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Field of Art, Artistic Discipline: Musical Arts

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**Comparison of Female Characters from the "Lower Social
Classes" in W. A. Mozart's Operas and Chinese Operas – Based
on Selected Soprano Roles**

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Warsaw, 2025 rok

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Introduction

Opera performance is an important part of vocal music education in higher education institutions in China, both in the *belcanto* aesthetic and in the singing performed in the traditional national aesthetic. However, this dissertation focuses solely on the classical repertoire in the *belcanto* aesthetic. Looking historically at the development of the themes underlying opera performances, it can be observed that female characters from lower social classes have appeared practically from the very beginning of the genre, especially in opera *buffa*. Even its first manifestation in the form of *La serva padrona* by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi introduced the fully realized character of the maid Serpina, who is the central figure in the unfolding intrigue. In opera seria, characters from lower social classes initially appeared only in the background, serving secondary dramatic functions, enriching the stage color, or lending credibility to social realities. As the dramatic themes evolved, their roles became more significant, and the characters themselves gradually gained dramatic and artistic weight, eventually advancing to the status of main characters, equal in importance to those from higher social spheres.

In this study, the author focuses on female characters from lower social classes, attempting to explore the role and significance of these characters through selected examples, taking into account a comparative perspective between European and Chinese opera. The author's research indicates that the chosen comparative perspective seems to be a relatively underexplored research topic and is worth further development, considering historical, cultural, dramatic, musical contexts, and most importantly in this doctoral thesis in the vocal discipline – the analysis of issues strictly related to the vocal part. As a result, the author of this dissertation, through the study of selected opera characters, aims to examine the musical characteristics and artistic value of the representations of women from lower social classes, and through the analysis of selected works, attempts to describe the practical application of expressive means in soprano performance. This, in turn, should contribute to a deeper

understanding of the aesthetic interpretation of such character portrayals in opera. Finally, through a comparative analysis considering different cultural circles – European and Chinese – and the various developmental dynamics of the opera genre, the author analyzes the differences and similarities in the appearance and functioning of these characters in both areas, also examining the execution techniques in terms of their adequacy.

To specify the research area, the author decided to choose servant characters from the operas of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, thus highlighting the importance of the operatic legacy of the Salzburg genius, also in the context of creating significant female characters from lower social classes. Dr. Małgorzata Sokalska, Assistant Professor in the Department of Literary Comparative Studies at the Faculty of Polish Studies at the Jagiellonian University, in her work "Supporting Characters – On Servant Figures in Opera," Dr. hab. Małgorzata Sokalska, Assistant Professor at the Department of Literary Comparatistics, Faculty of Polish Studies, Jagiellonian University, writes in the final paragraph of page 2: "The servant thus introduced an element of carnivalization onto the stage, which is especially evident among the successors of the ancient clever servant. (...) This lineage is worth recalling, if only to explain the genealogy of masterpieces that erected the most enduring operatic monuments to servants—namely, *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*..."¹

The above conclusion most effectively confirms the validity of the author's choice of characters, in terms of their representativeness for European culture. As for Chinese opera, it is worth noting that the history of the development of Chinese opera, particularly its form modeled on Western operatic aesthetics, is much shorter, spanning only a few decades, beginning in 1945 (with the premiere of the first opera regarded as modeled after European opera, *The White-haired Girl* (白毛女), with a libretto by He Jingzhi and Ding Yi, and music by Ma Ke, Zhang Lu, Qu Wei, Huan Zhi, Xiang Cun, Chen Zi, Liu Chi.² The character of the

¹ M. Sokalska, *Secondary Characters – On the Role of Servants in Opera* [J], *Poznań Studies in Polish Philology* 2022, Literary Series 42, p. 2.

² Ding Mu, *History of Chinese Theater* (中国戏剧的历史) [M]. China Business, 2018, p. 152-154.

young Xier from this opera is the first of the female characters from lower social classes chosen by the author of the dissertation. The next two characters included in the author's selection are from equally significant works, milestones in the development of Chinese opera, Jin Xiang's *The Savage Land* (原野) and *The Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣). Undoubtedly, both the operas themselves and the selected characters are representative of the development of the genre in China, which serves as the best justification for the author's choice. Justifying the selection of characters, the author, in Chapter One, identifies the key moments that led to their appearance in the works of W. A. Mozart and, respectively, in the works of selected Chinese composers (Chapter I).

The second and third chapters of the dissertation highlight key dramaturgical moments in opera librettos, specifying the respective characters and presenting their conceptual development by the librettists and composers. The author has selected six representative female characters from operas, including three Mozartian characters: Zerlina from *Don Giovanni*, Despina from *Così fan tutte*, and Susanna from *Le Nozze di Figaro*, as well as Xi'er from the Chinese opera *The White-Haired Girl* (libretto: He Jingzhi and Ding Yi, music: Ma Ke, Zhang Lu, Qu Wei, Huanzhi, Xiangcun, Chen Zi, Liu Chi), Shui Honglian from the opera *The Ballad of the Canal* by Yin Qing, and Jinzi from the opera *Savage Land* by Jin Xiang. These classical roles not only feature rich and diverse character portrayals but also exemplify a high level of musical aesthetic quality. They frequently appear in the pedagogical repertoire for university-level voice training. The author conducted an analysis of selected excerpts from works featuring women of lower social classes, from these six operas with varying musical styles. The study also includes targeted research and discussions on the musical structure and performance issues related to the vocal parts. The analysis of the key excerpts from the librettos, which describe the selected characters, aims not only to understand the dramaturgical complexity of the characters but also to facilitate a deeper understanding of these female characters during the interpretation process, thereby improving the development of their vocal parts. Furthermore, attention is often paid to vocal technique, while the musical aesthetic is sometimes neglected. The author, however, focuses on an in-depth analysis of the

characters and works on two levels – musical structure and vocal technique – and then examines in detail how to create the portrayals of women from lower social classes in the above-mentioned six operas and their specific interpretative practices. (Chapter II, Chapter III)

In the fourth chapter, the author carries out a comparative analysis between Mozart's operas and Chinese operas in terms of the creation of female characters from lower social classes. The analysis covers differences and similarities in musical structure, vocal parts, and emotional expression, aiming to reveal significant differences in the creation of female characters from lower social classes in these works. (Chapter IV)

Finally, in the fifth chapter, the author expands the perspective by analyzing the practice of performing female roles in Chinese opera and proposes her own analysis and research suggestions regarding the current status of Chinese opera since the establishment of CNF, as well as its future development and dissemination. (Chapter V)

The comprehensive, in-depth research on female characters from lower social classes performed by sopranos, both in theoretical and practical aspects of opera performance, was of significant theoretical and practical importance for the author of the dissertation herself. The comparison of the ways these characters are portrayed allowed the author to gain a better understanding of the form and content of the works, expand interpretive perspectives in the performance of these roles, and deepen knowledge in the theory and practice of vocal technique. This contributed to enhancing the author's professionalism in opera performance, increasing the emotional structure of the characters, developing professional skills, and realizing the idea of understanding, feeling, and perfecting role interpretation.

Keywords: Mozart operas, Chinese operas, portrayals of women from lower social classes; comparison; soprano; duet.

Chapter I: Mozart's Operatic Works and Chinese Opera

1.1 Overview of Mozart's Operatic Works

1.1.1 The Influence of Social Culture on Mozart's Works

The creative period of Mozart (1756–1791) is recognized as part of the "Classical period" (1750–1820) in the history of Western music. According to many scholars, the Classical period represents one of the most significant epochs in the development of music. Musical works from this era are characterized by a sense of clarity, serenity, balance, lyricism, and emotional restraint, offering listeners a refined and structured aesthetic experience.

In the mid-to-late 18th century, the stability of absolute monarchy was increasingly undermined. The contradictions between the three social classes—the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and the peasant and working classes—became more pronounced, while the capitalist market economy began to take shape. Against the backdrop of these socio-economic transformations, Enlightenment thought, drawing extensively from the rapidly evolving field of epistemology, emerged as a powerful ideological tool for the rising third estate in its struggle for freedom and equal rights. It emphasized the belief that human beings, through rational thought, could understand and improve the existing order to achieve self-realization. Thinkers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire were among those who inspired these ideas.

Under the influence of Enlightenment thought, music became secular and popular. Professional musicians aimed for a more accessible, widely understood, and liked style, aspiring to a "cosmopolitan" art, i.e. "a musical style that is preferred by many and not accepted only by one country, province, or specific ethnic group".³ This style became a means of personal

³ Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music*, translated by Wang Qizhang, et al., People's Music Publishing House, 1996, p. 496-499

expression for the people of that time and "not only characterized the music of the new era but also gave rise to the romantic musical style of the 19th century".⁴

From the second half of the 18th century, music, both directly and indirectly, found favorable conditions for development due to the Enlightenment ideals of the time, as well as the intense and extensive growth of trade, technology, and transportation. Ideologically, the exaltation and celebration of humanity, which characterized the emerging civil society culture, played a powerful role in transforming music from a pastime of the aristocracy into a natural means of expressing the emotions of the bourgeois class. From a technological perspective, the development of the printing press improved the efficiency of printing books and musical scores, while technological advancements in musical instrument production made them increasingly affordable. The availability of instruments, sheet music, books, and music education became widespread among the middle class.

Similar to the numerous biographical and epistolary novels and poems popular in this period, musical art, which was particularly suited for the expression of the internal emotional experiences of people, conveyed through its works the common feelings of the bourgeois class, which urgently sought to change its low socio-political status. In this way, music undergoes a transition from sacredness to humanism, which leads to a shift from depicting the "conflict between humanity and divinity" to portraying the "clash between good and evil in humanity"⁵.

The transformation of the economic market, and consequently the artistic market, led to the development of self-regulation mechanisms for art and the independence of music. The dominance of the concept of the musical work over the activities of appreciation and listening, as well as a series of practices that demonstrated how the cultural status of music had reached unprecedented heights, were part of the transformation of European society. The traditional system of aristocratic patronage began to decline, but it did not completely withdraw,

⁴ Yu Runyang, *A General History of Western Music*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2003, p. 175.

⁵ Xing Weikai, *The Aesthetic Journey of Emotional Art – Emotional Aesthetics in the History of Western Musical Thought*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2004, p. 76.

coexisting with the developing market. All these factors, occurring together, ensured that a significantly larger group of musicians could earn a decent income and achieve a corresponding social status related to their profession. Through the skill of composition, musicians were able to adjust their musical practice not only to the requirements of the subject matter but also to their own desires and goals. In this way, they shaped the characteristics of both the object and the subject simultaneously in both directions.

However, when looking at the broader context of European society in the mid- and late 18th century, the bourgeoisie in Germany and Austria did not form as strong a class as in France during Mozart's lifetime. Progressive intellectuals, however, strived for development in the field of culture. Their acceptance of the ideas of *Sturm und Drang* and their perception of social contradictions inevitably led to the emergence of new, dramatic elements in their works.

"It was this new element that allowed Mozart to make a greater step forward in his compositions than his contemporary Haydn, a step that was later developed by Beethoven".⁶

⁶ Dai Yulian, *Democratic Tendencies in the Later Instrumental Works of Mozart*, People's Music, 1981(11), p. 43

1.1.2 Mozart's life and creative journey



Ryc. 1. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)⁷

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (born January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, died December 5, 1791, in Vienna) was an Austrian composer and virtuoso of keyboard instruments. Throughout his life, he composed over 600 works, including 22 operas, as stated in his biography by Peter Gay from 1999. However, if we consider *Die Schuldigkeit des ersten Gebots* (a work regarded by some scholars as an oratorio) as a stage work (there are indications that its first performance might have been staged), the number of operas rises to 23. Mozart is known as one of the "three Viennese classics" alongside Haydn and Beethoven. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest and most important composers in the history of music.

Mozart's achievements would not have been possible without the rigorous education provided by his father, Leopold Mozart,⁸ and the extensive travels during his formative years, when young Mozart was exposed to Western European literature and heard all kinds of music. With the help of his extraordinary memory and understanding of the musical material, he

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang_Amadeus_Mozart 30/01/2025, 5:17pm

⁸ Leopold Mozart (1719-1787) - composer and violinist; for a long time, he served at the court of the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. His book *The Violin School* (1756) is an important historical document from the 18th century. His meticulous upbringing of the young prodigy Wolfgang Mozart is an indispensable contribution to humanity. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopold_Mozart, January 30, 2025, 5:18 pm

quickly absorbed all the beautiful sounds and techniques, imitating the works of others and even improving upon them. The creative ideas of some composers were also continued in the creation of his works. In this way, Mozart's compositions synthesized the musical treasures of all nations during the Classical period and became a mirror of the Classical music era.



Ryc. 2. Johann Georg Leopold Mozart (1719-1787)⁹

1.1.2.1 Early Life (1756-1773)

Wolfgang Mozart exhibited extraordinary musical talent from a very young age. By the age of four or five, he could already play the harpsichord and violin, with music becoming his natural language. Under the strict supervision of his father, Leopold Mozart, Mozart received a solid foundation in performance and composition from his early years. He began his artistic career as an international prodigy before he turned six.

Starting in 1763, Mozart and his family left Salzburg and embarked on a musical journey. In Paris, they met Johann Schobert (d. 1767), an eccentric German musician whom Mozart held in high regard. Schobert's works combined the Mannheim style with the romantic, wild, and intensely emotional expression of the Rampage school. Mozart's first four piano concertos are adaptations of Schobert's sonatas. "We should regard Schobert as one of the

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopold_Mozart 30/01/2025, 5:18pm.

most influential teachers of young Mozart.”¹⁰

In December 1769, while in Italy, Mozart was greatly appreciated wherever he went, encountering and listening to the finest musicians and music in Italy. He studied counterpoint with Father Antonio Battista Martini (1706-1784). During his musical life in Italy, Mozart began to realize that “passions, whether violent or not, should never be expressed in a way that causes disgust; and music, even in the greatest despair, should never be unpleasant to the ear, but should charm and enchant it, thereby always remaining music.”¹¹ This became his life's credo.

Through frequent contact with famous singers, Mozart realized that the beauty of music, which had become his guiding principle, could be embodied in the human voice. The fashion of the time and his own dramatic instincts led him to turn to the highest form of vocal work—opera. In Vienna, he composed the Italian comic opera *La finta semplice* (1768) and the German Singspiel *Bastien et Bastienne* (1768). In Milan, two operas were created: *Mitridate re di Ponto* (1770) and *Ascanio in Alba* (1772).

In the summer of 1773, Mozart again stopped in Vienna and met another person who would have a profound impact on him and become extremely important in his creative career—Joseph Haydn¹². His symphonies taught Mozart the art of logic and continuity. By imitating Haydn's works while maintaining his own independence, Mozart's symphonies became longer and more logical. The symphonies K.183 (1773) and K.201 (1774) were Mozart's first masterpieces in this genre. Later, Mozart wrote: “No one has ever devoted as much time and effort to composition as I have, and there is no famous master whose works I have not studied repeatedly.”¹³

¹⁰ Téodor de Wyzewa, Georges de Saint-Foix, “Un maître inconnu de Mozart,” *Zeitschrift der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*, 1908, pp. 35-41

¹¹ Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization*, p. 674.

¹² Franz Joseph Haydn (31.03.1732 - 31.05.1809) - Austrian composer; Haydn was the next great instrumental composer after Bach and a distinguished representative of classical music, known as the "father of the symphony," "father of the string quartet," and "Papa Haydn."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Haydn, January 30, 2025, 5:19 pm.

¹³ Joseph Machlis, *The Enjoyment of Music*, trans. Liu Kexi, People's Music Publishing House, 1987, p. 237.



Ryc. 3. Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)¹⁴

1.1.2.2 The Salzburg Period (1774-1781)

Mozart lived in Salzburg from 1774 to 1781. For a musician who had seen the world in Milan, Munich, and Paris, Salzburg felt like a small, backward town. Unable to improve his situation in Salzburg, Mozart had to quit his job and, this time accompanied by his mother, once again set out on a journey. After several stops, they spent quite some time in Mannheim, where they encountered the Mannheim School of music and heard their first-class orchestra, and where Mozart vainly waited for an audience with the king. It was here that he fell in love with the 15-year-old singer Aloysia Weber and began preparing for marriage. However, his father opposed the marriage, wanting him to become a musician of lasting fame and not marry too early or hastily. Mozart relented and continued his journey in a melancholic mood.

In March 1778, Mozart went to Paris again. There, he succeeded in composing the *Paris Symphony* K.297 (1778) for the Paris Symphony Orchestra, one of the finest orchestras in Europe at the time. The piece features techniques and the rich tonal colors of woodwind

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Haydn 30/01/2025, 5:19pm.

instruments, showcasing the Parisian musical style and a rich sound. While in Paris, Mozart diligently studied French music, particularly that of Gluck and Gretry. He admired Gretry's "realism of diction and dramatic expression." Although he did not appreciate the musical life in France, he was moved by the liveliness and simplicity of French comedy music and the excellence of its declamatory recitatives. When his mother passed away in Paris on July 3, 1778, Mozart returned to Salzburg the following year in a melancholic mood, resuming his work as the conductor of the Archbishop's orchestra, and soon after was appointed organist at the court.

