor, a dark and mysterious key, in *non scenderá su quello* when *Edgardo* laments that the vows he exchanged with *Lucia* are worthless at this point. Two bars ahead, in *degli estinti ahi, misero!*, the key approaches E minor to illustrate his displeasure. It returns to the vibrant key of D major in *comforto a me* and continues until the end of the *aria* without alterations during the traditional cadence to the natural B 4.

As we can conclude from the words and from the music perspective the tone and the ambience in this part of the opera is of most sadness, misery and desolation. It's one of the most dramatic moments of the opera given by the plot.

Regarding the score by Ricordi and what the composer established for dynamics in this specific *recitativo* and *aria*, there are no big indications requesting a dramatic interpretation from the tenor. I believe that that is already in the lyrics. Only in the end part of the *aria* there is a *poco piu animato* and *con calore* in *mai piu non passarvi, tutto lo dimentica*.

#### 4. Outcomes

I am now going to analyze 4 interpretations recorded chronologically from the oldest to the most recent one. The intervals between them are approximately 30 years.

##### 4.1. Aureliano Pertile (1885-1952), recorded in 1924-26

**Orchestra del teatro alla Scala; Conductor Carlo Sabajno**

Pertile starts the *recitativo* with a lyrical approach in the phrasing and makes a big *portamento* in the last syllable of each word in each phrase such as: *miei, avanzo, infelice* and a *portamento* in *voi* a *diminuendo*. In *cessò dell'ira* the tenor sings with a strong emotion and drama, gives accents to words *orrendo, deserto*. In *splende il*

*castello* Pertile gives vocal inflations and attacks that reveal big dramatic burst particularly in *struggo, pianto* and *al felice consorte*. His voice is of a *spinto* quality and has a strong and virile vibrato (Potter, 2009, 87). In *tu delle gioje* in seno the tenor sings with contrasts of dynamics from piano to forte on the repetition of this phrase. It is important to notice the warmth and richness of timbre in his forte. The tenor ends the recitativo in *io della morte* in a big A4 and Bb4 with great emotional engagement and a dramatic voice, ending with a diminuendo and a tear kind of sobbing attack in the 2 eight notes of the end of *morte*, giving a particular dramatic vocal effect.

The aria *Fra poco a me ricovero* starts with an interpretation of great sense of line and generosity in the sound showing a despair feeling and grief. In *ah fin degli estinti ahi misero* the tenor sings with a *crescendo* continuously through the phrase with a prodigious *legato* line until a big *forte* in *misero* on a G4. Pertile executes the following phrases dramatically, ending them with the *ritenuto* in *conforto a me*. In *tu pur dimentica* the dramatic accents are filled with his *spinto* voice and a sturdy vibrato that suits well the role. In the *sostenuto* of F#4 of *Ah rispetta almen* Pertile does a portamento and not breathing between *Ah* and *rispetta*, doing all in one breath giving an interpretation of dense sorrow and sadness. In *di chi moria per te* Pertile gives some burst of crying in his attacks. His voice is exciting on the quality of colour and in his interpretation has some exaggerated portamento that was used in that time. In the end, before the *cadenza* in *chi muore per te*, again sobbing attacks of notes in *muore* and *per te*. At the *cadenza* Pertile performs it up to a Bb4 which is different from the approach to a B4 (natural) that is known. But what is very impressive is the *crescendo* he does after in *per te* with again sobbing attack in *te* and a portamento to connect both words.

#### 4.1. Giuseppe di Stefano (1921- 2008), recorded in 1953

**Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino; Conductor Tullio Serafin**

Di Stefano starts the *recitativo Tombe degli avi miei* with a very precise diction, singing a stylistic exquisite *legato* and a *rallentando* at the end of the sentence, with special attention to the last word in *deh! raccogliete voi*. The tenor's performance expresses a feeling of despair as an interpretive effect from *Cessò dell'ira* till *abbandonar mi vo?*, with precise execution of the ornaments. Among these phrases Di Stefano sings *il breve foco*, giving more emphasis to the 1st syllable of the word *foco*. There is a clear declamatory feeling in his phrasing. While he does not possess a dramatic voice he shows the drama with accents in the words and has always a clean diction and a very lyrical phrasing. Di Stefano sings with an even and safe emission showing vocally despair and sadness from *Ah!*

*scarsa fu la notte al tripudio!.. until al felice consorte*, and also in the *larghetto* from *Tu delle gioje in seno*. The tenor approaches these phrases soberly, repeating them with greater dramatic contrast than the first time. Di Stefano performs the traditional cadenza in *io della morte* with a rich and secure top notes, as we can see in Figure1.



Fig. 1. G. Donizetti- Lucia di Lammermoor – m.3

At the beginning of the aria Di Stefano executes with his very lyrical voice a *legato* of great mastery from *Fra poco a me ricovero* to *manca il conforto a me*, with a *ritenuto* in *conforto a me*. His precise bright lyrical voice together with the clarity of his diction and the refined use of a small *portamento* in *Ah! Fin degli estinti, ah misero*, gives a beautiful interpretation of the sadness of this aria. All his phrasing is interpreted with elegance and always shaping a round line with detail specially in the quick notes and respecting the accents in *quel marmo dispregiato* and in *del tuo consorte a lato*. In the sentence *Ah! Rispetta almen le ceneri*, Di Stefano sings the suspension in *Ah* with a robust G4 and uses of *portamento* in the phrase *di chi moria per te*. Di Stefano uses the indication of *con calore* and in *crescendo* in *tu lo dimentica*. He also fulfills with incisive attacks in *tu lo dimentica*. Di Stefano interprets the traditional final cadence to a magnificent and well sustained B4 with feeling, making no *diminuendo* at the end of the phrase and maintaining a strong dynamic in the *per te* as a conclusion, as shown in Figure 2.



Fig. 2. G. Donizetti – Lucia di Lammermoor – m.6

#### 4.3. Alfredo Kraus (1927-1999) recorded in 1984

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; Conductor Nicola Rescigno

Kraus sings the *recitativo* very elegantly in his line. He performs exactly what is written in the score regarding melody and rhythm with a fabulous sense of *a tempo*. Only in *abbandonar mi vo* the tenor uses the double consonants to express anger and drama. In the following lines, Kraus sings with a full command of his

voice, but elegant and cautious always, respecting everything in the score. Kraus never exceeds in drama in the words *ingrata* and *pianto* and *al felice consorte* which is one of the most dramatic parts in this *recitativo*. In *tu delle gioje in seno*, Kraus sings the first one in a clear *pianissimo* dynamic that suits his lyrical light instrument very well. After the previous dynamic he sings the same phrase in a *forte* in continuous *crescendo*. In *io della morte* Kraus sings the high notes of A4 and Bb4 on *forte* and with easiness - it's clear that the high register is a comfortable place for his lyric *leggero* voice. Kraus sings the beginning of the aria with a noble line of singing, and is very assertive at the same time, executing just the notes and rhythm correctly. The tenor takes advantage of his superb breath control, singing long phrases in one breath such as *ah fin degli estinti ahi misero manca il conforto a me*. Kraus sings the dramatic accents in *qual marmo dispregiato* on a G4 and in the following he keeps the same emotion in *o barbara*. Again, Kraus performs with the same breath control in long phrases without breathing between *ah rispetta almen le ceneri* and *di chi moria per te*. Kraus never exceeds in big emotion or drama on his interpretation. In the succeeding phrase *rispetta almen le ceneri* Kraus ascends to the high note of A4 in *forte* and does a *diminuendo* while coming down the phrase. In the *poco piu animato* the tenor respects the *accelerando* in *mai non passarvi tu lo dimentica* and goes immediately back to previous time repeating the phrase again but slower. In the final *cadenza* Kraus sings it up to a B4 and does a slight *diminuendo* on it, giving to the interpretation a nostalgia feeling. In the words *per te* he executes a *crescendo* and *decrescendo* beautifully giving a full command of the dynamics which are a characteristic of the *belcanto* technic.

#### 4.4. Roberto Alagna (1963), recorded in 2002

**Orchestra de l'opera nationale de Lyon; conductor Evelino Pidò**

This is a french version of the opera, the keys of the tonality and the lyrics are exactly the same as the Italian version. This version is just translated and adapted regarding the metric of lyrics from the Italian version to a French version.

Alagna begins the *recitativo Tombe de mes aieux* with great confidence in the attack of the notes in *Tombes de mes aieux*, revealing a special expression of sadness in *d'une famille étente recuillez le dernier*, making a *rallentando* that is not written in *l'infortuné débris* and suppresses the *gruppetto* in *Ah! Plus of plaint*. At the end of the sentence *pour moi n'a plus de prix* makes a dynamic of a sweet *pianissimo* using a mix of head voice with *falsetto*, as well as a little *rallentando* which is also not indicated. He has a robust voice with a dramatic quality on it. Until the beginning of the following *larghetto*, Alagna expresses sorrow and anger in his singing from *mon sang Ashton je te le livre* to *je tourne vainement mon front pâli*



*vers toi*, where he makes a small *rallentando* that, again, is not indicated. The feeling of hatred is recognized in his interpretation, particularly when he sings *ingrate et moi* making a dense and a dark sound.

In the following *largetto*, in *tu cherches le plaisir*, he makes an expressive attack on a *pianissimo* dynamic and an extra small note of adornment on the word *plaisir*. When he repeats this phrase for the first time, he contrasts with a *forte* dynamic to give it more drama. Alagna uses the traditional cadence to A4, B flat 4, returning to A4 in *Lucie et moi la tombe* as can be seen in figure 3.

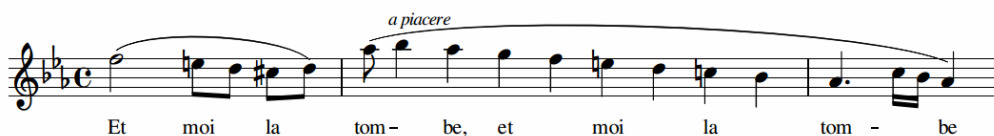


Fig. 3. G. Donizetti- *Lucie de Lammermoor* – m.3

Alagna sings the aria with accuracy in his legato line, revealing nobility and security in his dark and rich sound. The tenor uses *legato* and *portamento* in *la triste mausolée*, complies with the accent in *Ah mon âme* and the *ritardando* in *et désolée*. Alagna performs the next phrases well and pays attention to the fast notes and does a dramatic accent in *éveillerait mon ombre*. The tenor sings a *portamento* again in the exclamation in *ah respecte* on a G4 with his vigorous timbre, keeping a dense *legato*. He does the *crescendo* in *respecte au moins respecte* with a very bright and secure top to a A4. At the end of the aria, Alagna makes the *cadenza* to a well sustained and robust natural B 4, without any *decrescendo* in *Lucie adieu*, as we can see in figure 4. His interpretation is a clear on the dramatic side, revealing sorrow and sadness in his approach.



Fig. 4. G. Donizetti- *Lucie de Lammermoor* – m.4

## 5. Discussion

The first *Edgardo* was the tenor Gilbert Duprez (1806-1896) and much appreciated by Donizetti for his robust and dramatic interpretation (A. Bini and J. Commons 1997, 519). Duprez's voice was famous because he was one of the first tenors to sing the high register without changing to *falsestto* as it was a practice until the XVIII century. Duprez kept his chest voice all the way up his range until a high C without

changing registers. This approach was unique in the tenor's history because, until these days, the approach hadn't change. As John Stark (Stark 1999, 42) referred: "After Duprez, the *ut de poitrine* became a requirement for the romantic tenor". Miller (1993, 9) affirmed that the ideal tenor to sing Donizetti repertoire is the lyric and the *spinto* tenor because of roles as *Pollione* in *Norma*, *Roberto Devereux* and *Edgardo* in *Lucia*. Duprez was certainly on the more dramatic side because he was able to carry all his high register in chest voice and this gives to the sound more *squillo* and power. John Potter (Potter 2009, 54-55) points out that Duprez had a deep and darker voice relatively light to be able to sing Rossini and Donizetti. The latest one enjoyed the dramatic interpretation of his first *Edgardo*.

The lineage of tenors who have sung this role is hard to categorize. We shouldn't forget that, in the beginning of the XX century, this opera was not much performed as Sachs (2017, 456) recalled that "Toscanini had chosen to bring this downtrodden old stock opera to Vienna in 1929" with great success and with Aureliano Pertile (1885-1952) in the role of *Edgardo*. Potter (Potter 2009, 87) described Pertile's voice with "a highly developed dramatic sense which translated itself to an urgent delivery, heavily nuanced ... but more traditional sense of line". His timbre had a noticeable *vibrato*, a poignant phrasing and a tendency of metallic but easy high notes. Opera history has shown us that the role of *Edgardo* is often sung by a more dramatic tenor, but it has been performed by extremely lyric tenor voices as well as we can see here as an object of study. The orchestration of the introduction of the *recitativo* is dramatic with many *forte* dynamics as the words and story. By that the listener can already predict that the interpretation should be on the more dramatic side.

All tenors analysed in this study revealed a mastery in the *belcanto* style and approach, respecting dynamics, clear attacks, *portamento* ability and control of the high register. Pertile and Alagna have a more dramatic interpretation with accents and some sob attacks on notes and a great mastery on the *chiaroscuro* sound. Both voices are very robust with a thrilling vibrato and control of high register. It's also important to note that they both performed *Otello* and *Il Trovatore* by Verdi. Kraus and Di Stefano are both distinctive. Kraus has a sense self-control of his sound, continuously never giving more than he should. His approach is more lyric because of the nature of his timbre and by this he has full control of dynamics, clean attacks and a brilliant sound that makes him a perfect example of mastery of the *belcanto* style. His interpretation has a sweet side because of his lyric voice, the listener can understand the sadness in his interpretation but is more touched by his refined sound. Di Stefano has a warmer timbre. His interpretation is more extrovert than Kraus', but he keeps the lyricism. Di Stefano reveals sadness and despair in his

singing. He often shows some dramatic attacks on notes and his control of dynamics is outstanding as is his sense of phrasing.

By looking at the analysed tenors, both dramatic (Alagna and Pertile) and lyric tenors (Kraus and Di Stefano) can perform this role with elegance, easiness, and transparent interpretations.

## 6. Conclusion

It is important for this conclusion, to understand what kind of tenor Donizetti pretended for this role. More dramatic or more lyric?

All the tenors analysed in this study present dramatic points in this aria, but Pertile and Alagna are closer to what the composer pretended. This is the advantage of having a dramatic interpretation: to be closer from the story perspective and from what the composer wanted.

Nevertheless, Kraus and Di Stefano made recordings that are references until nowadays and established themselves as a pattern for this role. Having a lyric tenor performing this role reveals many positive aspects as command of dynamics (i.e. *crescendo* and *decrescendo* easily), an accuracy in the attacks of notes and sweetness sadness that fits well the character.

Both these types of tenor suite well the interpretation and I can understand why we have dramatic or lyric voices in this role. There is not a preferred one as long as the interpret can touch the audience with their instrument.

Therefore, I conclude that both types of tenor have assets for this interpretation. The dramatic voices are more transparent of the emotions of the character. They bring power, excitement, and drama. The lyric voices bring mastery in the dynamics which show a sweet sadness that also conveys the required drama and the *belcanto* style. Suffering can be shown in both ways: either with passion and rage or with the sadness of suffering.

From 2019 to 2022 the famous *Edgardo's* are the light tenors Juan Diego Florez (1973) and Javier Camarena (1976), establishing themselves in this role, being both of them famous for their agility and easy high notes. Is it a cycle that is going back to the Kraus and Di Stefano tendency? I shouldn't forget that even the recording of Kraus is 1984, the tenor was singing this role way much before. On the post-war Kraus did his debut at Covent Garden with this role in 1959 with great success. Di Stefano, in 50's, has two recordings of this opera. What I found peculiar is that in the post II World War the interpretations of this role are from lyric tenors. Pertile's interpretation was not a reference for this role because *Lucia di Lammermoor* was not much performed on those times. I just choose it because it's

the oldest one I could have access to and that could be pertinent for this study. Also, in the 1920's, Italy was under the regime of Mussolini. Those times were very troubled, as they are now: we are in the middle of a cold war and it seems that what is more seen for this role is again the lyric tenors.

I believe it is a cycle, depending on what is the world in need for. Sweetness or dramatic? Regarding the performance perspective I think this art form is to serve the audience well and expecting them to be elevated by exquisite interpretations.

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