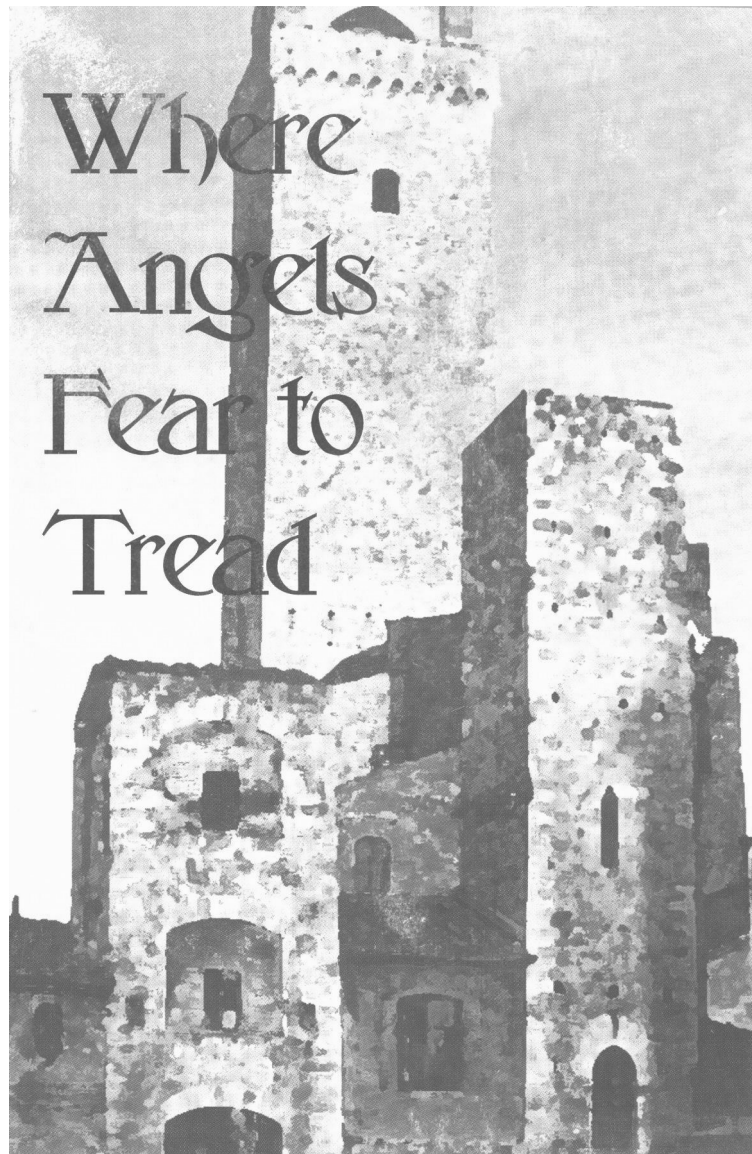


Novel into *Opera*

2. The Opera Aria



Thursday, September 29, 2022

The Opera Aria

ONE OF THE MAIN BUILDING-BLOCKS OF OPERA is the solo aria. Working first from two repertoire standards, we shall ask what the aria is and what it does. To whom is it sung, for example (even if the character is alone onstage)? What happens during it (even if the character has no specific action)? What is its emotional content? How does the composer introduce it, and what is its musical form?

In the second hour, we look at opera in English, and specifically at the problem of writing words suitable for singing. We shall end with some examples from *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, my own adaptation of the EM Forster novel for Mark Lanz Weiser in 1999. *rb*.

A. Some Figaro Arias

The Marriage of Figaro (1786) contains most of the basic aria types to be found in opera. We look at four relatively short examples then study at greater length the great *scena* (two-part aria preceded by an orchestrally-accompanied recitative) he gives to the Countess.

— **Mozart:** *Le nozze di Figaro*, various arias

Miah Persson (Susanna), Dorothea Röschmann (Countess),
Rinat Shaham (Cherubino), Erwin Schrott (Figaro);
DVD London 2006, Antonio Pappano (c), David McVicar (d)

B. A Verdi Scena

The solo *scena* became one of Verdi's principal tools, especially in exploring the inner conflicts of his leading female characters. The aria with which Violetta closes Act I of *La Traviata* is a case in point.

— **Verdi:** *La traviata*, ending of Act I

Ermonela Jaho (Violetta);
DVD London 2006, Antonello Manacorda (c), Richard Eyre (d)

C. Writing for Stravinsky

In writing the libretto for Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (1950), poets WH Auden and Chester Kallman produced a perfect evocation of the eighteenth-century world of Hogarth, on whose prints the opera is based. But a text that cannot be readily understood, even with titles, raises questions about what words in an opera are *for*.

- **Stravinsky: *The Rake's Progress***, two short excerpts
Miah Persson (Anne), Topi Lehtipuu (Tom);
Glyndebourne 2010, Vladimir Jurowski (c), John Cox (d)

D. Words in English

We take a short monologue for Irina, the youngest and most idealistic of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, and see what steps would be needed in adapting it as an opera aria.

- **Chekhov: *Three Sisters***, Irina's Act I monologue
Jet Jameson

E. Transforming Forster

Two contrasting arias from *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1999), adapted by Roger Brunyate from EM Forster's novel of the same name. One, Harriet's litany of complaints about Italy, was a matter of rearranging the phrases in a single paragraph of the original to make an obviously comic set piece. The longer aria for Caroline, however, involved combining ideas from several parts of the novel and arranging them to seem quite natural.

- **Weiser: *Where Angels Fear to Tread***, two arias
Susan Minsavage (Harriet), Anne Jennifer Nash (Caroline),
Taylor Armstrong (Philip).
Peabody 1999; Robert Sirota (c), Roger Brunyate (d)

For materials used in each class, see the instructor's website:

<http://www.brunyate.com/novel-opera/>

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