During this period, Mozart composed many works, including concertos, sonatas, symphonies, quartets, serenades, and one of his finest pieces, the Italian-style opera *Idomeneo* (1781), in which he integrated all the techniques and methods he had learned in Mannheim, Paris, and Italy. As a result, although the libretto is somewhat inflated, the music is dramatic and picturesque, with plenty of accompanying declamations, striking choruses, and the inclusion of spectacular staging, demonstrating the influence of Gluck and French lyrical tragedy. The opera also marked the beginning of Mozart's career as a young composer. It signified Mozart's transformation from a youthful, skilled apprentice to a future Master.

1.1.2.3 The Viennese Years (1781-1791)

In 1781, Mozart decided to resign from his service under Archbishop Colloredo of Salzburg and settled in Vienna as an independent performer and composer.¹⁵ The Archbishop of Salzburg, who had initially been a benefactor to the composer, ultimately became an obstacle to Mozart's development, hindering his pursuit of a more independent status. The reason for this was that, objectively speaking, the archdiocese adhered to the political system of the local aristocracy, which led to the imposition of an authoritarian policy "restricting or canceling the venues for traditional Salzburg creations and performances."¹⁶ Mozart

¹⁵ Stanley Sadie, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* [M], Grove's Dictionaries of Music, 1998.

¹⁶ Cliff Eisen, *Salzburg under Church Rule* in: N. Zaslav, *The Classical Era: from the 1740s to the 18th Century* [M], p. 167

himself categorically stated: "I cannot develop my talent there. First, professional musicians are not valued; second, there are no theaters or operas where one could hear anything."¹⁷ In fact, Mozart became the first musician in the history of Austria who had the courage and determination to break away from the court and the church to secure his personal dignity.

The ten years spent in Vienna became the most crucial in Mozart's creative career.

When the State Opera House, built at the initiative of Joseph II, was inaugurated in 1781, Mozart took up the commission to write his first German-language singspiel, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782), a romantic-dramatic tale of adventure and rescue. In all of Mozart's works, only a few go beyond the specific musical characteristics of the cities he visited, and this work, with its dissonant Turkish orchestra sound, is one of the few exceptions. In one fell swoop, the German sung theater was elevated to the level of great art, without losing its traditional character. Following the success of the premiere, in June 1782, Mozart married Constanze Weber, the sister of Aloysia. In the same year, Mozart began a close and mutually strengthening friendship with Haydn.

The next four years were the years of Mozart's creative maturity. During this time, this free artist turned his calling into a daily occupation, and his creative ideals were harmonized with practice. Daily life presented many challenges: marriage, starting a family, finding a place in society, and the intense schedule of composing and performing. This led to the creation of numerous occasional songs, canons, trios, and other small forms. Mozart admired Haydn's reforms concerning sonata form and string quartet structure. Impressed by Haydn's "Russian" string quartets,¹⁸ Mozart composed six quartets in 1785, which he dedicated with great affection to his mentor and friend.

¹⁷ Letter to his father, dated Paris, August 7, 1778, quoted in Qian Renkang, *Mozhate shuxinji* (Collection of Mozart's Letters) [M], p. 207

¹⁸ The "Russian" string quartets (op. 33) is a set of six string quartets composed by Austrian composer Joseph Haydn in 1781–1782. The premiere of these works took place on December 25, 1781, in Vienna, the capital of Austria. During the concert, Haydn dedicated the quartets to the Grand Duke Paul Petrovich Romanov, who was visiting Vienna on a state visit. The cycle was named "Russian" in his honor. The "Russian" quartets are considered to be Haydn's first fully mature string quartets and are regarded as the beginning of Classical music. Carl Dahlhaus & Hermann Danuser (eds.), *New Handbook of Musicology, Volume 5: Music of the 18th Century*. Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1985, p. 289.

Early lessons in counterpoint from his father Martini quickly led Mozart to master polyphonic composition. Intensely interested in the polyphonic culture of German and Austrian music, Mozart adapted several fugues by Johann Sebastian Bach into string trios (K.404a), quartets (K.405), and the C minor fugue for two pianos (K.426). Bach's influence on Mozart was deep and lasting, as evidenced by the increasingly frequent use of counterpoint in Mozart's later works, such as *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute) and *Requiem*.



Ryc. 4. Lorenzo Da Ponte (1791-1838)¹⁹

At that time, the opera scene in Vienna was dominated by Italian composers who had the favor of the emperor. With such strong competition, Mozart read one hundred librettos before meeting Lorenzo da Ponte ²⁰, an Italian poet, dramatist, and man of letters, who perfectly understood Mozart's intentions and was willing to adapt Beaumarchais' *Le Nozze di Figaro* (K.492) to his (Mozart's) whims. The opera premiered in Vienna on May 1, 1786, with great success, running for a total of nine performances. The fame of the new work soon reached Prague, where it was quickly staged with the greatest success at the Prague Opera in December. The opera embodied wit, courage, honesty, and optimism of a secondary character

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorenzo_Da_Ponte 30/01/2025, 5:20pm

²⁰ Lorenzo Da Ponte (ur. 10.03.1791 w Ceneda koło Wenecji jako Emmanuele Conegliano, zm. 17.08.1838 w Nowym Jorku) – autor librett dla wielu kompozytorów, jednak znany jest głównie z librett do oper Mozarta takich jak *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Così fan tutte* i *Don Giovanni*.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorenzo_Da_Ponte 30/01/2025, 5:20pm.

and became one of Mozart's most famous works.

When Mozart returned to Vienna, he discovered (with surprise and astonishment: as the author, we must admit that it still surprises us today) that his operas were considered too heavy and difficult; at the same time, his family life and financial situation were in serious trouble. During this sad, continually worsening period, Mozart accepted an order from the Prague Theatre and wrote one of his greatest masterpieces, *Don Giovanni* (K.527, 1787). The premiere took place in Prague on October 29, 1787, under Mozart's baton, and the work thrilled the audience to such an extent that it reached the ears of Joseph II. After several delays, *Don Giovanni* was eventually staged in May 1788 in Vienna. Unfortunately, it did not meet with a good reception in Vienna. The opera contained both tragic and comic elements, and Mozart's integration of life and philosophical aspects, with an emphasis on music in the psychological portrayal of characters, set a precedent for musical psychodrama in the 19th century. However, at that time, many considered *Don Giovanni* to be disorganized and inconsistent. The failure of the Vienna production and the death of his father plunged Mozart into another deep sadness. With the change in circumstances, Mozart's artistic style also changed. Subjective tones began to dominate his music, with works such as the *Symphony in D major* (K.504) and the *String Quintet* (K.515, 516). While composing these masterpieces, he felt that life was slipping away from him, as though tragic and irresistible fate was beginning to take its course. Most of his chamber music and piano works from this period seem to have been created for himself, and his final carefree composition, the *String Trio in E-flat major* (K.563), stands out as a solitary exception.

In 1789, following the death of Gluck, the position of royal court composer became vacant, which Mozart took up, but with a salary of only 800 florins. The last three years of his life were marked by increasing poverty. Meanwhile, *Le nozze di Figaro* was revived and performed with such success that Joseph II was eventually convinced to commission another opera from his court composer. *Così fan tutte* (K.588) premiered in Vienna on January 26, 1790, based on the original libretto by Da Ponte. It is considered one of Mozart's most perfect

and balanced works in terms of content and form, and is regarded as one of the most humane examples of Italian comic opera. The instrumental works from this period exhibit the same classical ideals, such as the *Piano Sonata in D major* (K.576), *Piano Concerto in B-flat major* (K.595), and the *Clarinet Quintet* (K.581). They are characterized by thoughtful, balanced harmonic progressions, serene structural equilibrium, and crystal-clear transparency. In Mozart's final period, the quartets (K.575, 589, 590) and quintets (K.593, 614) exhibit an intensely focused musical expression, with cold and austere melodic lines that, combined with a polyphonic texture, achieve an unprecedented unity of style, with poetic ideas meticulously transformed into musical form.

The last year of Mozart's life was also a period of intense creativity. His final compositional activity focused on the lyrical drama *Die Zauberflöte* (1791), which returned to the German singspiel tradition. Mozart combined various musical ideas from the 18th century, and the ideological content of the opera was progressive for its time, as it presented Enlightenment ideas to the audience. Sensing his imminent death, he continued to work on the *Requiem Mass* until the end, which became his unfinished legacy, with its striking "Baroque elements." The music of the *Lacrimosa* had only a few bars when the life-affirming song ceased for good, and on December 5, 1791, he passed away.

1.1.3 Aesthetic Style of Mozart's Composition

The 18th-century classical music style represented by Mozart, in aesthetic terms, treats the musical work as a reflection of its own existence and strives for clarity in logical thought and the perfection of form, with an effect that is objective. Focusing on beautiful melody (as Bloom noted, "melody is the soul of classicism")²¹, the pursuit of virtuosity, the demand for order, harmony, and proportion in the work as a whole, and emotional control. Mozart's understanding and need for the musical expression of human emotions was a step forward compared to the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Although he did not yet emphasize

²¹ Leonie Rosenthal, *Schirmer History of Music* [M], New York: Schirmer Books, 1982, p. 540

personal experience and emotional catharsis as in later Romanticism, he was emotional while composing music, with his emotions highlighting “universality” and “generality,” and they were more rational and controllable.

Thus, Mozart’s music reflected his aesthetic concepts, such as respect for human beings, individuality, and the moral idea of brotherly love, as well as his frequent emphasis on the need for moderation in musical feelings, so that they were not forced, and the necessity of smooth transitions before and after.

1.1.3.1 Aesthetic Style of Operatic Composition

Undoubtedly, one of the major areas of Mozart's output was opera, having written over 20 operatic works. In his operas, he combined elements of Italian opera seria and buffa, French opera, German singspiel, Handel’s oratorio, and Gluck’s opera reform, even applying the symphonic development principle to operatic composition, which was an important impetus for the development of classical opera. As a mature opera composer, Mozart had his own view on operatic composition. He wrote: “I considered that in opera, poetry must undoubtedly act as the obedient daughter of music.”²² Among Mozart's operas, the Italian comic operas *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, and the German opera *Die Zauberflöte* are four of his most outstanding works. They also represent his significant contribution to the development of both Italian and German opera.

Opera wloska Mozarta

Under the influence of the Enlightenment, the concepts of promoting universal humanity and respect for the equal rights of human beings emerged during the era and permeated the hearts of the third class, becoming a common aspiration and longing of society as a whole. Especially the political, economic, and cultural demands of the bourgeoisie became increasingly pressing. "Mozart's character is a striking expression of this awakened bourgeois

²² Mozart's letter to his father, October 13, 1781, quoted in: Emily Anderson, *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*

consciousness, which is a fundamental pillar of his artistic self-awareness."²³ After recognizing the comic opera as a product of the bourgeois Enlightenment era during his travels through Italy, Mozart used this genre to express the condition of human nature. *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte* are satirical takes on traditional moral concepts based on the feudal hierarchy, and they mock the hypocrisy of princes and the nobility.

In his operas, Mozart used arias to characterize the figures and perfectly express their inner feelings. He placed great importance on the quality of the libretto, yet even with the best libretti, music dominated in his operas, and he skillfully blended the melodic structure of the music with the plot of the piece. The skillful and complex orchestral phrases in *Le nozze di Figaro*, with the symphonic development of a particular motif in the accompaniment, and the trio at the beginning of the second act of *Don Giovanni* with its sonata structure, are convincing. The trio at the beginning of the second act of *Don Giovanni* demonstrates a sonata form structure that is also compelling. Mozart emphasized the role of repetitions and made them an important dramatic device in opera. *Le nozze di Figaro* contains twelve repetitions that represent the psychology of the characters, participate in the development of the plot, and push the drama forward. *Così fan tutte* was, in turn, called an "ensemble opera" because of its structure and the interplay between characters. Mozart followed the tradition of Italian opera but was able to create his own distinct creative style. *Don Giovanni*, as a particular type of comic opera, shows the serious side of Mozart's comic opera art through its musical language and demonstrates an excellent combination of comic opera and opera seria. Mozart's operas used music to portray complex characters and bring them to life, reflecting the joys and sorrows of his life as well as other aspects of his personality, making them unrivaled at the time.

Mozart viewed composing as self-construction, a new realization that composing is like creating oneself, and he was very aware of his own worth. Not only that, but he also saw

²³ Harry Goldschmidt, *Muzyka niemiecka* (German Music) [M], trans. Feng Wenci, Tan Bingruo, Wang Yuhe. People's Music Publishing House, 1959, p. 95

composition as an interpretation of his personal destiny. "In this sense, the three operas by Da Ponte are a true trilogy: *Don Giovanni* reinterprets the voice types and relationships between voices that appeared in *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *Così fan tutte* refers to the deceptions and egos that were present in the first two works. On the other hand, *Così fan tutte* indirectly explores deception and self-deception in the two previous pieces." ²⁴

Mozart i niemiecki Singspiel

Mozart gained rich life experiences during his travels, but he never forgot the years spent studying and performing in his Austrian homeland before he left for Italy. He composed the German Singspiel *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782), which "truly transformed into the German-Austrian comic opera, light, cheerful, happy, sentimental, imaginative, and with magnificent music."²⁵ Another masterpiece, *Die Zauberflöte*, takes us back to Mozart's youthful memories.

Die Zauberflöte is a diverse opera in which Mozart weaves together elements of many 18th-century musical ideas into a new structural project: the grand vocal music of Italian operas, the folk humor of German Singspiel, arias for soloists, recitatives from comic operas with new musical meanings, declamatory melodies with new types of accompaniment for the German libretto, majestic choral scenes, and even the revival of baroque prelude techniques for hymns, along with harmonic counterpoint, which were unprecedented in operatic composition at the time. The revival of baroque preludes to hymns and the addition of harmonic counterpoint were groundbreaking for the operatic writing of that era.

The libretto is well-conceived, with each character representing a specific idea, and their characterization is thoughtfully crafted by the composer. The music is composed in a very distinctive and iconic way, incorporating symbolism from Masonic music; its ideological content was progressive for its time, harmoniously and beautifully combining mystical and sacred religious colors with bright and joyful secular colors.

²⁴ Paul Griffiths, *A Concise History of Western Music* [M], trans. Zhou Yupei, Wang Min, Shanghai Sanlian Shudian, 2013, p. 147

²⁵ Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* [M], trans. Gu Lianli, Zhang Hongdao, Yang Yandi, Tang Yading, Guangxi Normal University Press, 2014, p. 408

Mozart was one of the greatest musical and dramatic geniuses of all time. This exceptional status is owed to his ability to approach all things, all situations, and all characters with absolute objectivity. The portrayal of each situation and each character became music; his overall concept was purely aesthetic, and music was his voice. He preserved the ancient, noble qualities of Italian music with universal continuity, merging them with the musical ideas of Germany and Austria.

1.1.3.2 Aesthetic Style of Instrumental Composition

During the Classical period, music, like all fields of knowledge, aimed for systematization. Mozart, consciously or unconsciously, utilized his lifelong explorations and experiments with various musical genres in his compositions, refining and standardizing them. Let us take a few instrumental genres as examples:

Mozart composed 41 symphonies in his lifetime, with the last three, K. 543, K. 550, and K. 551, being the most significant. E-flat major is joyful and proud, G minor is passionate and melancholic, while C major is the most magnificent and richest, representing the most classical expression of his symphonic art. These three works encompass a vast range of emotions. "The first, full of radiant optimism, powerful, sunny, heroic, and lively; the second, in the key of a somber quintet and a dark aria after dusk, strikes with an emotional chord that Mozart rarely expresses in his instrumental works; and the third, not yielding to the name Jupiter, is a milestone in the construction of music and the achievement of counterpoint technique."²⁶

Mozart's contribution to the development of the concerto form (especially in the development of the piano concerto, where he is considered one of the main creators of the genre) was also significant. He was one of the greatest pianists of his time. He composed many piano works, such as the "Fantasy in C minor," "Sonata in C minor," etc. In terms of the structural form of these works, he developed an important form—the piano concerto. While the early concertos were at the stage of imitation, as they rapidly developed, Mozart found a

²⁶ Paul Henry Lang, op. cit., p. 653.

balance between the piano and orchestra, and their dialogue, embodying equally important elements of opposition, became more symphonic. The Piano Concerto in D minor (K. 466) is dramatic and passionate throughout its musical material. The Piano Concerto in C minor (K. 491) is even more intensely symphonic and dramatic. Mozart gave the orchestra a status never imagined in that century, with each instrument as a protagonist. Another noteworthy stylistic detail is Mozart's use of variations in his concertos.

In addition to piano concertos, Mozart wrote numerous concertos for violin, flute, oboe, and other instruments.

Mozart's chamber works are of great importance, especially in the six pieces dedicated to Haydn in 1782 (K. 387, 421, 428, 458, 464, 465). These works show Haydn's influence on Mozart while maintaining his own musical style. Other repertoire pieces also clearly reflect Mozart's style: full utilization of instrumental playing and technique, with beautiful melodies reminiscent of songs, clear color contrasts, transitions between instruments, and subtle, rich music.

His religious music, inheriting the solemn and magnificent style of the Baroque period, is serious and dramatic, reflecting the influence of Bach and Handel's music, along with traces of similar works by Haydn and others, as well as the growing contrapuntal style of Mozart's late period.

Mozart's compositions reflect the efforts of German and Austrian intellectuals at the end of the 18th century who found themselves in an oppressive situation, seeking to free themselves from the constraints of feudal absolutism and their unwavering desire for a better society, as well as for light, justice, and human dignity. The genius from Salzburg integrated the elegance and grace of the former ornamental style with rich emotions and passions, creating the exceptional beauty of his music, making it sincere, delicate, popular, elegant, light, and flowing, full of optimism, reflecting the optimistic state of mind of the German-Austrian bourgeoisie in the period of its development. In his later Viennese compositions, tragic and dramatic styles emerged, and deeper social reflections and

contradictions in society became more prominent. "It was this new element that allowed Mozart to make a greater step forward in his compositions than his contemporary Haydn, and which was later inherited and developed by Beethoven." ²⁷

1.2 Outline of the development of opera in China

1.2.1 The Emergence and Development of Opera in China

The development of opera in China was initiated by the introduction of European operatic forms and other arts in the early 20th century. Particularly during the New Culture Movement²⁸, associated with the May Fourth Movement ²⁹, musicians across China—such as Zhao Yuanren, Xiao Youmei, Li Shutong, Cai Yuanpei, Li Jinhui, and Wang Guangqi—began to study and promote European music. While assimilating Western musical concepts, Chinese musicians, particularly composers (though not exclusively), consistently integrated them with characteristics of traditional Chinese music and local aesthetic preferences.

When China attempted to create a national opera, it sparked many heated discussions and divisions, resulting in the emergence of various forms of operatic art. Each form had its own name and aesthetic, which I will explain further in the discussion, including: "ancient opera (jiu ju 旧剧)" – the traditional Chinese opera (xiqu 戏曲), European "grand opera (da geju 大歌剧, Grand opera)", "children's song and dance theater (ertong gewu ju 儿童歌舞剧)", "musical (yinyue ju 音乐剧)", "Musikdrama (yin ju 乐剧)", "folk opera (minge ju 民歌剧)",

²⁷ Cai Yulian, *Democratic Tendencies in Mozart's Late Instrumental Compositions* (莫扎特后期器乐创作的民主倾向) [J], *People's Music*, 1981(11).

²⁸ New Culture Movement (Xinwenhua Yundong 新文化运动) - an ideological movement advocating liberation from feudalism, initiated by Chinese intellectual elites in the early 20th century, whose fundamental tenets included the promotion of democracy and scientific progress.

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²⁹ May Fourth Movement (Wusi Yundong 五四运动) - a patriotic movement sparked by student protests in Beijing on May 4, 1919, which soon expanded to broader societal circles, including citizens, industrialists, and entrepreneurs, through demonstrations, petitions, strikes, and violent confrontations with the government. It represented a comprehensive Chinese resistance to imperialism and feudalism, also known as the "Storm of May Fourth" (Wusi Fenglei 五四风雷).

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"theater of folk songs (xiaodiao ju 小调剧)", "spoken drama with sung parts (huaju jia chang 话剧加唱)", "yangge opera (yangge ju 秧歌剧)", "new opera (xin geju 新歌剧)", and "ethnic opera (minzu geju 民族歌剧)". The names themselves reflect the different needs, varying conceptions of opera, and the artistic aspirations of people from different political and cultural backgrounds, showcasing different views on opera in various periods.

To this day, so-called "Chinese opera" remains a versatile performing art, expressing dramatic themes based on its original polyphonic musical structure, using song as the main method of narration, adopting a realistic style of expression, and containing Chinese characteristics both in content and form. This definition aims to emphasize the differences between Chinese opera and Western opera, as well as between Chinese opera and dramatic theater, and to provide a better analysis of the historical process of the formation of Chinese opera.

The development of Chinese opera can be divided into four main periods, which will now be discussed.

1.2.1.1 The early period of opera development in China (1919-1937)



Ryc. 5. Li Jinhui (1891-1967)³⁰

When discussing the development of Chinese opera, we cannot overlook the figure of Li

³⁰ <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%BB%8E%E9%94%A6%E6%99%96/1555128> 30/01/2025, 5:21pm.

Jinhui.³¹ Li was one of the significant figures who contributed to shaping Chinese opera during its early period. He also paved the way for the development of Chinese opera. Li created the first musical-theatrical performance for children in China. *The Little Painter* (*Xiaoxiao huajia* 小小画家) is a representative work of Li Jinhui's children's opera. His music goes beyond simple singing, incorporating psychological and emotional changes in the characters and shaping dynamic images through music with varied emotional colors. This piece, aimed at children, presents a more dramatic way of thinking and is also referred to as an "opera."³² Li is also considered the Chinese precursor to "operatic thinking."³³ Following Li Jinhui's children's opera, another step in the ideological and artistic development of Chinese opera was taken by Yan Shushi (1905–1963). His masterpiece, the innovative lyrical opera *Mountains and Flowing Rivers* (*Gaoshan liushui* 高山流水) (1927), based on a classical Chinese tale and accompanied by traditional Chinese instruments, incorporated European operatic forms with solo singing, duets, quartets, and choirs. Thus, this work is closer to the European operatic style in terms of its presentation form.

Interestingly, in terms of expression, the style of the work is closer to European opera. After the May Fourth Movement, with the development of civil society in Shanghai and other large cities, and the continuous adaptation of Western scientific concepts and democratic ideas, the Chinese incorporated national conditions and cultural trends into the broader tendency of global music and theater. In the early 1930s, proponents of the New Culture Movement viewed Chinese opera as a symbol of the outdated "old culture," subjecting it to thorough criticism and rejection. Some of the more radical ones have set as their goal and main task, to bring the "old opera"³⁴ to an imminent demise.³⁵

³¹ Li Jinhui (1891–1967) - Born in Xiangtan, Hunan Province, he was called "the creator of Chinese children's song and dance theater" by Nie Er and is regarded as the founder and pioneer of Chinese popular music. He is the author of 12 children's theatrical works and 24 children's songs.

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³² Jing Lan, *History of Chinese Opera* (中国歌剧史) [M], Culture and Art Publishing House (文化艺术出版社), 2012, p. 16.

³³ Man Xinying, *The First Traces of Operatic Thinking—On Li Jinhui's View of Opera* (初见端倪的歌剧思维——论黎锦晖的歌剧观) [J], *Musical Studies* (音乐研究), 2006 (3), p. 55.

³⁴ *Old Opera* (*jiu ju* 旧剧) – a term referring to traditional Chinese opera (中国戏曲), often described by European missionaries as "opera," and still widely used in contemporary sources discussing Chinese cultural and artistic history. As such, many Chinese local operatic forms use the term "opera" in materials intended for international audiences.

Yangzi River Storm (Yangzi baofengyu 扬子江暴风雨) (1930), with a libretto by Tian Han and music by Nie Er, used the form of opera to express the social reality during the Japanese invasion of China, marking the beginning of the revolutionary realist opera trend. In terms of form, the piece can be classified as "spoken drama with singing parts" (*huaaju jia chang* 话剧加唱)³⁶ This form shows that in the process of assimilating the concept of opera, Chinese theater and music transitioned from being two separate aspects of a work to a unifying synthesis, which is an important factor influencing the development of Chinese opera. In 1935, the Shanghai musician Chen Gexin³⁷ created the first Chinese musical *Xi Shi* (西施), A five-act work that is "a large-scale historical drama in an original form, with music accompanying the entire text."³⁸ The work includes elements of dramatic theater, dance, and music interwoven together. Its performance format contains both spoken parts and singing, with elements of dance, and musically, the piece adopts the European major-minor system while drawing from traditional Chinese opera forms of singing (*chang* 唱), recitative (*bai* 白), and acting (*biao* 表).

1.2.1.2 The Period of Search for Chinese Opera (1937 – 1949)

Starting from 1937, China entered a period of resistance against Japanese aggression, during which the popularity and interest in Chinese opera among the broad masses of society clearly increased. Opera became a tool for political propaganda. The artistic and historical character of opera was transformed into a national and revolutionary character, leading to further adaptation of opera to local conditions and understanding and acceptance by the broad masses of people. In wartime, the independent development of various opera movements took

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³⁵ Zheng Boqi, *Paths of Development of the Chinese Theater Movement* (中国戏剧运动的道路)[J], *Artists* (艺术), February 1930, vol. 1, no. 1

³⁶ *Spoken Drama with Singing Parts* – a theatrical performance with a few solo or choral singing parts woven into the storyline, with simple musical accompaniment emphasizing the development of the plot.

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³⁷ Chen Gexin (September 19, 1914 - January 25, 1961), a male Han ethnic, born as Chen Changshou in Nanhui, Jiangsu Province (now Pudong District in Shanghai), was a famous Chinese composer.

<https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E9%99%88%E6%AD%8C%E8%BE%9B> 30/01/2025, 5:23pm

³⁸ Ji Jiangshou, *The Generation of Immortal Singers: Chen Gexin* (一代歌仙陈可辛) [J], *Shanghai Tan* (上海滩), 1995(3)

place in areas under the actual control of different Chinese political forces.

Shanghai during the "Lonely Islands" period³⁹ became an important area for the development of opera in China at that time, and the local population continued to engage in various anti-Japanese propaganda activities of an entertainment nature. With the development of opera in Shanghai, very different styles emerged, and the diversity of opera ultimately resulted from the inevitable commercialization and increasing Europeanization and Americanization. During this period, most of the operatic works followed the path of realism, with the musical structure of early European opera in the form of "ballad theater (geyao ju 歌谣剧)", paying attention to the role of polyphonic music. In these works, the plot did not deviate far from real life. The four-act opera *Peach Blossom Garden* (Taohua yuan 桃花源) by Chen Tianhe from 1939 was a mixture of modern drama and traditional Peking opera with a national and popular character. Its melody has a rather distinct national style, adopting a song structure, with lyricism being the main feature of the entire work. In the four-act opera *Song of the Earth* (Dadi zhi ge 大地之歌) by Qian Renkang (1914–2013) by Qian Renkang⁴⁰, a well-known musicologist, composer, and music educator from Xishan in Jiangsu Province, the human voice emphasized by the orchestra is used to present the characters and convey the plot. The musical material draws from the sound of folk songs from the southern Yangtze River, with added overtures and interludes, which brings it closer to the style of Western operas in terms of compositional technique.

In 1940, when the war of resistance against the Japanese began, the Kuomintang government in regions under Chinese control intensified its control over culture⁴¹, attempting to express its voice as the ruling party through culture and art. The Kuomintang government instructed educational institutions across the territory to organize theatrical education and,

³⁹ "Lonely Island (gu dao 孤岛)" – a term referring to the socio-political situation in Shanghai between November 12, 1937, and December 8, 1941. The so-called "islands" referred to the Shanghai International Settlement (excluding the Hongkou and Yangshupu districts) and the French Concession.
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⁴⁰ Qian Renkang (1914 – 2013) was a renowned musicologist, composer, and music educator from Xishan in Jiangsu Province. In 1941, he completed his studies in Theoretical Composition at the National Conservatory of Music (Guoli Yinyue Zhuanke Xuexiao, 国立音乐专科学校) in Shanghai.
https://baike.baidu.com/item/钱仁康?fromModule=lemma_search-box 30/01/2025, 5:24pm.

⁴¹ https://baike.baidu.com/item/国统区?fromModule=lemma_search-box 30/01/2025, 5:39pm.

through these educational programs, guide the masses and promote the development of new Chinese opera. On April 6, 1944, the Ministry of Education of the National Government presented and adopted a resolution to "promote and encourage the performance of orchestral music and opera" ⁴². During this period, many Chinese opera schools and theater groups operated in areas controlled by the Kuomintang, and outstanding opera works continuously emerged on its "cultural front."

The five-act realist opera *Potop* (洪波曲, Hong Bo Qu) (1940) by Ren Guang⁴³ is closer to the form of spoken theater with sung parts, while "trying to dramatize it, realizing its positive intention of making opera music a better reflection of reality and a delight for the masses"⁴⁴ .

The opera *Qiu Zi* (秋子) by Huang Yuanluo ⁴⁵became a fully realized and influential opera produced in a region controlled by the nationalist government due to its strong operatic thinking.



⁴² Wang Shuhe, *History of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Music* (中国近现代音乐史), People's Music Publishing House, 2002, p. 180.

⁴³ Ren Guang (任光), born in Sheng County, Zhejiang Province, studied music in France in his youth, and later served as director of the Shanghai Pathé Record Company. He was a musical leader of the leftist movement and a famous film music composer during the Republic period.

⁴⁴ Chen Zhi'ang, *History of Music during the War of Resistance against Japan* [M] (抗战音乐史), Yellow River Publishing House (黄河出版社), 2005, p. 90.

⁴⁵ Huang Yuanluo (1910-1989), born in Changsha, Hunan Province, one of the pioneers of new music in China
<https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E9%BB%84%E6%BA%90%E6%B4%9B> 30/01/2025, 5:26pm.

Ryc. 6. Opera *Qiu Zi* (秋子)⁴⁶

It focuses on the most authentic artistic themes of humanity—love and justice. Huang adopted music as the primary means of expression in the opera, emphasizing character and personality portrayal. Through vocal and instrumental music, he conveyed the atmosphere and developed dramatic conflict. He utilized the most traditional Western *opera seria* structure, a segmented opera form (*fen quti geju* 分曲体歌剧)⁴⁷. The opera consists of arias, recitatives, ballads, duets, choral sections, and instrumental forms played by the orchestra—such as interludes, overtures, and codas—amounting to a total of 43 musical numbers.

The structure of the male-female duet in this work is modeled after the love duet from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, which is written in intervals of thirds, sixths, and unisons. These two operas mark the evolution of Chinese composers' work in the right direction, adapting opera to local conditions. In terms of compositional technique and operatic form, Chinese opera reached a high level during this period, leading to the emergence of a large number of opera enthusiasts who appreciated its international form.

Operatic activities in the liberated areas under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) were characterized by an environment and audience distinct from those under the rule of other political forces. This resulted in a unique developmental path and artistic tradition. The city of Yan'an not only served as a base for the CPC's anti-Japanese resistance but also as a center for the development of literature and the arts. The just cause and dynamic activities of the CPC attracted talented writers and artists from across the country to Yan'an. These individuals, who had received professional training in music and theater, as well as those who had returned from studies abroad, contributed to the artistic and cultural landscape of the region.

⁴⁶ https://baike.baidu.com/item/秋子/13462198?fr=ge_ala 30/01/2025, 5:27pm.

⁴⁷ A form widely used in Europe during the time of Gluck and Mozart. From the perspective of international opera composition, it was already considered conservative at the time. Nevertheless, *Qiu Zi* was the first opera in China to fully adopt this form

https://baike.baidu.com/item/新歌剧?fromModule=lemma_search-box 30/01/2025, 5:40pm.

Artists responded positively to the call of Communist Party leader Mao Zedong for a "Chinese character and Chinese style" (*Zhongguo zuofeng he Zhongguo qipai* 中国作风和中国气派). Xian Xinghai⁴⁸ was among the first artists invited to the Chinese Academy of Arts and Sciences in Yan'an. While composing his first opera, *March of Soldiers and Citizens* (*Junmin Jinxingqu* 军民进行曲) in 1938, in the style of revolutionary realism, Xian wrote in his diary: "I have discovered a style that involves drawing from progressive Western techniques, incorporating inherent Chinese melodies, using simple harmonies with both Chinese and Western instruments—especially percussion—so that the whole becomes a synthesis of arts with a popular, national, and artistic character."⁴⁹

In May 1942, Mao Zedong delivered the *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* (*Yan'an wenyi zuotan hui shang de jianghua* 延安文艺座谈会上的讲话), hereinafter referred to as the *Talks*. This speech demonstrated the firm desire of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) for literature and art to assume a political function. It placed literature and art in the service of the masses, emphasizing their role in raising ideological awareness and advocating that artists engage with the people to find material for artistic creation.

Under the leadership of the *Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art*, Chinese artists responded actively to the call of Comrade Mao Zedong and the CPC Central Committee. They united with the proletariat, intensively studied folk art, and enthusiastically learned from the masses, adopting forms of popular rural music and dance from northern Shaanxi Province. A notable example is *yangge* (秧歌, sprout song), a community-based folk song tradition (to use a term from contemporary philosophy). This art form evolved into *yangge opera*⁵⁰ (*yangge ju* 秧

⁴⁸ Xian Xinghai (洗星海) (1905–1945) – also known as Huang Xun and Kong Yu, was a member of the Communist Party of China. His family originated from Panyu in Guangdong Province, but he was born in Macau. A renowned modern Chinese composer and pianist, he was known as the "People's Musician" (*renmin yinyuejia* 人民音乐家)

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/洗星海/13913> 30/01/2025, 5:28pm

⁴⁹ Xian Xinghai, *The Complete Works of Xian Xinghai* (洗星海全集) [M], Guangdong Higher Education Publishing House (广东高等教育出版社), 1990, p. 144.

⁵⁰ Opera yangge, as a theatrical form combining song and dance with distinct character roles, emerged through the addition of a storyline to yangge songs.
<https://baike.baidu.com/item/秧歌剧/5401965> 30/01/2025, 5:41pm.

歌剧), integrating singing, dancing, and dramatic elements. This development transformed Chinese opera into a folk (peasant), revolutionary, and contemporary art form. The themes of *yangge opera* were broad, encompassing almost all aspects of mass life at the time, with most works reflecting current events. Their melodies were largely adapted from local theatrical forms or folk songs. In terms of performance structure, *yangge opera* was relatively simple, typically featuring two or three roles, with the storyline conveyed in a narrative style and a relatively flexible performance format. Representative works of this genre include *Brothers and Sisters Reclaim the Wasteland* (*Xiongdì kāi huāng* 兄妹开荒) (1943) by An Bo and Zhou Zishan (周子山) (1943) by Ma Ke, Shi Le Meng, Zhang Lu, and Liu Chi.



Ryc. 7. Opera *Brothers and Sisters Reclaim the Wasteland* (兄妹开荒)⁵¹

At the later stage of the development of yangge opera, musicians in Yan'an were dissatisfied with their achievements thus far, and the development of yangge towards "opera" in the European sense of the word became their creative ideal. There was a consensus that the next goal should be to seek a Chinese opera that would neither follow the path of earlier opera reformers nor adopt the model of Western opera but rather develop in accordance with the concept of opera that Yan'an was able to define. This form came to be known as *the national opera* (*minzu geju* 民族歌剧) or *the new opera* (*xin geju* 新歌剧)⁵². It was in this context that the first Chinese opera, *The White-Haired Girl*, was born in 1945, co-authored by Ma Ke,

⁵¹ <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%85%84%E5%A6%B9%E5%BC%80%E8%8D%92/127081> 30/01/2025, 5:29pm

⁵² During that period in Yan'an, the term "new opera" (*xin geju* 新歌剧) was used in reference to *The White-Haired Girl* and was defined in opposition to yangge opera, traditional Chinese opera, the reformed opera (*gailiang geju* 改良歌剧), European operatic forms, children's song-and-dance theater (*ertong gewuju* 儿童歌舞剧), and other forms preceding *The White-Haired Girl*.

https://baike.baidu.com/item/新歌剧?fromModule=lemma_search-box 30/01/2025, 5:42pm.

Zhang Lu, Qu Wei, Li Huanzhi, and Xiangshu. In terms of artistic form, this work inherited the expressive means of *traditional Chinese opera* (*xiqu* 戏曲) while simultaneously adopting the mimetic method of dramatic theater and incorporating external forms of European opera. Traces and outlines of folk song forms from Hebei, Shandong, and Shaanxi, as well as elements of melorecitation, traditional Chinese opera, religious music, and European music, are visible in the opera. This gave rise to a new singing style—a fusion of Chinese and Western vocal styles that combined Western operatic breathing techniques, the timbre of Chinese folk singing, and the rhythmic cadence of *traditional Chinese opera* (*xiqu* 戏曲). The most significant progress can be observed in two aspects. First, the importance of traditional European techniques of opera composition in capturing the character-associated theme and organizing musical texture, emphasizing the typification of character images in opera. Second, in polyphonic music, greater emphasis was placed on the dramaturgical function of the chorus, particularly the mixed choir. This opera is considered a groundbreaking work and even a model of the new national opera, marking the entrance of Chinese opera into an entirely new era.

1.2.1.3 The Flourishing Period of Chinese Opera (1949 – 1966)

The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 marked a new phase in the development of Chinese opera. In the newly liberated regions, composers of new operas, together with musicians, formed an opera creative team and established professional opera troupes at both central and local levels. These artists assimilated selected artistic forms of European opera while actively adopting and incorporating certain expressive methods of traditional Chinese opera. Their goal was to make national opera performances accessible and appealing to a broad audience. During this period, in addition to praising contemporary events, depicting the struggles of revolutionary life, and reflecting social realities as the central themes of artistic creation, works exhibited distinct national characteristics and elements closely tied to the realities of the time. This resulted in an unprecedented flourishing of creative output. Among the operas that gained popularity among the masses were *The Marriage of Xiao Er Hei* (*Xiao Er Hei hunyin* 小二黑结婚) (1953) by Ma Ke, Qiao Gu, He Fei, and Zhang Peiheng; *Liu Hulan* (刘胡兰) (1954) by Chen Zi, Mao Yuan, and Ge Guangrui; and *Red Glow* (*Hong Xia* 红霞) (1957) by composer Zhang Rui. These and other works played a significant role in the development of opera during this period, particularly in the

selection of themes, content, and musical expression, contributing decisively to the advancement of the operatic form.



Ryc. 8. Ma Ke (1918-1976)⁵³

The Marriage of Xiao Er Hei (小二黑结婚) belongs to the national opera movement that sought to resemble traditional Chinese opera (*xiquhua* 戏曲化). Its greatest value lies in the fact that, in the process of adapting opera to local conditions, it pioneered an innovative path for the development of Chinese opera by assimilating traditional Chinese opera while simultaneously creating a mature artistic work within the new movement. The similarities to traditional Chinese opera are not limited to musical style or the application of certain techniques characteristic of *xiqu* but encompass the entire creative process—from the libretto and music to singing, acting, and choreography. The pursuit of resemblance to traditional Chinese opera was a goal continuously strived for throughout the creation and performance of the work.

In *The Marriage of Xiao Er Hei*, Ma Ke⁵⁴ built upon the artistic style developed in *The White-Haired Girl* and made a significant contribution to the advancement of Chinese opera based on traditional *xiqu*.⁵⁵ The creative utilization of traditional Chinese opera styles (*banqiang* 板腔体)⁵⁶ largely

⁵³ https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%A9%AC%E5%8F%AF/1387605?fr=ge_ala 30/01/2025, 5:30pm.

⁵⁴ Ma Ke (1918–1976) was a composer born in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province. In 1935, he enrolled in the Department of Chemistry at Henan University and joined the May Ninth Movement in the same year. In 1939, Ma Ke arrived at the music department of the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts in Yan'an, and in 1940, he toured with the People's Theater Troupe (*Minzhong Jutuan* 民众剧团). At the end of 1944, he participated in the creation and staging of *The White-Haired Girl*.

https://baike.baidu.com/item/马可/1387605?fromModule=search-result_lemma 30/01/2025, 5:31pm.

⁵⁵ Hu Shiping, "Ma Ke and Chinese Opera" (*Ma Ke yu Zhongguo geju* 马可与中国歌剧), *People's Music (Renmin Yinyue* 人民音乐), 2004, No. 10, p. 8.

determined the direction of later Chinese operatic creations. At that time, opera was profoundly influenced by Ma Ke's concept of "developing opera based on traditional Chinese opera," which can be regarded as the most fundamental theoretical foundation for Chinese opera composition and performance. The great success of this opera during this period also signaled the impending arrival of the second peak in the history of Chinese opera.



Ryc. 9. Opera *The Marriage of Xiao Er Hei* (小二黑结婚)⁵⁷

The 1957 Opera Conference (*Geju zuotanhui* 歌剧座谈会) allowed opera creators to further clarify the differences between opera and *xiqu* (traditional Chinese opera) in terms of artistic performance characteristics, laying the groundwork for the later development of Chinese opera, so that it could maintain its independent aesthetic style in composition and performance. During this period, works such as *Red Guard of Honghu* (*Honghu chi weidui* 洪湖赤卫队) (1959) by Jing An and Ouyang Qianshu, *The Injustice of Dou'e* (*Dou'e yuan* 窦娥冤) (1960) by Chen Zi and Du Yu, and *Red Coral* (*Hong shanhu* 红珊瑚) (1960) by Wang Xiren and Hu Shiping emerged. These mature national operatic works, along with the strong "opera fever" in the musical and theatrical scenes, led to significant development in national opera, helping it shape its own unique artistic characteristics, establish conceptual and performance models, and gradually move toward stereotypes, becoming an increasingly mature art form.

This marked the second climax in the development of Chinese national opera. In 1964, in line with the goal of focusing on the significance, revolutionary, and class character of the

⁵⁶ The *banqiang* (板腔体) styles refer to structural types in traditional Chinese opera (*xiqu* 戏曲) and folk theater (*quyi* 曲艺). Corresponding melodic phrases form the basic units of vocal passages (*changqiang* 唱腔), which then evolve into various patterns based on certain principles of variation

⁵⁷ https://www.thepaper.cn/newsdetail_forward_13286791 30/01/2025, 5:32pm.

themes and motifs, Yang Ming, Jiang Chunyang, and Jin Sha composed the epic work *Sister Jiang* (*Jiang jie* 江姐), characterized by deep national and heroic thought. The plot of the work unfolds freely, with rising and falling tension in the action, a loose dramatic structure, and distinct characters. A few comedic characters are woven into the overall serious style of the opera series. Drawing largely from the musical material of southern and northern Chinese "operas," the opera organically integrates with the operatic chorus to enrich the depiction of characters. Utilizing the traditional Chinese operatic technique of melodic recitative, *yun bai* (韵白)⁵⁸, which is similar to the recitative found in European opera, the work explores the emotions and psyche of the characters. At the same time, the grandeur of the symphonic orchestra adds intensity to the dramatic conflict. In the history of Chinese opera development during the 1950s and 1960s, which focused on themes of heroism and the use of traditional *banqiang* (板腔) styles to structure the music, *Sister Jiang* (江姐) stands as the pinnacle of this period. It embodies the overall strengths of operatic art in both composition and performance of that time. *Sister Jiang* occupies a particularly significant place in the history of Chinese opera, and its successful creative experience is of great importance for today's Chinese opera.

1.2.1.4 Chinese Opera from Renaissance to Maturity and Diversity (1966 - obecníe)

*The Cultural Revolution*⁵⁹ from 1966 to 1976 was an unprecedented catastrophe in modern Chinese history. During this period, Chinese politics, economy, culture, and other social spheres suffered unprecedented blows, and the decade of the Cultural Revolution was also a decade of stagnation for Chinese opera.

In 1976, following the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese opera entered a period of

⁵⁸ *Yun bai* (韵白) is one of the characteristic artistic techniques in traditional Chinese opera. It is characterized by a tone that lies between singing and speech, blending melody with the dramatization of dialogue. This technique allows for a musical expression of speech, where the tone and rhythm emphasize the emotional and dramatic qualities of the character's words. It is similar to the recitative in European opera, where the text is delivered in a sung, yet speech-like manner, enhancing the emotional impact of the performance.

<https://cidian.yw11.com/ci/韵白> 30/01/2025, 5:44pm.

⁵⁹ The Cultural Revolution (Wenhua da geming, 文化大革命), fully known as the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," was a civil conflict that was mistakenly initiated by the leaders and exploited by counterrevolutionary groups, bringing severe disasters to the party, the state, and people from all ethnic groups, leaving behind extraordinarily painful lessons.

https://baike.baidu.com/item/无产阶级文化大革命?fromModule=lemma_search-box 30/01/2025,5:45pm.

comprehensive renaissance, the "period of revival (*fuhuo qi*, 复活期)," which saw both creative and performance aspects of Chinese opera revitalized. This phase enriched and expanded the thematic range of opera. From *Morning Star* (*Qimingxing*, 启明星) (composed by Li Jingran, 1979), rich in the spirit of socialism characteristic of that era, to *Magnificent Wedding* (*Zhuangli de hunli*, 壮丽的婚礼) (composed by Lü Yuan, 1979), expressing courage and steadfastness, and *Remembering Mother* (*Yi niang*, 忆娘) (composed by Zhu Zhengben, 1979), reflecting the boundless patriotism of Chinese emigrants, all important works of this period fully illustrate the rapid revival and development of Chinese opera.

In the 1980s and 1990s, as a result of the decisions made during the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, China entered the "period of reform and opening up." In the context of the overall transformation of Chinese society, the emergence of more cultural trends in literature and art, and the shift from the concept of "literature and art serving politics" (文艺为政治服务) to "literature and art serving the broad masses" (文艺服务于广大人民群众), Chinese national opera during this period developed in a pluralistic manner. Through continuous exploration, it became more diverse in style and richer in both content and form. The opera *Shangshi* (伤逝), composed by Shi Guangnan in 1981, was a highly innovative work in the history of Chinese national opera.

The opera *Savage Land* (*Yuanye*, 原野) from 1987, with a libretto by Wan Fang and music by Jin Xiang, is an example of a successful fusion of Chinese national opera and modern European musical language. Its international premiere took place in January 1992 at the Kennedy Center for the Arts in Washington, D.C., where it achieved great success. *Savage Land* is a groundbreaking work of undeniable significance in the history of Chinese opera—it is the first original Chinese opera to leave China and be shown internationally. Qiao Yu (乔羽)⁶⁰ believed that "the opera *Wasteland* will be an innovative and important work in the

⁶⁰ Qiao Yu (1927 - 2022), born in Jining, Shandong Province, was a renowned writer and playwright, and the former honorary director of the Opera Research Institute at Peking University(北京大学歌剧研究院). <https://baike.baidu.com/item/乔羽/133818730/01/2025>, 5:33pm.

history of Chinese opera." ⁶¹It is a normative operatic work (in the history of the development of Chinese bel canto opera) created in strict accordance with the European model. Its structure is complete, and the dramatic development maintains the logic of gradual progression to successive levels. This work set the tone for Chinese opera, embodied in majestic music and a plot full of twists and turns. Subsequent Chinese operatic creations developed precisely in this direction.

Entering the 1990s, a large number of outstanding operatic works continued the legacy of the diverse development of Chinese opera. The opera *Daughter of the Party* (Dang de nü'er 党的女儿) (1991), composed by Wang Zujing, Zhang Zhuoya, Yin Qing, Wang Xiren, Ji Cheng, and Fang Tianxing, belonged to the revolutionary realism genre (革命现实主义). *Endless Steppe* (*Cang yuan* 苍原) (1995), composed by Xu Zhanhai and Liu Hui, is an epic opera in the European style, while maintaining Chinese national characteristics. It is one of the most important works in Chinese national opera of the 1990s and also represents a new creative experience in blending Chinese and Western artistic styles. It is noteworthy that in *Endless Steppe*, the composer "made a great leap forward, with the work characterized by a dramatic approach to the development of musical material, bringing it closer to the Western classical concept of opera divided into movements, achieving operatic unity and organic interaction between the plot, emotions, and script."⁶²

After 50 years of exploration, Chinese opera entered the 21st century, gradually approaching artistic maturity with each passing day. In terms of themes, Chinese national opera encompasses a wide range of motifs. This includes revolutionary realist operas such as *Battle in the Ancient City* (*Yehuo-chunfeng dou gucheng* 野火春风斗古城, 1973) by Kang Zhen, based on colorful Chinese ethnic "operas" (*minzu xiqu* 民族戏曲) and folk songs, the use of musical expression techniques from folk theatre (*quyi* 曲艺), as well as creatively processed music from the Jin, Hebei, Lu, and Yu regions, making the music in the

⁶¹ Cao Yu, Qiao Yu, *Correspondence concerning Chinese operaj* (关于中国歌剧的通信) [J], *People's Music* (人民音乐), 1987(9), p. 34.

⁶² Ju Qihong, *Epicness and Tragedy - Impressions after Watching the Large-Scale Opera "Boundless Step"* (史诗气概悲壮情怀——大型歌剧《苍原》观后) [J], *People's Music* (人民音乐), 1997(1), p. 12.

performance both national in character and reflective of the spirit of the times. *Psalm of Mulan* (Mulan shipian, 木兰诗篇, 2004), composed by Guan Xia, is an opera based on classical Chinese literature. In its new form of symphonic music and opera, it conveys the great Chinese culture and national spirit, portraying the noble spiritual sphere of the Chinese nation, and even of all humanity, which cherishes life, strives for truth, goodness, and beauty, and calls for peace and justice. Also worth mentioning is the opera *The Orphan of Zhao* (*Zhao shi gu'er* 赵氏孤儿, 2018), based on a classical Chinese tragic tale, composed by Lei Lei, and the first original opera by the National Center for the Performing Arts of China (*Zhongguo guojia da juguan* 中国国家大剧院), with Chinese folk singing as the primary medium, *Ballad of the Canal* (*Yunhe yao* 运河谣, 2012), composed by Yin Qing.

Opera is a magnificent miracle of human genius and creativity, a synthesis of remarkable achievements in music and theatre. Therefore, it is both a privilege and an honor for contemporary musicians to dedicate themselves to this art. At the same time, opera imposes very strict and extraordinarily high demands on overall musical proficiency.

1.2.2 Characteristics of Chinese opera

The aesthetic style of operatic works is undoubtedly the result of the combination of many artistic elements. The style of Western opera is highly diverse; not only do different countries have their own specific operatic styles, but different composers also exhibit very distinct styles. Chinese national opera has developed a unique national style due to its content and form, which differ significantly from Western operas. This style stems from the choice of material, as well as the opera's content and music, and is also influenced by the adaptation of the unique performance and singing techniques of Chinese "folk opera" (*minzu geju* 民族歌剧).

1.2.2.1 Musical creativity

Drawing from the essence of traditional Chinese operatic art (*xiqu yishu*, 戏曲艺术) reflects the main goal of the ethnicization (*minzuhua*, 民族化) of Chinese operatic music style, and it is also an important means of achieving this goal. The musical style's alignment with traditional Chinese opera (*xiquhua*, 戏曲化) is a significant initiative in the practice of ethnicizing Chinese opera, which is valuable because it closely integrates the elements of advanced European operatic culture with the beautiful traditions of Chinese folk "operas," absorbing various types of singing styles (*changqiang*, 唱腔) and structural types such as *banqiang*, which are traditional forms in Chinese performing arts. This also marks a significant breakthrough in the musical style of Chinese national opera. In line with the aesthetic orientation dominant among the Chinese, the music created in Chinese opera generally combines realism and historical materialism, through the absorption of folk music, folk songs, ballads, dances, and other musical materials such as *xiaodiao* (小调). Additionally, considering the multitude of plots and character types, the absorption and refinement of folk musical material have resulted in many unique Chinese national works.

1.2.2.2 Selection of topics

Over the course of the past century, during which Chinese opera has gone through several distinct epochs, opera creators have drawn inspiration from and learned from the experiences and concepts of Western national music schools. They then used or transformed native Chinese musical materials to authentically reflect the realities of the lives of the Chinese masses. Although these works differ in terms of content and genre, their main theme is the portrayal and reflection of the struggles of the Chinese nation and the realities of its life. For example, *Daughter of the Party* (党的女儿) embodies the spirit of the times of the great revolution and the struggles of the Chinese people in their bloody fight for freedom under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. The operas *The Marriage of Xiao Erhei* (小二黑

结婚)and *The Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣) reflect the true life and love stories of the Chinese people in different eras. We also find works like *Qu Yuan* (屈原), which stems from songs praising traditional Chinese culture. It is an adaptation of a folk legend that showcases the simplicity and hard work of the Chinese people while promoting traditional Chinese culture and national nobility. At the other end, we have works like *Ao Lei - Yilan* (傲雷·一兰), which expresses the unity and love of the Chinese people in building socialism.

The ethnicization of opera themes is a main feature in the development of Chinese opera in the 20th century. It also serves as a key point of convergence between Chinese and world opera, with its maturity marking that Chinese opera has embarked on the path of utilizing Western achievements for China (*Xi wei Zhong yong*, 西为中用). This refers to the development of Chinese opera based on the national culture of the country, using the heritage of folk "operas" (民族戏曲), indigenous music, and other art forms, while also drawing from the creative experiences and techniques of European opera, in order to shape and develop Chinese opera to become one of the main foundations of world opera creation.

1.2.2.3 Workmanship style

Emphasizing that all artistic elements, such as singing, the entire musical structure, orchestration, acting, and stage design, should inherently contribute to the development of the plot and dramatic conflict is the core foundation of Chinese national opera. This characteristic stems from folk traditions and national forms of musical theatre. The attachment of Chinese music lovers to the understanding of musical theatre as a universal art form that combines all performing arts into one is far stronger than in the West. Even the most avant-garde Chinese creators, who were strongly influenced by European music, could not ignore this perspective on their native musical drama. It is worth noting that in Europe, one of the distinguishing features of opera as a musical-dramatic form is precisely the combination of theatrical, musical, and visual arts into one. However, from a Chinese perspective, this combination is much weaker and insufficient when compared to the specificity of Chinese musical theatre.

Compared to the creative practice of European opera, Chinese national opera places greater emphasis on the integrity of the overall work and the gradual development of the plot. Characteristics of operatic singing, such as voice usage, changes in timbre and tempo, diction, depiction of climactic points, overall structure, and the use of special techniques, should be comprehensively studied based on information about the creative intent, historical context, thematic style, basic musical material, character traits, emotional state, and vocal expressive means, among others. With the various transformations in operatic art, the form of singing is also subject to continuous innovation. Some have developed their style based on folk singing, while others' ideas have evolved based on the vocal art of traditional Chinese opera. Still, others have drawn from the bel canto tradition, and some have achieved an excellent fusion of all three forms.

1.2.2.4 Woman as the main character

Female roles have always occupied a key position in Chinese opera, serving as a significant symbol of its development. Whether in its early stages, during its two peak moments, or even in its weaker years, female roles have led Chinese opera due to their exceptional artistic charm and cultural values. Some even define the historical trajectory of the development of Chinese operatic art as being dominated by female roles. Throughout the development of Chinese opera over the past century, the abundance of female roles greatly enriched it, and the portrayal of these roles became a leading feature on stage, adding color and brilliance to Chinese opera. As we all know, the feudal mindset that favored men over women in Chinese feudal society for thousands of years caused most women to live at the lowest level of Chinese society, making them the most unfortunate and suffering masses in China. Meanwhile, the main thrust of the May Fourth Movement, anti-imperialism, and anti-feudalism became the liberation of women. Many Chinese operas originate from this position. A large portion of literary works celebrate women's pursuit of freedom and happiness, their rebellion, and hatred toward feudal forces. The turn towards and liberation of women signaled a true breakthrough in China. Thus, in Chinese opera, there are both

oppressed white-haired girls like Xi'er and the mischievous fisherwoman Shanmei; there is Xiaoqin, who strives for the freedom of love, as well as heroines like Jiang Jie and Han Ying, who sacrificed their precious lives for the cause of human liberation. Some of them are daughters of peasants from the lowest social strata, while others are revolutionaries and heroines. Although their origins, characters, and experiences vary, they all share one common trait: they were all oppressed by feudal forces and embarked on the path of revolution.

In the new era, the world of politics became more peaceful, and the economy developed rapidly. Due to drastically changing conditions, the cultural environment, aesthetic expectations of audiences, and other aspects, the role of female characters in opera also underwent change. Heroic opera lost some of its significance, and the role of women in Chinese operas stopped being limited to themes of the liberation of oppressed and persecuted heroines who bravely fought and sacrificed their lives for the noble cause of human liberation. Instead, the focus turned to outstanding female figures in history, as well as reflections on values such as contemporary Chinese love, family, ideals, the meaning of life and death, the value of life, and more.

Chapter II: Characters of lower-class women in Mozart's operas

2.1 The character of Susanna from the opera *Le Nozze di Figaro*

2.1.1 Creative context

In composing *Le nozze di Figaro*, Mozart drew inspiration from Italian *opera buffa*. However, his approach to the genre significantly diverged from traditional conventions—he did not confine himself to typical comedic tropes but instead deepened character psychology and imbued them with greater realism. He avoided the exaggerated, farcical techniques of Italian comic opera, focusing instead on character portrayal, enhancing their depth, intensifying the conflict between social classes, and introducing moral themes. Mozart's psychological insight and his genius in character depiction substantially elevated the significance of the genre. The meticulous rendering of character is evident not only in the arias but particularly in the duets, trios, and larger ensemble pieces. In the final ensemble, interpersonal conflict emerges, blending realism with the dramatic unity of musical form. Mozart's orchestration, especially his use of wind instruments, plays a crucial role in defining character and narrative. The bassoon and clarinet parts are particularly significant, often accompanying key emotional moments and adding an expressive dimension to the characters.

The opera premiered in 1786 at Vienna's Burgtheater under Mozart's own direction. Despite its light *opera buffa* form, the work sparked controversy due to its social undertones, which were especially provocative in the pre-revolutionary era. The libretto, adapted from Beaumarchais' earlier play, softened the original critique of feudal society. In comparison to the literary drama, the operatic version of *Le nozze di Figaro* softened the most radical anti-aristocratic elements, likely to avoid open conflict with the Habsburg court's censorship. Lyrical descriptions were added, but the opera did not lose the critical spirit of the original, exposing and satirizing the hypocrisy and extravagance of the feudal aristocracy represented

by the Count. His character is portrayed not only as a cynical and debauched ruler, but also as someone whose authority is undermined by the cleverness of the lower classes—an audacious dramaturgical move for an 18th-century opera. The opera praises the honesty, resourcefulness, and courage of the "third estate," represented by Figaro and Susanna. They are depicted as heroes with greater intelligence and moral strength than their aristocratic superiors, capturing the spirit of pre-revolutionary social tensions. At the same time, the work conveys an optimism about the lifelong struggle against feudalism, not through revolutionary rhetoric, but through subtle humor, irony, and musical brilliance.

2.1.2 Shaping the Musical Image of Susanna

Susanna is a maid in the Count's residence. She is one of the most developed and multidimensional female characters in opera *buffa*—full of wit, intelligence, and emotional maturity. She is young and beautiful, desires and strives for love, but not in a naïve way—she fully understands the mechanisms of power and does not fall for illusions that could threaten her happiness. She is not enticed by money or power. Instead, despite her lower social status, she often takes control of the situation and becomes a key element in the intrigue. In the face of the Count's attempts to seduce her and misunderstandings with her fiancé, she can calmly find a way out of the situation. Susanna shows exceptional flexibility—skillfully balancing between cleverness and dignity, intelligently avoiding conflicts, while not allowing herself to be manipulated. Susanna's role in this opera is very interesting; she is witty, humorous, but also has a strong moral backbone. She is not merely a servant, but an equal partner to Figaro, and her resourcefulness often surpasses his impulsiveness. She represents the "third estate." She embodies a new vision of society—a world in which people from lower social classes are not merely passive subjects but intelligent, capable individuals who can triumph over the aristocracy through cleverness and prudence.

In *Le nozze di Figaro*, Mozart crafted the character of Susanna with extraordinary musical precision and consistency. Her vocal part is light, agile, and imbued with natural

grace, reflecting both her youth and vivacious intellect. Central to her characterization are two arias—"Venite, inginocchiatevi" and "Deh vieni, non tardar"—which reveal distinct facets of her personality. The former highlights her wit, energy, and penchant for irony, while the latter unveils her lyrical depth, inner tenderness, and concealed vulnerability.

However, her role extends beyond these arias. Susanna participates in nearly all major ensembles of the opera, and her presence in collective scenes is pivotal to the work's dramaturgy. Even in duets with Figaro and the Countess, she emerges as an active figure, capable of rapid reactions and orchestrating intrigue. Of particular significance are the grand finales of Acts II and IV. In the dynamic, plot-twist-laden Act II finale, Susanna drives the narrative, engaging actively in the game of deception and heightening dramatic tension. In the Act IV garden finale—the climactic moment—Susanna, disguised as the Countess, becomes the linchpin of the intrigue that secures her and Figaro's ultimate triumph. Here, Mozart endows her music with heightened solemnity, underscoring her mature agency in the plot's resolution. While this dissertation limits its musical analysis of Susanna to her arias, it is crucial to emphasize that her characterization permeates the opera's entire score. Mozart employs diverse musical devices—from light coloratura and syncopated rhythms to subtle legato phrasing and chromatic harmonic shifts—to capture the fullness of her personality: a sharp-witted, humorous, yet profoundly emotional heroine who ultimately seizes control over her own and Figaro's fate.

The aria "Venite, inginocchiatevi" appears in Act II of *Le nozze di Figaro* during the preparations for Susanna and Figaro's wedding. Meanwhile, Count Almaviva, reluctant to fulfill his promise of abolishing the feudal "right of the first night," is looking for a way to bypass his own decision and win Susanna's favor. Sensing his scheming, the Countess, Figaro, and Susanna decide to outwit the Count and devise an intrigue that will lead to his humiliation and force him to make concessions. At the key moment of the plan, the Countess and Susanna prepare Cherubino for the ruse – the boy is to dress as a woman to lure the Count into a trap. The aria "Venite, inginocchiatevi" is sung by Susanna as she cleverly and energetically instructs Cherubino on how he should behave. The Countess, although more reserved and

elegant, observes the situation with distance and amusement, adding grace and subtle irony to the scene. The aria, light and full of charm, emphasizes Susanna's resourcefulness and sense of humor, contrasting with Cherubino's clumsiness and enthusiasm for the female disguise. The Countess's presence adds further dramatic tension to the scene – she is the one most wronged by the Count's infidelity, yet she allows herself to participate in this amusing deception, which aims to regain control of the situation.

"Deh vieni, non tardar" is one of the most important arias in Act IV of the opera. It is also one of the most lyrical and intimate moments in *Le nozze di Figaro*, revealing a new aspect of Susanna's character – her deeply hidden sensitivity and her longing for true love. The Count's advances force Susanna to discuss with the Countess Rosina the plan to swap clothes, allowing Susanna to rid herself of the Count while the Countess can convince him to change his behavior. This plan is the pivotal moment in the intrigue – it leads to the final confrontation in the opera's concluding scene, where the truth is revealed, and the Count must publicly admit his defeat. At this moment, Susanna notices that Figaro is watching her in secret and wants to use this opportunity to make him jealous, so she sings the aria as a ruse. This scene demonstrates her wit and psychological insight – Susanna knows exactly how to manipulate Figaro's emotions to teach him a lesson for his earlier suspicions and lack of trust. Once again, we see that although Susanna comes from a lower social class, she has often used her intelligence to resolve crisis situations. She does not act impulsively but always finds solutions through cleverness and prudence, which contrasts with Figaro's more impetuous character. Her schemes not only allowed her to deftly navigate dangerous situations but also made Figaro value her more. One could say that Susanna represents the most intelligent depiction of the "third estate." Though she comes from a humble background, her way of thinking and acting suggests that she surpasses her aristocratic superiors in wisdom and morality. She is simple and kind, witty, yet aware of good and evil, which contrasts with the moral ugliness and hypocrisy of the aristocratic characters, creating a characteristic comic effect. This contrast is central to the opera – its comedy is not based solely on farce but also on the subtle exposure of the hypocrisy of the upper classes through the intelligence of

characters from the lower social strata.

Embodying the role of Susanna demands not only exceptional acting skills but also outstanding musicianship and vocal technical mastery. This is a part that requires remarkable interpretative flexibility throughout nearly the entire opera—ranging from spirited humor and irony to subtle lyricism and sensitivity. Susanna must consistently radiate traits such as vivacity, cheerfulness, courage, and kindness; only in this way can her uniqueness be fully conveyed. The character demands unrelenting stage energy—though not an aristocrat, she controls the intrigue and steers events toward a felicitous resolution. In terms of emotional expression, the vocalist's interpretation is paramount. Susanna's performance must exude natural charm and self-assurance, which are core facets of her personality. Amid shifting circumstances, she remains composed, navigating every situation with intelligence and humor. Vocally, Susanna is portrayed as a young woman in her twenties yearning for free and joyous love, her spirit nourished by this aspiration. A pure, authentic voice must reflect her emotional depth, with gentle tones conveying both innocence and playfulness. Unlike virtuosic coloratura roles such as Konstanze or the Queen of the Night, Mozart's writing for Susanna emphasizes precise phrasing, natural vocal lightness, and nuanced dynamic control. Faced with the Count's licentiousness and misunderstandings with her fiancé, Susanna never succumbs to panic. She remains calm and collected, shrewdly exposing the Count's scandal while safeguarding her own virtue. Far from passive, she actively shapes events, making decisions that resolve the central conflict. As a sonic representation of her narrative agency, Susanna's music must be lucid and poised, highlighting her sharpness in the audience's perception. Mozart's use of rhythmic flexibility, light syncopation, and subtle dynamic shifts mirrors her agility, ingenuity, and intellect. Through these musical devices, her character emerges as both a driving force of the plot and a symbol of wit triumphing over aristocratic pretension.

2.1.3 Analysis of the Recorded Arias of Susanna on the Original Album

2.1.3.1 Susanna's Aria "Venite, inginocchiatevi" from the Second Act of *Le nozze di*

Figaro

Translation of the libretto:

<i>Venite, inginocchiatevi</i>	Come, kneel down
<i>Restate fermo lì,</i>	Stand still there,
<i>Pian piano, or via, giratevi</i>	Slowly, now, turn around
<i>Bravo! va ben così.</i>	Bravo! That's fine.
<i>La faccia ora volgetemi:</i>	Now turn your face to me:
<i>Olà, quegli occhi a me,</i>	Hey, those eyes to me,
<i>Drittissimo, guardatemi !</i>	Far straight, look at me!
<i>Madama qui non è!</i>	Madam is not here!
<i>La faccia ora volgetemi ,</i>	Now turn your face to me!
<i>Drittissimo , guardatemi !</i>	Far straight, look at me!
<i>Madama qui non è.</i>	Madam is not here!
<i>Restate fermo lì,</i>	Stand still there,
<i>Or via, giratevi, guardatemi !</i> <i>Bravo!</i>	Now, turn around, look at me!

<i>Più alto quel colletto , quel ciglio un po' più basso !</i>	Bravo!
<i>Le mani sotto il petto ,</i>	That collar higher!
<i>vedremo poscia il passo,</i>	That brow a little lower!
<i>Quando sarete in pie',</i>	Hands under your chest!
<i>Mirate il bricconcello, mirate ,</i>	We'll see his step later!
<i>quanto è bello!</i>	When you're on your feet!
<i>Che furba guardatura!</i>	Look at the little rascal, look!
<i>Che vezzo, che figura!</i>	How handsome he is!
<i>Se l'amano le femmine,</i>	What a sly look!
<i>Han certo il lor perché.</i>	What a charm, what a figure!

Analysis of the work:

Time of composition: 1786 r.

Key: G major - D major - G major.

Metre: 2/4

Tempo: *Allegretto*

Form: single three-part song A B C (although it can also be regarded as a variant of the recomposed form with repeated motifs)

Part	A	B	C
Measures	1-14	15-80	81-118
Key	G-major	G-major- D-major- G-major	G-major

Section A (mm. 1–14), Susanna prepares to disguise Cherubino as a maid and instructs him to step forward, kneel, and stay still. From the very first measures, the aria blends lyrical and energetic elements, perfectly capturing Susanna’s character—full of temperament, yet at the same time caring and pragmatic. As the action unfolds, the prelude introduces three rapid, stepwise descending progressions in the melody of the accompaniment, portraying Susanna as a lively and dynamic figure. These descending passages in the left hand of the piano accompaniment can be interpreted as a musical counterpart to Susanna’s gestures, reflecting her dynamism and her attempt to restrain the restless Cherubino. In measures 1–14, each phrase begins on a weak beat. Some phrases are long, while others are short, and pauses are placed between them. Mozart deliberately employs these rests to emphasize Susanna’s instructive tone and to lend the scene a natural sense of narration—resembling the rhythm of spoken commands. The performer must be sufficiently prepared to ensure that the initial breath at the onset of a phrase is adequate. Since the phrases start on a weak beat, there is a risk of uneven articulation—therefore, smooth breath control is crucial to avoid phrase fragmentation. At the same time, volume, breath management, and dynamics must be well-coordinated to prevent abrupt attacks and enable sustained, even phrasing. It is also essential to consider the natural prosody of the Italian text—Mozart crafted the melody to align with speech rhythms, requiring the performer to pay close attention to the proper placement of word accents. When singing, logical accents, musical stresses, and accented syllables must be consistent, with breath flowing naturally through the phrases to maintain clarity, fluidity, and coherence in the aria. In the opening phrase of the piece, "Venite, inginocchiatevi," the syllable "Ve" functions as an upbeat, adhering to the word’s natural prosody. This is characteristic of Mozart—beginning on a weak beat enhances the phrase’s

naturalness and fluidity. The singer's delivery should be warm and engaging, but with a slightly firmer vocal tone, rather than overly gentle. In the middle section, three syllables—"ni," "gi," and "chia"—should be emphasized to highlight Susanna's spirited nature and commanding tone. These moments reflect not only Susanna giving instructions but also her lightly "scolding" Cherubino, which should be conveyed through firm articulation and dynamic phrasing. Between measures 6 and 14, Cherubino continues to fidget, attempting to move closer to the Countess. Susanna repeatedly instructs him to stay still, her mood becoming increasingly animated. The accompaniment, filled with rapid figurations, underscores the growing tension of the scene and the accelerating exchange between the characters. With a commanding tone, she urges Cherubino to settle down, even if only momentarily. The dynamic expression of the five repetitions of "restate" must be varied each time. Mozart introduces subtle rhythmic and articulatory differences, so each repetition should possess a slightly different character—ranging from a calm instruction to increasingly firm commands. Measures 11–12 mark an emotional outburst. The melodic line reaches its peak, and the harmony grows more intense, heightening the dramatic effect. The performer should, in accordance with the melodic direction, express different emotional states while maintaining breath control. This is a pivotal moment where Susanna shifts from gentle admonition to firm command—her emotions should build progressively without disrupting the fluidity of the phrasing. (see Score 1.1)

Allegretto (小快板)

Voice

Ve - ni - te, in - gi - noc - chia - te - vi,

Piano

p

5

re - sta - te fer - mo lì, re - sta - te, re -

mf p sf p

10

- sta - te, re - sta - te fer - mo lì, re - sta - te fer - mo lì.

p sf p

Score 1.1

Section B (mm. 15-80) follows the development of both the plot and melody. At this moment, Susanna begins arranging Cherubino’s hair; however, the infatuated boy seizes every opportunity to cast glances at the Countess, expressing his admiration for her. This scene is rich in situational comedy—Susanna attempts to focus on her task, yet Cherubino behaves in a manner characteristic of a lovestruck youth, which is reflected in the musical dynamism of this section. Susanna sings: “Or via, giratevi, guardatemi!” .The performer should deliver this phrase in a tone of admonition. The melodic line in this passage features greater leaps, and the rhythm becomes more pronounced, emphasizing Susanna’s assertiveness. In combination with the meaning of the words, the dynamic should remain subtle, avoiding excessive heaviness. Mozart deliberately avoids excessive accents here, which suggests a playful rather than harsh reprimand—Susanna is not strict but rather mildly amused by the situation. Cherubino obediently turns around. It is worth noting that the accompaniment also reflects his movement—short, bouncy figures suggest the character’s dynamic change of position. When singing the phrase “Bravo, va ben così,” the tone should

transition to a joyful one, and during the word “bravo,” the performer may incorporate a clapping gesture. This stage action enhances the comedic effect of this section of the aria—Susanna treats Cherubino somewhat like a mischievous child who has finally been tamed. (see Score 1.2)

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Susanna's aria. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The first two systems, labeled with measure numbers 15, show the lyrics "Pian, pia-no or via gi - ra-te-vi:". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the bass line and chords in the treble. The third system, labeled with measure number 23, shows the lyrics "la fac - cia o - ra vol - ge - te-mi,". The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The entire score is enclosed in a light blue border.

Score 1.2

In measures 24-52, Susanna dresses Cherubino while simultaneously ensuring that he does not take advantage of the situation to approach the Countess. This scene contains both comedic and subtly tense elements, as Susanna must navigate between the humorous nature of the moment and the necessity of keeping Cherubino under control. In measures 24-26, the performer should sing with a calming tone. The melodic line in these measures is smoother,

and the rhythm is more tranquil, suggesting a temporary lull in the situation. Measure 27 serves as an interlude. In performance, attention should be given to eye contact, facial expressions, and the portrayal of psychological reactions. This is a theatrical moment—the singer should use the pause for a scenic reaction, adding naturalness to the situation. Cherubino, with a hat placed on his head, appears highly amusing. Meanwhile, Susanna glances at the Countess, and both should exchange a subtle, knowing smile. This silent dialogue between the characters enhances the situational humor and helps the audience perceive the nuanced dynamics of their relationship. During measures 28-36, particular attention should be given to the contrast in vocal timbre. Cherubino’s eyes remain fixed on the Countess, and he is reluctant to cooperate with Susanna. When singing the word “dritissimo,” the tone should be softer. However, as Susanna realizes that Cherubino is not responding, she shifts to a commanding tone, delivering “guardatemi” with a crescendo, significantly accentuating the syllable “da.” This technique is employed to break Cherubino’s gaze away from the Countess. This is another crucial dramatic moment—the crescendo heightens the tension, while the strong emphasis on the syllable “da” functions as a musical “command” directed at Cherubino. In vocal execution, maintaining contrast in volume is essential. To achieve this, the singer must increase the engagement of the abdominal and waist muscles, enhancing diaphragmatic control to reinforce breath support, which in turn allows for the production of a sufficiently powerful voice. From a technical standpoint, maintaining a stable breath line is crucial to preventing loss of control over phrasing during sudden dynamic shifts. (see Score 1.3)

The image shows a musical score for measure 27. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in the treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are "o - là, que - gli oc - chi a me, o -". The piano accompaniment is in the bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the left hand and a more melodic line in the right hand. The measure is marked with a '27' at the beginning.

31

- lā, que-gli oc - chi a me, drit - tis - si-mo, drit - tis - si-mo, guar -

35

- da - te - mi, guar - da - te-mi, ma - da - ma qui non

cresc. *f* *p*

Score 1.3

In the first phrase following the key change, particular attention must be given to the pitch of $\#c^2$. This is a crucial moment in the phrase's construction— $\#c^2$ appears as a point of harmonic tension that must be precisely intonated to maintain the coherence of the modulation. The accompaniment texture consists of consecutive sixteenth notes, creating a highly fluid melody that is closely tied to the text, reflecting Susanna's lively character. Mozart employs rapid rhythmic values to convey her energy and emphasize her agility—music and dramaturgy are seamlessly integrated here. In measure 62, the original c^2 reappears in the accompaniment texture, and the key changes from D major back to G major. This marks a return to the primary key, signaling stabilization and the closure of this section—both musically and dramaturgically. By this point, Susanna has already dressed Cherubino, and her vocal expression and tone should convey a sense of satisfaction with her own work. This is one of the moments in which Susanna adopts a more playful tone—the music expresses a sense of gratification, which can be highlighted through a subtly brightened vocal timbre and more relaxed phrasing. At the same time, she exchanges glances with the Countess and encourages Cherubino to display the result of her efforts. The element of stage action is crucial in this passage—the singer should use the brief pauses in the melodic line to establish eye contact with the Countess, conveying a subtle, humorous understanding between the characters. (see Score 1.4)



Score 1.4

Section C (mm. 81-118), after Susanna has dressed Cherubino in women's clothing, the Countess looks at Cherubino with astonishment. This marks the climax of the entire scene—the transformation of Cherubino is complete, and both he and those around him begin to assess the outcome of his metamorphosis. The glances exchanged between the Countess and Susanna convey a sense of affirmation and approval of Cherubino's disguise. Mozart illustrates this moment through subtle harmonic shifts, which temporarily suspend the tension before the entrance of the next vocal phrase. In the humorously staged action, Cherubino should internally acknowledge that he is exceptionally handsome and that it is no surprise that so many women admire him. When performing this section, the singer should focus on three key aspects. First: Pronunciation and articulation. Words must be pronounced with correct diction and clarity, ensuring that no sounds—especially double consonants—are omitted. Mozart carefully aligns the rhythm of the phrase with the natural prosody of the Italian language; therefore, consistent articulation is crucial for maintaining musical and textual coherence. Second: Breath control and phrasing. Between measures 90-98, there are no rests, making it essential to distribute phrases wisely to avoid disrupting breath support. The lack of natural breathing spaces requires the singer to carefully manage phrasing, avoiding abrupt breaks in the melodic line. A singer with strong breath control may take a breath in measure 94 after the quarter note on the syllable "ra." If breath capacity is more limited, an additional breath can be taken at the comma in measure 92. This is a crucial technical adjustment—depending on the singer's vocal endurance, either a more economical or fuller phrasing approach can be adopted. Third: Contrast between strong and weak dynamics. When

the melody is particularly dense, paying attention to dynamic contrast becomes more important, as it can aid breath control. Dynamic variation not only facilitates phrasing but also enhances the theatricality of this scene, in which Susanna evaluates the outcome of her work and playfully highlights Cherubino’s charm. The phrase “che vezzo, che figura” features a crescendo, with the most emphasized syllable being “gu.” The dynamic peak at this moment accentuates the expressive quality of the phrase—Susanna admires Cherubino’s transformation while simultaneously teasing his vanity. (see Score 1.5)

Score 1.5

From measure 102, we move toward the conclusion of the aria. It is important to note that the accompaniment introduces a staccato articulation, so, in accordance with classical performance practice, the same articulation should be applied to the vocal line, reflecting the intended character of the music at this point. The triplet figures should be cohesive and fluid. Mozart often uses triplet passages to convey a sense of movement and freedom—here, the smoothness of the triplets highlights the carefree and joyful tone of the conclusion. The interesting melodic contrast effectively expresses Susanna’s satisfaction with her plan, as well as her lively, intelligent, and humorous servant persona. Alternating register changes and dynamic phrasing make the final section of the aria demanding in terms of vocal control, as it requires maintaining both lightness and clarity in expression. (see Score 1.6)

105

il lor per - chè, han cer - to, cer - to, cer - to il lor per -

110

- chè, han cer - to, cer - to il lor per - chè, han cer - to, cer - to il lor per -

Score 1.6

In summary, throughout the aria, the melody and the accompaniment's texture are flexible, with short phrases predominating. The text and melody seamlessly connect, precisely drawing out the essence of the piece. Mozart skillfully aligns the rhythm of the vocal phrases with the natural prosody of the Italian language, making the sung text feel almost like a conversation in musical form. Elements such as rhythm, dynamics, and timbre during the performance lend color to the language of the libretto, and this color is reflected back to the performer, enabling the singer to vividly shape the character of Susanna. The variety of articulations and the richness of dynamic changes require great vocal flexibility and interpretative skill, as the performer must capture both the humor and lightness of the aria.

When singing Susanna's aria "Venite inginocchiatevi," I focused primarily on capturing her "teasing" tone and the playful joy she felt when seeing Cherubino silently adore the Countess. It is this contrast between Susanna's playful irony and her firmness that makes this aria so special—the singer must skillfully balance the humorous tone with the character's slight didacticism. I firmly believe that the structure of the accompaniment itself suggests this

emotion and places it at the heart of the aria. The lively passages and the light rhythmic texture of the piano part emphasize the dynamic character of the scene while enhancing the impression of a humorous yet graceful word-music dance between the characters. There is also another important reason why this interpretation seemed most fitting to me. It is about portraying the inner freedom of the character despite her lower social status. The humor and playfulness in response to Cherubino's clumsy advances and the Countess's accepting attitude visibly showcase our heroine's independence and her distance from the role assigned to her in the social structure.

2.1.3.2 Susanna's aria "Deh vieni non tardar" from the fourth act of the opera *Le Nozze di Figaro*

Translation of the libretto:

<i>Giunse alfin il momento</i>	The moment has finally come
<i>Che godrò senz'affanno</i>	That I will enjoy without worry
<i>In braccio all'idol mio</i>	In the arms of my idol
<i>Timide cure, uscite dal mio petto,</i>	Timid cares, leave my breast,
<i>A turbar non venite il mio diletto!</i>	Do not come to disturb my delight!
<i>Oh, come par che all'amoroso foco</i>	Oh, how it seems that to the amorous fire
<i>L'amenità del loco,</i>	The pleasantness of the place,
<i>La terra e il ciel risponda,</i>	The earth and the sky respond,
<i>Come la notte i furti miei seconda!</i>	As the night second my thefts!
<i>Deh, vieni, non tardar, o gioia bella,</i>	Oh, come, do not delay, oh beautiful joy,

<i>Vieni ove amore per goder t'appella,</i>	Come where love calls you to enjoy,
<i>Finché non splende in ciel notturna face,</i>	While the nocturnal torch does not shine in the sky,
<i>Finché l'aria é ancor bruna</i>	While the air is still dark
<i>e il mondo tace.</i>	and the world is silent.
<i>Qui mormora il ruscel, qui scherza l'aura</i>	Here the stream murmurs, here the breeze plays
<i>Che col dolce sussurro il cor ristaura</i>	That with its sweet whisper restores the heart
<i>Qui ridono i fioretti e l'erba é fresca</i>	Here the little flowers smile and the grass is fresh
<i>Ai piaceri d'amor qui tutto adescia.</i>	To the pleasures of love here it allures.
<i>Vieni, ben mio, tra queste piante ascose.</i>	Come, my love, among these hidden plants.
<i>Vieni, vieni, ti vo'la fronte incoronar di rose.</i>	Come, come, I want to crown your brow with roses.

Analysis of the piece:

Key: C major - F major

Metre: 4/4, 6/8

Tempo: *Allegro vivace assai, Andante*

Form: Recitative and three-part aria (A B C).

	Recitative			Aria		
Part				A	B	C
Measures	1-11	12-17	18-24	25-42	44-56	57-74
Key	C-major	a-moll	F-major	F-major		

In measures 1-24, we have a recitative section consisting of three phrases spanning 24 measures, with two- or one-measure accompaniments placed between the phrase pairs, serving as transitions. The allegro tempo emphasizes the lively character, excitement, and emotional thrill of the character. Unlike the recitativo secco commonly used in Mozart's operas, this recitative does not adopt a speech-like quality but rather demonstrates maximum melodic flexibility, using many dotted notes to convey both slowness and urgency, giving the singer more room for interpretation. The singer should modulate the tone well while paying attention to the intended direction of the melody, as dictated by Mozart.

This section takes place at night, so the singer should control the dynamic level to convey the intimate and lyrical nature of the situation. In measures 5-7, a gentler breath support is required, with a tone reminiscent of speech. The tempo of the words may be slightly faster. In the stage interpretation, a forward movement can be performed to express Susanna's excitement. The emotional communication should convey the joy and shyness of the young girl in anticipation of a long-awaited meeting. Phonetically, it is important to ensure correct pronunciation of double consonants (e.g., "affanno" and "braccio"). Their precise articulation is essential for maintaining text clarity and adherence to Italian operatic diction. (see Score 2.1)

5

End-lich naht sich die Stun-de, da ich dich, o Ge-lieb-ter, bald ganz be-si-tzen wer-de!
Final-mente al-fin il mo-men-to, che go-dro sen-za af-fan-no, in brac-cio all'i-dol mi-o!
 End-lich naht sich die Stun-de, wo ich dich, o Ge-lieb-ter, bald ganz be-si-tzen wer-de!

Score 2.1

In measures 10-15, after the repetition of the melody from the interlude, a new melodic line is introduced. At this moment, in the face of an attempt to thwart the marriage, Susanna's assertive and brave character emerges. The tone of the singing becomes decisive and bold. The singer should ensure coherence in the text and smooth connection of vowels to maintain the lightness of phrasing, while also ensuring clear articulation. Special attention should be given to the pronunciation of the "r" sound in the words "cure" and "turbar," which should be articulated with only a gentle breath support. They should not be pronounced with force, as this would disturb the mood of the phrase. It is also important to maintain correct articulation of double consonants, particularly in "petto" and "diletto." (see Score 2.2)

12

Ängst-li-che Sor-gen, ent - flieht aus mei - nem Bu-sen, stört nicht län - ger die heiß-er-schn-ten
Ti-mi-de cu-re, u - sci - te dal mio pet - to, a tur - bar non ve ni - te il mio di-
 Ängst-li-che Sor-gen, ent - flie - het, weicht auf im-mer, stö - ret nicht mehr die Freu-de mei-nes

15

Freu-den!
let - to!
 Her-zens!
 tr

Ach, um mich her scheint al-les nier so
Oh, co-me par, che all' a-mo-ro-so
 Ha, um mich her scheint al-les mir so

Score 2.2

In measures 17-23, when Susanna contemplates her surroundings, her heart is filled with sweetness and tenderness. This reflects the longing and anticipation of the young girl for romantic fulfillment, which is mirrored in the pure and clear tone of her singing. The phrases in this section are characterized by lightness and agility. The challenge in modeling the tone for this part of the recitative lies in the frequent occurrence of notes starting on weak beats. Mozart employs pauses and rhythmic shifts, requiring the singer to have precise control over their breath and flexible phrasing. Given the fast tempo, the key aspect is the ability to manage the breath smoothly and fluidly. Dynamic contrast is an important aspect of performance, as it influences the drama of the recitative. In terms of phonetics, attention must be paid to the correct pronunciation of double consonants (e.g., "del loco," "terra," and "notte").

Section A (measures 25-42), B (measures 42-56), and C (measures 57-74) are the actual aria sections. The aria has a gentler tempo than the recitative section, but it is important to note that the 6/8 meter makes the piece more rhythmic, with a light, dance-like quality. This is a means of expression that emphasizes Susanna's joyful and anticipatory mood at this moment. Musically, parts B and C of the aria focus on the character's emotions while also depicting the surrounding nature. The changes in the musical structure reflect her internal struggles, delicacy, and moments of shyness, creating a multi-dimensional psychological portrait of the twenty-year-old girl. According to the development of the story, we can divide Susanna's emotional changes into three distinct stages: anticipation, joy, and indifference.

In measures 25-31, the aria remains in the key of F major, with the accompaniment providing smooth melodic lines that support Susanna's singing, creating a graceful, almost dance-like atmosphere. Vocal phrases often begin on the weak beats of the measure, giving them lightness and a natural flow. Mozart uses dotted rhythms in the melody, highlighting the mischievous and playful character of the role.

In measures 32-42, Susanna's emotional character shifts from initial boldness and excitement to more subtle and reflective emotions, expressing delicacy and inner expectation.

Harmonically, we remain in F major, but in measure 42, the tonic chord of the sixth degree suggests a temporary shift to the parallel minor, D minor. The vocal line continues to begin on weak beats, maintaining lightness and natural flow. The accompaniment structure consists of smooth melodic lines, gradually leading the character into a more lyrical state. The dynamics transition gradually from more expressive phrases to subtler lyricism, highlighting the gradual shift in emotions. The vocal phrases are extended, requiring smooth breath control and delicate phrasing. In a stage interpretation, the singer might initially adopt a more dynamic posture and, as the phrase develops, gently slow down the movements, emphasizing the subtle transition to a more reflective emotion. (see Score 2.3)

30

O säu-me län-ger nicht, ge-lieb-te See-le, sehn-suchts-voll har-ret
Deh vie-ni, non tar-dar, o gio-ja bel-la!
 O säu-me län-ger nicht, ge-lieb-te See-le, sehn-suchts-voll har-ret

35

dei-ner hier die Freun-din. Noch leuch-tet nicht des Mon-des Sil-ber-fa-ckel,
per go-der l'ap-pel-la, fin-chè non splen-de in ciel not-tur-na fa-ce,
 dei-ner hier die Freun-din. Noch leuch-tet nicht des Mon-des Sil-ber-fa-ckel,

Score 2.3

In measures 42-56, it seems that Mozart aimed to depict the natural surroundings accompanying Susanna's aria through the music. The accompaniment is delicate and flowing, reminiscent of a murmuring stream and light breezes. Susanna's vocal line becomes more lyrical and soft, highlighting her emotional shift from earlier excitement to peaceful admiration. The dynamics are more subtle, and thus, the singer should restrain the earlier, tense tone and focus on savoring the beauty of the phrases. The singing should be pure and

sweet. In the stage interpretation, the singer's movements can be slow and flowing, emphasizing the lyrical character of this section. In measure 52, ornamental embellishments appear, which should be sung lightly and smoothly, without excessive expression. Mozart enriches this section with subtle ornamentation, accentuating the flexibility of the melody and enhancing the drama of the fragment. Susanna should emanate calm and joy, with her love for Figaro also expressed through her contemplation of the beauty of nature. (see Score 2.4)

52

auf den bun-ten Wie - sen, al - les lockt uns zu Lie - be, Freud und
 ret - ti, e l'erba è fre - sca, ai pia - ce - ri d'a - mor - qui tut - to a -
 auf den bun - ten Wie - sen, al - les lockt uns zu Lie - be, Freud und

Score 2.4

In the section related to excitement (measures 57-74), we reach the climax of the entire piece, where Susanna openly expresses her love. She abandons the earlier tone of persuasion and subtle emotional play, directly declaring her love for her beloved and passionately calling him her lover. The three repetitions of "vieni" enhance the dramatic effect, gradually building emotional tension. Although there are no explicit indications of diminuendo and crescendo in the score, the performer can apply a gradual increase in expression, giving each repetition greater intensity. In measure 61, the long extension of the syllable "vie-" requires precise control of the breath to ensure the phrase sounds smooth and natural. Over the second syllable of "vieni" in measure 62, there is a fermata, allowing for free shaping of the dynamics. Crescendo and diminuendo can be interpretively justified, though not strictly written in the score. This contrast between strong and weak dynamics enhances the emotional expression of the phrase, emphasizing Susanna's intense joy and romantic ecstasy. With a clear, radiant voice, Susanna calls her beloved, culminating the emotional journey of this aria. (see Score 2.5)

61

komm, o Trau-ter, daß ich mit Ro-sen krän-ze dein Haupt,
 Vie-ni, ni, vie-ni, ti vo' la fron-te in-co-ro-nar
 komm, o Trau-ter, daß ich mit Ro-sen krän-ze dein Haupt, mit

Score 2.5

When performing the aria "Deh vieni non tardar" by Zuzanna, I was inspired by recordings of many renowned sopranos, analyzing their interpretations in detail. I was particularly impressed by Kathleen Battle's performance⁶³, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the character of this scene. I realized that interpreting this aria requires a silkily smooth and sweet tone in order to fully convey the delicacy and tenderness of the young girl. To achieve this effect, especially for more mature performers, it is necessary to precisely control vocal technique—breath control, timbre, vibrato, and dynamics. Only then can one fully express the sweetness of love that fills Zuzanna's heart—an emotion as dense and enveloping as the night surrounding her.

2.2. The character of Zerlina from the opera *Don Giovanni*

2.2.1 Creative context

Don Giovanni is an opera of ethical and moral significance, based on the popular Spanish legend of Don Juan, which has found numerous literary and theatrical adaptations, including Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla*. Mozart and Da Ponte chose the scenario of Giovanni Bertati's *Don Giovanni, o sia Il convitato di pietra*, which Da Ponte subjected to many modifications in terms of the plot and character portrayal. Through the character of the aristocrat Don Giovanni and his wicked behavior—cheating and harming women—the

⁶³ Kalthleen Battle Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlzxugLzSWc> 01/02/2025, 10:15am

corrupted environment of the feudal aristocracy is exposed. At the same time, Don Giovanni, although portrayed as a seducer and a fraud, is a character with great charisma and ambiguous morality, which makes him more than just a straightforward antagonist. Mozart's opera, combining elements of opera buffa and opera seria, transcends genre boundaries, making Don Giovanni both a grotesque and tragic hero.

Mozart's musical approach plays a crucial role in this opera, as he blends opera buffa and opera seria with a comedic beginning and a tragic ending. This unique combination causes *Don Giovanni* to defy clear genre classification, becoming a *dramma giocoso*, an opera that integrates lyrical, comedic, and dramatic elements into a cohesive whole. The operatic reform introduced by Gluck at the turn of the Baroque and Classical eras aimed at a close integration of music and drama, eliminating overly ornamental and virtuosic vocal parts in favor of expressions that serve dramatic content. Although Mozart remained true to his melodic inventiveness, in *Don Giovanni* he drew on these principles, especially in how he built dramatic tension, psychologically developed characters, and organically linked arias, ensembles, and recitatives to the progression of the action. The overture is a perfect example of this—rather than serving a purely introductory function, it anticipates the tragic conclusion of the opera by introducing a dark, majestic theme that recurs in the final confrontation between Don Giovanni and the Commander. He also enhanced the psychological portrait of the character, utilized the drama of the collective parts, and emphasized the conflict more strongly, resulting in a realistic, complex, and thoughtful character portrait. Due to its tragic themes, *Don Giovanni* is full of sharp conflicts. Emotional contrasts play a crucial role—comic scenes with Leporello are interspersed with deep dramas, such as Donna Anna's aria "Or sai chi l'onore" or the confrontation between Don Giovanni and the Commander. Based on this, Mozart does not dwell excessively on pain and sorrow, but strives to make the pain felt within a rich emotional atmosphere, almost immersing the audience in the character's suffering and the inevitability of the hero's fate.

2.2.2 Shaping the musical image of Zerlina

The peasant girl Zerlina belongs to the "third estate" of Spanish society, and therefore, her melodic progression is fundamentally energetic, with great dynamics, which reflects the simplicity, naturalness, and beauty of her character. Of course, Mozart constructs her character in a highly cohesive way, not limiting her characterization solely to her aria, but also through her interactions with other characters, revealing her emotional evolution. For the reasons already explained in the analysis of Susanna's aria, this dissertation focuses only on the analysis of Zerlina's two arias. It seems that particularly three aspects of her personality are worth noticing and emphasizing for a full understanding of her character and the way Mozart creates her musical image.

Simplicity and vanity of Zerlina: Zerlina and her fiancé, Masetto, announce their engagement to the villagers when Don Giovanni and his servant pass by. Seeing the young and beautiful Zerlina, Don Giovanni immediately focuses his attention on her and begins a subtle manipulative game. He does not immediately reveal his intentions but gradually surrounds Zerlina with his charm, distancing her from Masetto and promising her a life of luxury. His words are enticing but informal – he does not use open persuasion, but deceptive delicacy, which causes Zerlina to begin to hesitate. The climax of this scene is the duet "*Là ci darem la mano*", which perfectly captures the tension between desire, power, and uncertainty. To clearly present Zerlina's transformation, Mozart gradually develops her melodic lines – initially, her phrases are short, uncertain, repeating fragments of Don Giovanni's melody, but gradually they become more extended and fluid, symbolizing her growing submission. In the final part of the duet, Zerlina transitions to unison with Don Giovanni, which musically illustrates her submission to his influence. In this way, Mozart not only creates a beautiful seduction scene but also subtly captures the psychological dynamics – Don Giovanni does not conquer Zerlina through force, but through a complex interplay of words and sounds, to which the girl succumbs, not fully aware of the danger. The music is used to dramatize the psychological actions of Don Giovanni and Zerlina and their internal conflict, bringing to life

Zerlina's musical image as naive, yet susceptible to the illusion of a better life.

Repentance and charm of Zerlina: In Act II, Scene 4, Don Giovanni's lies are revealed by Donna Elvira, and Zerlina realizes that she has been deceived. Seeing an agitated Masetto, she decides to ease the situation – not through dramatic apologies, but through a subtle play of charm, based on a strategy of submission and persuasive coquetry. In the heat of the moment, she sings the aria "*Batti, batti o bel Masetto*", whose gentle, almost lullaby-like *andante* does not express despair, but tries to disarm Masetto's anger through her tenderness and musical repetitiveness. The melody is compact but even, full of simple, symmetrical phrases that give it an almost hypnotic character. The dynamics and harmonies subtly change in a controlled manner, not disturbing the soothing tone of the aria, making it a musical counterpart of flirtatious persuasion. In the second part, Mozart introduces a waltz rhythm, which not only suggests a joyful reconciliation but even draws Masetto into an idealized vision of their shared future, making his anger increasingly difficult to sustain. Thus, the aria is not just a request for forgiveness – it is an example of subtle emotional manipulation, where the music, text, and phrasing complement each other, building tension between true repentance and Zerlina's calculated strategy.

Delicacy and gentleness of Zerlina: In Act II, Scene 1, the outraged Masetto gathers some villagers to settle accounts with Don Giovanni, but unexpectedly, he is deceived by Don Giovanni, who pretends to be his own servant. Cleverly, Don Giovanni directs the crowd in the wrong direction, leaving Masetto alone and defenseless. Taking advantage of this moment, Don Giovanni mercilessly humiliates him – not only using physical violence but also mocking his impotence. Zerlina runs in and, with a broken heart, sees Masetto lying on the ground in pain. Instead of expressing dramatic despair, she employs a different strategy – she transforms anxiety and pain into tenderness, trying to disarm Masetto with gentleness. The aria "*Vedrai, carino*" is then sung with love and subtle grace, making its function twofold – it is both a gesture of consolation and a persuasive attempt to divert his attention from anger. The tone of the aria is slow and whispered, with the entire piece maintaining a soft, almost

lullaby-like expression, where the phrases flow gently, avoiding sharp harmonic tensions. The slight modulations and ornamentations are not mere embellishments – they serve a key dramaturgical function, conveying the subtle nuances of Zerlina’s emotions, from tender concern to increasingly strong, almost hypnotic persuasion. Eventually, a pressing, sincere, and emphatic expression of true, intense love for Masetto emerges. The final phrases of the aria expand into wide melodic arcs, and the subtle crescendo makes Zerlina’s love persuasion more powerful – this is no longer just a gesture of comfort but a firm affirmation of her feelings and emotional superiority over Masetto. Up until this scene, Zerlina is full of contradictory traits: beautiful and simple, playful and lively, kind and brave, yet naive and prone to illusion. However, "*Vedrai, carino*" marks a turning point – there is no longer room for childish coquetry or naivety. This aria becomes the musical sign of Zerlina’s transition from innocence to maturity, where subtlety and gentleness prove to be a more powerful force than anger and revenge.

2.2.3 Analysis of Zerlina's arias recorded on the author's album

2.2.3.1 Zerlina's aria “Batti, batti o bel Masetto” from the first act of the opera *Don*

Giovanni

Translation of the words :

Batti, batti, o bel Masetto,	Bij mnie, bij, mój Masetto,
la tua povera Zerlina	twoją biedną Zerlinę
starò qui come agnellina	Jestem tu jak mała owieczka
le tue bòtte ad aspettar	i będę czekać na tve razy.
Lascero straziarmi il crine	pozwołę ci targać moje włosy,

lascero cavarmi gli occhi	pozwolę ci wydrzeć mi oczy,
e le tue care manine	a potem z radością będę całować
lieta poi saprò baciar	twoje cudownie słodkie dłonie.
Ah, lo vedo, non hai core!	Ach, widzę, że nie masz serca!
Pace, pace, o vita mia!	Uspokój się, uspokój moje życie!
In contento ed allegria	Pogódźmy się, moja prawdziwa miłości.
notte e di vogliam passar.	w szczęściu i radości spędzajmy dni i noce,

Analysis of the piece:

Time of composition: 1787

Key: F major

Metru: 2/4, 6/8

Tempo: Andate grazioso, Allegro

Form: A B

Part	A	B
Bar	1-60	61-99
Tone	F major	F major

Part A (mm. 1-60) is in 2/4 time, *Andante grazioso*. In measures 1-16, the singer can express feelings of sadness and being wronged. In terms of physical expression, the arms can be extended forward, and the whole body gently swayed with the melody, reflecting the

mischievous and charming image of a girl who has made a mistake. Naturally, the physical expression will depend on the director's and choreographer's vision and the creative potential of the singer. The performer should prioritize maintaining the given tempo and choosing a tone that reflects delicate uncertainty. One should not take in too much air, but rather focus on a high position of sound production to convey the suggested delicacy and sweetness of expression. The pronunciation of the vowel "a" in the word "batti" should not be shortened due to the correct articulation of the double "tt." Repeated sections of the libretto should be emphasized with varied expression, with volume gradually increasing. A credible interpretation should express a sincere desire for forgiveness. (see Score 3.1)

The image shows a page of a musical score for Mozart's opera. It features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Andante grazioso" and the composer is "Mozart". The score includes German and Italian lyrics. The piano part is marked "Str. p" and "Va. Solo". The score is numbered 6.

German lyrics: Schmä-le, to-be, lie-ber Jun-ge, wie ein Lamm will ich's er-tra-gen, fromm, er-
 Italian lyrics: Bat-ti, bat-ti, o bel Ma-set-to, la tua po-ve-ra Zer-li-na, sta-rò
 German lyrics: ge-ben, oh-ne Kla-gen, oh-ne je-den Wi-der-stand, schmä-le,
 Italian lyrics: qui co-me a-gnel-li-na, le tue bot-te ad a-spet-tar, bat-ti,

Score 3.1

In measures 19-34, Mozart skillfully employs dissonances, subtly intensifying the drama of the scene. The shift from F major to C major introduces a brief tonal destabilization, reflecting Zerlina's emotional imbalance in the face of Masetto's indifference. Upon noticing the lack of response from her beloved, her expression shifts to one of sorrowful resignation, singing with exaggerated exaltation: "Lascieró straziarmi il crine lascieró cavarmi gli occhi." This theatrical turn perfectly fits the character of Mozart's opera buffa, where drama blends with comedy, and exaggerated expression highlights not so much authentic suffering but rather an attempt to influence the emotions of the interlocutor. Zerlina realizes that Masetto

would never resort to violence, but she consciously adopts the role of a penitent to gain his pity and forgiveness. From a technical perspective, this passage presents a challenge for the singer. The combination of a rhythmic pattern based on four sixteenth notes with intensely concentrated text makes precise articulation a key element of the performance. It is crucial to articulate each vowel carefully. In the phrase "mi il," the vowel "i" appears twice, and the second "i" should be sung slightly more forcefully. Special attention should also be paid to the correct sound of the lateral consonant "gli" in "gli occhi," as well as to the short, clear "hold" of the double consonant "cc." An additional difficulty lies in the proper articulation of all the uvular consonants "r," which in Mozart's style should be articulated with delicate lightness, avoiding excessive hardness. Achieving clarity of diction thus requires repeated exercises combining precise breath control and flexibility of the speech apparatus. (see Score 3.2)

The image displays two systems of a musical score. The first system, starting at measure 19, features a vocal line with lyrics: "Je-de Strafe will ich dul-den, La-scie-rò straziar:mi il ori-ne,". The piano accompaniment includes markings for "Str." (strings), "vi." (violin), and "Bläs." (woodwinds). The second system, starting at measure 23, continues the vocal line with lyrics: "schelten kannst du mich und schlagen, Dank da-für will ich dir sa-gen und noch la-scie-rò ca-var-mi glioc-chi, e-le-ca-re tue ma-ni-ne lie-ta-". The piano accompaniment continues with the "Str." marking.

Score 3.2

Masetto has still not recovered from the earlier events, and Zerlina, anxious and concerned, looks for a way to alleviate her fiancé's anger. During the brief vocal break (measures 36-38), while the orchestra continues the musical narrative, the singer can express her helplessness and determination through gesture—such as holding her skirt. This dramatically underscores her attempt to convince Masetto that she has done everything in her

power to fix the situation. In the climactic moment of this phrase (measures 39-49), Zerlina returns to the main theme of the aria, once again pleading with Masetto for forgiveness. The repetition of the melody from the first section highlights her desperate plea, this time with even more emphasis on emotional engagement. From a performance perspective, it is crucial that the phrase "saprò baciare" be sung with lightness and flexibility, which suggests Zerlina's delicacy and tenderness toward her beloved. In measures 53-60, Masetto seems slightly moved by Zerlina's efforts. It is here that the turning point in the plot and the characters' emotions occurs. Zerlina sings: "Ah lo vedo, non hai core," changing her tactic and beginning to blame Masetto for ignoring her. She wants to evoke protective feelings in him. In measures 58-59, Mozart uses four consecutive syncopations, subtly accentuating the growing emotional tension. From a performance perspective, this requires precise phrasing balance—avoiding exaggerated articulation while ensuring the smoothness of the melodic line. In terms of staging, Zerlina might take Masetto's hand and look at him with the expression of a wronged girl, eager for reconciliation. These measures herald the unfolding of events—Masetto's emotional turmoil gradually subsides, and his anger weakens, setting the stage for the couple's reconciliation. (see Score 3.3)

52

stand. tar. tr. tr. tr. tr. Ja, ich seh es, Ah lo ve-do, tr. tr.

55

kannst nicht zür-nen, non hai co-re, ja, ja, nicht ah non hai

58

zur - nen, kannst nicht zur - nen, kannst nicht zur - nen.
co - re, ah lo ve - do non hai co - re.

cresc.

f

Score 3.3

Part B (measures 61-99), the meter changes to 6/8, giving the music a more dance-like, flowing character compared to section A. The use of this meter, combined with the gently undulating melodic line and the accompaniment suggesting the character of a waltz, emphasizes an atmosphere of lightness and joy. Zerlina, expressing her desire for harmony and happiness, sings with more freedom, and the change in musical style symbolizes her optimism and hope for reconciliation with Masetto. While singing this phrase, the singer may gently sway in time with the 6/8 rhythm, highlighting Zerlina's tenderness and grace. A possible stage interpretation includes hand gestures placed in front of the chest in a prayerful position, further enhancing the sense of humility and plea for forgiveness. Facial expression also plays an important role—a radiant smile and subtle muscle elevation in the face support both the emotional message and vocal stability, particularly when reaching high notes. The climax of the piece begins in measure 70, but it is measures 72 and 75 that mark the moments of the highest ornamentation in Zerlina's part. Mozart introduces characteristic fioriture in descending progressions, giving the singing lightness and virtuosity. These ornamental passages, consisting of continuous sixteenth notes, require the singer to possess exceptional vocal flexibility and smooth articulation in order to maintain the natural lightness of the phrases without undue strain. From a performance perspective, precise breath planning is key, especially before the ornamental phrases, which must be sung in one seamless arc without noticeable breaks. Proper variation of dynamics within the fioriture helps avoid monotony and ensures that the ornaments retain their expressiveness. High precision in articulation of notes and syllables maintains the clarity of the phrases, and skillful control of the vocal line accentuates their lightness and emotional expressiveness. (see Score 3.4)

68

Tag,
sar, uns in Won - ne Tag für Tag,
sar, not - tee di - vo - gliam pas - sar,

vi.

72

Tag,
sar, uns in Won - ne Tag für Tag,
sar, not - tee di - vo - gliam pas - sar,

Bläs.

Score 3.4

Masetto finally relents and looks joyfully at his fiancée. In measures 86 and 89, in the phrase "si, si, si...", Mozart highlights the emotional exaltation of the character through the repeated, short, and energetic syllables, which should be articulated with clear, bouncy enunciation. From a performance perspective, it is crucial to use the breathing muscles flexibly, especially in the lower diaphragm, to ensure resonance and proper projection of these repetitions. The word "si" should be dynamically balanced—strong but not harsh—maintaining lightness and naturalness in the delivery. This passage symbolizes Masetto's joy and impatience, as he completely abandons his earlier hesitation. The scene concludes with a harmonious and happy image of the lovers. (see Score 3.5)

84

nie - Ben uns in Won - ne Tag für Tag, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, uns in
gri - a not - tee di - vo - gliam pas - sar, si, si, si, si, si, si, not - tee

88

Won - ne Tag - für Tag, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, uns in Won - ne Tag - für
 di - vo - gliam pas - sa; si, si, si, si, si, si, not - tee di - vo - gliam pas -

Score 3.5

The aria "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto" by Mozart is a remarkable example of operatic emotional play, where the composer skillfully balances flirtation, pleading, and playful charm. Mozart creates a light, almost hypnotic atmosphere, based on clear rhythms, natural melodiousness, and subtle harmonic nuances. The changing intensity of the accompaniment emphasizes the dramatic nature of the aria, making it both a vocal and theatrical challenge. This multi-dimensionality helps maintain the freshness and expressiveness of the aria, ensuring it remains one of the most recognizable moments in *Don Giovanni*.

In developing my own interpretation of the aria "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto", I aimed to find a balance between vocal expression and the character's dramatic arc. While this aria features a clear melodic line, it also requires subtle changes in vocal color and careful shaping of phrases to fully capture the emotional nuances of the character. My goal was to portray Zerlina as sweet and enchanting, yet without excessive coquetry, preserving authenticity and dramatic depth. Before crafting my performance concept, I familiarized myself with a recording of the aria by Nadine Sierra,⁶⁴ which provided invaluable interpretive insights. Nadine Sierra, as a 21st-century operatic star active on the international scene, occupies an important place in the contemporary aesthetic of the global music stage due to her exceptional vocal technique and unique artistic expression. In *Don Giovanni*, she portrays Zerlina, not only showcasing her girlish innocence but also adding richer layers to her personality, making the character more realistic and dramatic. This was the type of portrayal I aspired to create.

⁶⁴ Nadine Sierra video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgRRD9Sabkk> 22/02/2025, 07:40pm.

With a clear, pure, and fluid voice, Sierra has natural predispositions for interpreting Zerlina. Her vocal technique allows for subtle shifts in vocal color, which enables her to convey the psychological nuances of the character—from fear and hesitation to flirtation and tender reassurance of Masetto. Her impeccable Italian diction, ability to articulate clearly in fast passages, and maintenance of melodic line fluidity enhance the expressiveness and impact of her portrayal of Zerlina. In her interpretation, Sierra remains faithful to the classical performance style of Mozart’s music, while also introducing elements of contemporary lyrical expression, which lend her interpretation greater accessibility and individuality. This balance not only enriches the character with additional interpretive layers but also demonstrates a deep understanding and unique take on Mozart’s works.

Inspired by Sierra’s performance, I focused on control of vocal color, conscious breath support, precise articulation, emotional expression, and stylistic balance. My goal was to combine her strengths with my own vocal abilities, tailoring them to my individual vocal technique. Zerlina is a lively character, but excessive flirtatiousness could make the music lose its elegance and naturalness. Therefore, in my interpretation, I sought to find a balance between lightness and warmth, giving the character a more authentic charm. Striving for subtle shifts in vocal color, precise breath management, and multi-layered dramatic expression, I aimed to give Zerlina authenticity and emotional depth. I hope that my interpretation remains true to Mozart’s spirit while also bringing an element of personal expression, offering a fresh, personal perspective on this extraordinary stage character.

2.2.3.2 Zelina's aria “Vedrai, carino” from the second act of the opera *Don Giovanni*

Translation of words:

<i>Vedrai, carino, se sei buonino,</i>	You'll see, my dear, if you're good,
<i>Che bel rimedio ti voglio dar!</i>	What a nice remedy I want to give you!
<i>È naturale, non dà disgusto,</i>	It's natural, it doesn't disgust,
<i>e lo speziale, non lo sa far, no</i>	and the apothecary doesn't know how to make it, no
<i>È un certo balsamo</i>	It's a certain balm
<i>che porto addosso,</i>	that I carry on me,
<i>dare tel posso, se il vuoi provar.</i>	I can give it to you, if you want to try it.
<i>Saper vorresti dove mi sta?</i>	Would you like to know where it is?
<i>Sentilo battere, toccami qua!</i>	Feel it beating, touch me here!

Analysis of the work:

Time of composition: 1787.

Key: C major

Metre: 3/8

Tempo: *Andante*

Form: A B

Part	A					B		
	prelude	a	b	a1	b1	c	d	coda
Bar	1-8	9-16	17-33	34-41	42-52	53-75	76-85	86-104
Tone	C major							

Part A (mm. 1-52) is characterized by a smooth, undulating melodic line that emphasizes the tender and soothing nature of Zerlina's expression. The melody of the prelude (mm. 1-8) is repeated in the vocal part (mm. 9-16), reinforcing the formal cohesion of the aria. In the following phrases (mm. 17-33), larger interval leaps, appoggiaturas, and trills appear, adding greater lightness and subtle virtuosity to the singing. The rhythmic pattern, based on dotted notes, gives the original 3/8 meter a unique rhythm. The thematic melody is dominated by homophonic repetitions and descending progressions, which create an effect of emphasis and set the tone of the language. The piano accompaniment strengthens the melody, the rhythm is synchronized with the melody, and the basic continuity of the bass solidifies the key of C major. This compositional technique allows for the creation of a vivid picture of Zerlina's gentle and kind nature, while also adding an element of liveliness and playfulness.

In the performance of this section, the singer should adopt a posture full of care and tenderness, with a subtle touch of sadness and love in her eyes. Zerlina wishes to calm Masetto, so the phrase "cudowny specyfik" should be sung almost in a whisper, with a soft emission and smooth legato. The appoggiaturas must be clear and precise, with proper emphasis on the dotted notes in each measure to maintain the rocking character of the phrase. It is also crucial to differentiate the dynamics and phrasing, which will convey the contrast between Zerlina's tenderness and her coquettish playfulness. (see Score 4.1)

17.

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system features a vocal line with the lyrics "Ve-drai, ca-ri-no, se sei buo-ni-no, Ich weiss ein Mit-tel, das dir, mein Schätz-chen," and a piano accompaniment with a trill (tr) in the right hand and a piano (p) dynamic marking. The second system features a vocal line with the lyrics "che bel ri-me-dio ti vo-glio dar. wenn du fein fromm-bist, Hei-lung ver-schafft." and a piano accompaniment with trills (tr) in the right hand.

Score 4.1

The phrase "Non lo sa far, no" (mm. 27-33) consists of a threefold repetition of both the melody and the text, yet each rendition should differ in dynamics and emotional expression. The first repetition should be clear and distinct, with a natural resolution of the phrase. The second performance is gentler, and the melodic line becomes more fluid. The third repetition should carry the fullest emotional charge, emphasizing Zerlina's flirtatiousness and playfulness. In measure 28, Mozart introduces a perfect fifth leap from g1 to d2, further enhancing the playful, almost theatrical character of the figure. In performance, this requires careful attention to maintaining vocal position unity, ensuring that the notes retain their lightness and smooth articulation. The entire passage combines singing with rhetorical teasing, so it should sound light, coquettish, and tinged with humor. (see Score 4.2)

25
 e lo ape-zia - le non lo sa far, no, non lo sa far, no, non lo sa
 kein A - po - tho - her kennt sei - na Kraft, nein, kein A - po - the - ker kennt sei - ne

32
 far. È un cer - to bal - samo che porto ad - dos - so, da - re tol
 Kraft. Jo, die - ser Bal - sam, er wirk - te schon Win - der, magst du ihn

Score 4.2

Measures 48-52 close section A, with the repeated notes d2, e2, and c2 giving the melody a sweet, effusive character that emphasizes Zerlina's tenderness and subtle flirtation. The phrase ends on an ambiguous C major chord, which, in combination with the question in the libretto, creates an effect of suspension and dramatic anticipation. This ending does not provide a definitive cadence, allowing the tension to smoothly transition into the next section of the piece. (see Score 4.3)

46
 do - ve mi sta, do - ve, do - ve, do - ve mi sta?
 wo ich ihn ber - ge, wo ich den Bal - sam ber - ge?

Score 4.3

In section B (measures 53-104), the music gains greater fluidity and energy, with moving melodic phrases enriched by fast sixteenth notes that flow in wavy progressions, highlighting Zerlina's emotional exaltation. Compared to section A, the tempo is more energized, and the rhythm is more dynamic. In this section, Zerlina transitions from soothing tenderness to

passionate sincerity – instead of the gentle persuasion from section A, here she boldly and openly professes her love to Masetto (measures 53-75). Zerlina believes that Masetto acts this way because of her, and therefore, she decides to soothe his pain with genuine affection. The rhythm is based on alternating dotted notes and fast sixteenth notes, and the melodic progression contains several large intervallic leaps that emphasize the heroine's excitement. In measure 53, the left hand accompaniment begins in the dominant of C, and then a homophonic repetition in sixteenth notes appears, intensifying the dramatic tension. The piano gradually builds emotions until measure 56, where a subtle diminuendo contrasts with the earlier tension. In the first sentence of the libretto, to convince Masetto of her love, Zerlina takes his hand and places it on her chest. At this moment, the melody reaches one of the lowest points in the entire aria, musically emphasizing the intimacy and tenderness of this scene. The temporary calming of dynamics and melody allows for the construction of a strong contrast with the more expressive section that follows. In performance, the sound should be soft and warm, with subtle phrasing and deep, controlled breath support, ensuring stability and resonance in the lower register.

(see Score 4.4)

53

Sen - ti - lo bat - te.re,
Fühlst du es klop - fen hier?

p

Score 4.4

In measure 61, Zerlina introduces a new quality of expression by starting the phrase with a pronounced leap of a fifth, which gives it a more dramatic character. The subsequent sixteenth notes densify the rhythm, making the music more dynamic and intense. At the same time, Mozart employs a contrast in dynamics, which should be clearly emphasized in performance – the initial sharp entry of the phrase should gradually transition into a more

subtle ending, reflecting the change in Zerlina's mood in the libretto. In performance, this phrase should be smooth yet tense, with precise control of the open throat and active soft palate, which will help achieve a fuller and more resonant sound. (see Score 4.5)

59
too .. ca - mi qua, sen - ti - lo bat - te - re, sen - ti - lo bat - te - re,
Das heilt dein Leid! