

The vocal profile of the character “Anna Bolena” from the homonymous opera by Gaetano Donizetti

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Abstract: *Anna Bolena* is one of the most representative works of the composer Gaetano Donizetti because it marks the transition from the style of its predecessors (Rossini, Mayr, Pacini) to a more well-defined personal style. This study addresses the vocal profile of the main character, both in the context of the characteristic vocal typology and in the context of the voice-dramaturgy relationship. The character of *Anna Bolena* highlights the vocality of dramatic coloratura soprano and outlines the new hypostase of “prima donna” in the Italian opera - that of the performer-actress.

Key-words: *Donizetti, Anna Bolena, character, vocal profile*

1. Introduction

“*Anna Bolena*” opens the series of “The Three Donizetti Queens”, including “*Maria Stuarda*” and “*Roberto Devereux*”. All these titles are inspired by historical facts, dating back to the Tudor Dynasty. With “*Anna Bolena*”, Donizetti is recognized as an important European opera composer, thus exceeding the national prestige that characterized him until 1830.

The *libretto* of the opera (inspired by Ippolito Pindemonte and Alessandro Pepoli) is written by Felice Romani - a name that is often associated with composers such as: Vincenzo Bellini, Gaetano Donizetti, Giuseppe Verdi. In “*Anna Bolena*”, Romani exploits a theme inspired in the history of England, having Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry VIII, as the main character. The quality of the *libretto* has contributed to the configuration of a complex dramatic action and “the text contains numerous dramatic and musical opportunities for the composer” (Constantinescu 2013, 70).

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Over time, many musicologists and researchers have shown a special interest in this donizettian oper, considered a major work in the specialty literature. Thus, the following factors are analyzed: the social-political context in Italy, the influence of European literature and the preferences of the audience - these factors in the case of Gaetano Donizetti, contributing to the development of a compositional identity. Thus, we remark the following statements: „In formal terms, *Anna* really presents a number of items released under the rossinian code, giving greater emotional significance to the recitative, which gains increased intensity.” (Abbate and Parker 2019, 176).

Regarding „*Anna Bolena*”, other aspects addressed by musicologists and researchers consisted in the analysis of unprecedented music-dramatic situations as well as the evolution of particular vocal typologies such as dramatic coloratura soprano / dramatic agility soprano - representative female voice in the creation of Gaetano Donizetti.

Type of publication	Name of the author	Title	Publishing House/ Publishing Journal	Year
Article from Journal	Ashbrook William	„Anna Bolena”	The Musical Times Vol. 106, No. 1458 pp. 432-436	Jun. 1965
Book	Ashbrook William	„Donizetti and His Operas”	Cambridge University Press	1982
Book	Gossett Philip	„Anna Bolena and the Artistic Maturity of Gaetano Donizetti”	Oxford, Clarendon Press	1985
Article from Journal	Ashbrook William	„Donizetti and Romani”	Italica, Vol. 64 No. 4, Literature&Opera, pp. 606-631	Winter, 1987

Table 1. *The main studies on the opera “Anna Bolena”*

2. The structure of the vocal discourse – interpretative peculiarities

The opera “*Anna Bolena*” is structured in two acts – the specific structure of the opera seria from the first decades of the 19th century. In the first act, the character is presented through a vocal discourse in which the lyrical character predominates; it is rendered by an ample phrasing and by passages of virtuosity. In this context, the vocal virtuosity is used for descriptive purposes, to highlight the character's

youth. The aria "Come innocente giovane" and the cabaletta "Non v'ha sguarda" are representative musical moments, because they outline the vocal parameters in which the integral discourse of the character will take place (ambitus, tessitura).

The aria "Come innocente giovane" debuts in a graceful character, highlighted by ample phrases. During the first musical phrase, the Sol 1- Sol 2 octave ambitus is capitalized, imposing an equal sound of mediul vocal register and high vocal register. The punctuated rhythm and the short values (sixteenth notes, thirty second notes) give the vocal discourse a naïve character - necessary to portray the character at this moment of the opera. In interpreting this aria, vocal suppleness and linearity are required, without adding accents out of a desire to highlight certain words (for example, "giovane" or "core"). In this sense, the indication "legato" must be observed, which ensures unity and expressiveness of the vocal discourse.



Fig. 1. Musical fragment from aria "Come innocente giovane" (measures 1-5)

In the cabaletta "Non v'ha sguarda" the jovial character of the previous aria is perpetuated. The structure of the musical phrases is distinct, these being shorter; the main aspect in the development of this fragment of the vocal discourse consists in the expressive exposition of the punctuated rhythm, integrating it in the character of the character. The sound Sol 2 represents a point of reference of the vocal exposure, being defining in the tessitura of the vocal discourse; in the interpretation of this cabaletta, a fair, free voice emission is required, allowing accessibility to a solid high vocal register.

Non v'ha sguardo - do cui sta da - to pe-ne-trar nel me - sto
co - re; mi con - dan - na cru-do fa - to

Fig. 2. Musical fragment from cabaletta "Non v'ha sguardo" (measures 10-16)

During the ensemble moments found in the first act - respectively the quintet "Io senti sulla mia mano" / "Questo dir per voi spuntate", the duet "Se t'aborre, io t'amo ancora" and the end of the act, the vocal discourse depicts the relationships with the other characters. During these musical moments, the most important aspect of the vocalization is that of the timbre color, and of the fluidization of the dynamics.

In the second act we notice an intensification of the dramatic character, present in moments such as the duet Anna - Giovanna, the trio Anna - Percy - Enrico and the wonderful scene of madness at the end of the opera. The recitatives in this act emphasize the singer's ability to convey various emotions - love, anger, fear - without being dazzled by bravery, but rather by assuming the score in terms of individual vocal nuances.

The final scene of the opera - in which the death of the character is presented - represents one of the most dramatic moments in the history of Italian opera. This scene describes the madness of the character and the multitude of feelings that the voice of dramatic coloratura soprano can convey.

The recitative "Piangete voi..." describes an impressive inner monologue. Thus, the singer will consider the diversification of the vocal colors in order to bring veracity to the state of madness. This recitative allows a freedom of interpretation, because the simplicity of the text requires a special personal involvement. One of the most dramatic moments of this recitative is the one in measures 19-26 - when Anna remembers her wedding day with King Henry VII - the one who sentenced her to death. The vocal discourse found in this musical fragment begins with a discreet, almost sighing statement - "E questo giorno di nozze?" so that later it would be violently externalized in measures 23-25 - "infiorato altar". It is necessary for the interpreter to demonstrate the dramatism of this moment, and in this sense the sound Do 3 requires vocal mastery and an incisive vocal colour.

E questo gior-no di nozze Il Re m'a-spet - ta e ac-
ce - so, in - fio - ra - - to - l'al - tar da-temi tosto

Fig. 3. Musical fragment from recitative "Piangete voi..."(measures 19-26)

The aria-cantilena "Al dolce guidami" - an impressive moment in its simplicity - describes the nostalgia and longing of the character now facing death, towards the lands of her home. The aria consists of ample phrases, which highlight the roundness of the voice in the octave range Sol 1 -Sol 2. From an interpretive point of view, the attack on the *sind* Fa 2 should be soft, *mezzo piano*, being necessary a bright, diaphanous sonority. The dynamics will be maintained in the perimeter of *mezzo piano* - *mezzo forte*. The rhythm contributes to the completion of the dramatic context; thus, key words in interpretation, such as: *guidami*, *verdi platani*, *queto rio* are highlighted through exceptional rhythmic divisions. In the vocal interpretation of these words, the aim will be to obtain a distinct vocal color - a soft, suspended voice, with a recitative tendency that emphasizes the feeling of melancholy.

Al dolce guí - da mi ca - stel na - ti - o ai ver - di pla - ta - ni,
al que - to ri o

Fig. 4. Musical fragment from aria "Al dolce guidami" (measures 1-8)

The cabaletta "Coppia Iniqua" represents a training test from a technical-interpretative point of view. It highlights the timbral qualities of the dramatic coloratura soprano voice, imposing a metallic vocal color and incisiveness. It shows feelings of anger, desire for revenge and grief ("*Coppia iniqua l'estrema vendetta*" / "*False couple, I do not call down the final vengeance*"). The vocal discourse is discontinuous, being capitalized the dramatic accents on the sounds Mib 2, Sib 2, Sol 2. The word "vendetta" (measures 4-5) imposes a declamatory sound, similar to a shout. At this point in the opera we understand best why this role is dedicated to the voice of the dramatic coloratura soprano - only such a vocal typology can express all the vocal colors necessary for musical dramaturgy, remaining sonorous in all vocal registers in relation to the orchestral accompaniment.



Fig. 5. Musical fragment from cabaletta "Coppia iniqua"(measures 2-5)

The measures 24-31 describe in the most truthful way the character's disorder in the face of death. From a vocal point of view, at this moment the technical-interpretative climax is reached; the difficulty of the vocal writing - the dramatic coloring from measures 25-26 is doubled by the dramatic load of the literary text ("*Ei m'acquisti clemenza e favore al cospetto d'un Dio di pietà*" / "*May they obtain mercy and favour for me in the presence of a God of pity*"). Unusually, measures 29-31 require a sudden shift in interpretive intentions, transitioning from anger to abandonment. From a vocal point of view, this moment imposes the highest level of theatricality. The sounds LaB 2, SiB 2 and Do 3 (measures 25-26) represent an eloquent example of G. Donizetti's writing in the period of maturity, thus marking the transition from belcanto - in the well-known general sense to dramatic belcanto - a form of vocal exposition that emphasizes the theatrical qualities of the human voice.

si clemen-za e pie - ta, _____ fa - vor _____ pie -

ta. Ta-ce - te ta - ce - te, ces - sa - te, ces -

sa - te.

Fig. 6. Musical fragment from cabaletta “Coppia iniqua”(measures 24-31)

Musical section	Key	Vocal range	Tessitura
Act I			
(Anna) Cavatina “Come innocente giovane” Cabaletta “Non v’ha sguarda”	G Maj E flat Maj	B3 – B5 flat E4 flat – C6	G4 – G5 G4 – G5
Quintetto (Anna, Percy, Hervey, Riccardo, Enrico) Section 1. “Io senti sulla mia mano” Section 2. “Questo dir per voi spuntate”	A flat Maj C Maj	E4 flat – B5 flat E4 flat – G5	E4 flat – E5 flat G4 – E5
Duetto (Anna, Percy) “Se t’aborre, io t’amo ancora)	B flat Maj	B3 flat – G5	F4 – E5 (Traditionally, the duet ends with C6.)
Finale primo “Ah, segnate la mia sorte”	B flat Maj/D Maj	C4 – A5	F4 – E5

Musical section	Key	Vocal range	Tessitura
Act II			
Duetto (Anna, Giovanna)	C Maj – G Maj	C4 – B5	E4 – E5
Section 1. “Sul suo capo aggravi un Dio”	C Maj	E4 – A5	E4 – G5
Section 2. “Va’ infelice, e teco resta”			
Terzetto (Anna, Percy, Enrico)	C Maj		
Section 1. “Arresta, Enrico”	B flat Maj		
Section 2. “Fin dall’eta piu tenera”	G Maj	B3 – A5	E4 – G5
Section 3. “M’ha si, m’ha della fe tradita”	C Maj		
Section 4. “Quanto, quanto e funesto il tu dono...”			
Scena ed aria finale (Anna)	F Maj	C4 – C6	E4 – G5
Recitativo “Piangete voi?...”	G Maj	B3 flat – A5	G4 – G5
Aria “Al dolce guidami”	E flat Maj	D4 – C6	G4 – G5
Cabaletta “Coppia iniqua”			(Traditionally, the cabaletta ends with C6.)

Table 2. *The structure of the vocal discourse*

3. Anna Bolena in the context of the repertoire for dramatic coloratura soprano

Since the beginnings of the Italian lyrical theater, the roles dedicated to soprano voice have had a special status. Many of the large-scale roles could be designed because of the versatility of this vocal category. During the 18th and 19th centuries, a special type of vocality is distinguished - the dramatic coloratura soprano.

The characteristics of this type of voice consist of: an ample ambitus (exceeding two octaves: below B3 and above C6), an intense low register, a solid medium register and an extended, flexible acute register; it is distinguished by a significantly higher voice volume than the voice of coloratura soprano or than lyric coloratura soprano.

This particular vocality was highlighted in many 18th century works by composers such as Händel, Piccini, Gluck, Mozart, Salieri etc. Among the representative roles we mention: Cleopatra from the opera "Giulio Cesare", Armida from the opera "Rinaldo", La Marchesa from the opera "La Cecchina", Alceste from the homonymous opera, Iphigenie from the opera "Iphigenie en Tauride", Elettra from the opera "Idomeneo", Constanze from the opera "Die Entführung aus dem Serail", Donna Anna from the opera "Don Giovanni", Vitellia from the opera "La Clemenza di Tito", Europa from the opera "Europa riconosciuta", etc.

In the 19th century, the dramatic coloratura soprano voice is found in many bel canto works, representative of the evolution of the Italian lyrical theater. Composers such as Rossini, Mercadante, Bellini, and Donizetti assign this type of voice a particular discourse, combining the bel canto technique - characterized by vocal virtuosity and vivacity - with a new style of voice exposure, diversified with dramatic recitative moments. Thus, we take into account the following ideas: "Due to the technique of bel canto, lyrical artists have the opportunity to express vocally in a unique manner, using: an ambition of two octaves, two distinct vocal registers, the chest voice and the head voice, an impressive dynamics, from piano barely whispered to fortissimo of 120 dB." (Eremia 2017, 10). We mention the reference roles in the creation of the above mentioned composers, until the premiere of "Anna Bolena".

Among the Rossinian roles we mention: Armida, from the homonymous opera, Elena from the opera "La donna del lago", Semiramide, from the homonymous opera, Mathilde, from the opera "Wilhelm Tell". Among the most important Bellinian roles we mention the following: Beatrice, from the opera "Beatrice di Tenda", Imogene, from the opera "Il Pirata" and Adelaide from the opera "La Straniera".

We also notice in the creation of Saverio Mercadante relevant roles such as: Caritea, from the opera "Caritea, regina di Spagna" and Nitocri from the homonymous opera.

Donizetti dedicates a large part of his large-scale roles to this vocal typology, because this vocal category truly supports the dramatic intentions of the libretto and completes the orchestral discourse. Among the Donizettian roles composed before Anna Bolena we mention: Emilia, from the opera "Emilia di Liverpool", Elvida, from the homonymous opera, Gabriella, from the opera "Gabriella di Vergy", Alina, from the opera "Alina, regina di Golconda", Elisabetta, from the opera "Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth", Ada, from the opera "Il diluvio universale", Imelda, from the opera "Imelda de Lambertazzi".

What differentiates the opera "Anna Bolena" from the previously composed operas is the composer's involvement in the vocal and theatrical evolution of the

character. The character's vocality is an instrument through which moments of refinement and lyricism are highlighted (especially in the first act) as well as moments of intense drama, rendered particularly through recitatives - very convincing inner monologues (in the second act). Thus, the vocal coloratura is no longer used for the purpose of vocal bravery, but increases the parameters in which the character evolves from an emotional point of view.

4. "Anna Bolena" in reference interpretations

Since the premiere of the opera in 1830, Anna Bolena's role was portrayed by numerous interpreters, belonging to various voice typologies. Significant is that this role was created for the soprano Giuditta Pasta. One of the representative descriptions of this soprano is the following: "At her best in tragic roles such as Medea or Norma and Anna Bolena, written expressly for her (...) Nevertheless she was an outstanding singer, renowned for her dramatic ability as much as for her singing, a superb interpreter in an era of superlative performers." (The Encyclopedia of Opera 1976, 268). Regarding her vocal typology, in the numerous researches that were carried out about Giuditta Pasta, various opinions were issued. Given that Giuditta Pasta represented a vocal ideal in the role of Anna Bolena, the following statements are revealing: "A long, multicoloured voice promises either extraordinary accomplishment or extraordinary difficulties: Pasta had her share of both. Ranging two and a half octaves from a to d, her voice was often described as a mezzo-soprano, although the modern term soprano drammatico d'agilità might more accurately define its mixture of qualities." (Rutherford 2007, 111). Starting from this vocal-dramatic template, Anna Bolena will be embodied by other reference performers.

In the 20th century, the success of this opera is mainly due to soprano Maria Callas, which returns to the public this unique character in the extraordinary production in 1957 from Teatro alla Scala. Looking back, we can consider that representation a beginning in the tendency to approach a role of such magnitude. An important contribution was made by Luchino Visconti, the famous director of film, theater and opera, who capitalized on the literary text in a distinct, realistic way that only Maria Callas could assimilate at that time. Thus, after all the conquests in the field of vocal technique obtained in the Italian belcanto after all research and treaties, in the second half of the twentieth century comes the time of a dramatic - interpretive conquest.

Another reference interpretation of this role is that of soprano Leyla Gencer. Endowed with an unmistakable vocal timbre - like that of Maria Callas - Gencer strikes with the versatility of the vocal colors and a perfect vocal technique, which

allowed her during her long career to become a vocal standard of large-scale Donizetti roles. About Leyla Gencer's affiliation at the donizettian repertoire and about the dramatic potential of her voice was said: "She returned to Covent Garden for Anna Bolena, 1965; most famous in this and other Donizetti roles (...) to which her dramatic and pathetic accents are best suited" (The Encyclopedia of Opera 1976, 141). This provocative role aroused the interest of many sopranos, both in the second half of the 20th century and in the 21st century, Anna Bolena becoming a common title in the repertoire of opera houses. From the list of reference performers who meet all the vocal and dramaturgical requirements, we mention the following sopranos:

- From the period 1957-1970: Maria Callas, Leyla Gencer, Elena Souliotis, Teresa Zylis-Gara;
- From the period 1971-1980: Vasso Papantoniou, Beverly Sills, Marisa Galvany, Renata Scotto, Olivia Stapp;
- From the period 1981-1990: Yasuko Hayashi, Montserrat Caballe, Cecilia Gasdia, Joan Sutherland, Katia Ricciarelli, Nelly Miricioiu;
- From the period 1990-2000: Carol Vaness, Edita Gruberova, Denia Mazzola-Gavazzeni, Giusy Devinu;
- From the year 2000 to the present days: Dimitra Theodossiou, Adelaide Negri, Mariella Devia, Elena Moşuc, Ermonela Jaho, Sondra Radvanovsky.

4.1. Maria Callas and Leyla Gencer – specific aspects of interpretation

Maria Callas is an emblematic name in the history of lyrical theater. Many things can no longer be said, because her "assoluta" fame has lasted in the world of opera for over half a century. The essential contribution that Callas made to lyrical theater was the true life of the characters - her impeccable acting. Associated more with dramatic roles, she paid special attention to the psychological structure of the characters. Every word, every inflection of the voice must convey a real feeling. In "Anna Bolena" she portrays a royal, dignified character, who through her voice displays prestige, even in the most sensitive moments of the opera. In Callas' interpretation, the aria "Come innocente giovane" and the cabaletta "Non v'ha sguarda" highlight the character's grace, without diminishing the character's prestige. The voice is supple, the attacks of the sounds are direct but soft, and the high register is bright. But the most important aspect is related to the articulation of words. In Callas' case, the pronunciation of the words is perfectly intelligible, which allows her to juggle the colors of the voice. In the recitative "Piangete voi" and the cantilena "Al dolce guidami" she exposes a perfect mastery of the

pianissimes, creating that auditory sensation of “suspended time” - a sensation long awaited in the “scenes of madness”. This effect is achieved by a completely free voice emission, allowing the highlighting of the harmonics of the voice in the high register. In the cabaletta “Coppia iniqua” she reveals the Machiavellian side of the character, reminiscent in some places with Verdi's Lady Macbeth. The hatred and rage found in this musical moment are transmitted with a glacial nobility, without too many dramatic effects. Dynamic fluctuations are accompanied by the emphasis on important words, which Callas experiences, feels and conveys. Summarizing what has been said before, the novelty that Callas brought to this role was not necessarily vocal but acting. She acquired this royal character, which she portrayed from the beginning until the end of the opera. Her voice was just a perfectly trained instrument that told the dramatic fate of an English queen.

Leyla Gencer (Turkish soprano) was probably the most versatile opera singer after Maria Callas. Endowed with a special vocal timbre, remarkable for its dark color, Gencer has in her record an impressive number of roles, from all stylistic periods (from A. Vivaldi, to the twentieth century opera - Fr. Poulenc and I. Pizzetti). However, the roles that placed her among the greatest sopranos of all time were those in the dramatic belcanto repertoire and the Verdi ones. In the role of “Anna Bolena” Leyla Gencer differs from Maria Callas by the way she alternates the colors of her voice. Leyla Gencer's resounding vocal versatility is impressive. In the aria “Come innocente giovani” and cabaletta “Non v'ha sguarda” she displays the portrait of an innocent young woman. The mild glottal attacks - representative of Leyla Gencer - give this moment a timid, hesitant character. In the recitative “Piangete voi” and the cantilena “Al dolce guidami” the royal character of the character is revealed. Like Maria Callas, Gencer also had some superb pianissimes, only in Gencer's case they had a special sound. The color of her voice, slightly strange, gave her a special distinction. In the madness scene at the end of “Anna Bolena”, Gencer manages to use these sounds to give more truth to the mental state of the character. Unlike Callas, we cannot say about Gencer that she had an impeccable pronunciation, but she compensates with other advantages in the field of vocal technique. Cabaletta “Coppia iniqua” performed by Leila Gencer is one of the most intense moments in the belcanto dramatic repertoire. The attacks on the sounds, the dynamic fluctuations and the fluctuations of the vocal colors, crown this moment of the work with all the drama that the human voice can express. Summarizing what has been said before, the novelty brought by Gencer in the opera “Anna Bolena” consisted in exposing the vocal drama, precisely, using more the colors of the voice than the affected utterance of the literary text.

5. Conclusions

During his long career as a composer, Donizetti portrayed in his operas unprecedented universes and characters. If until 1830 he followed the stylistic direction of his predecessors - Rossini and Mayr and excelled following certain patterns - the structure of operas, the structure of musical moments, the choice of performers' voices - with “Anna Bolena” he manages to create a true historical melodrama. Thus, the following ideas define the essence of the opera: “The merit of Anna Bolena lies not in any radical departures from Donizetti's previous norms of structure, but rather in the generally higher level of expression to which his imagination was stimulated by the well-realized characters he was bringing to life.” (Ashbrook 1982, 317). The rise of melodrama also implies changes in the vocal approach, so that starting with 1830 we witness a diversification of the belcanto style. That “filigree singing” will be transfigured into a mixed vocal style, in which the bel canto cantilena will alternate with dramatic declamations (in recitatives) and an impressive vocal virtuosity (in cabalettas). The vocal profile of the character Anna Bolena sums up all the technical conquests of the bel canto type, emphasizing the vocal expressiveness in relation to: the literary text, with the orchestra, with the other characters. The writing attributed to the voices in Donizetti's mature operas, starting with 1830, will find its continuity in the Verdi's operas from the first period of creation. We can consider this stage of the Italian opera a transition of the belcanto vocal style - from the popular meaning - to the dramatic belcanto style, the one very well represented in the writing of roles from operas such as: “Ernani”, “I Masnadieri”, “Macbeth”, “Il corsaro”, “Luisa Miller”, etc.

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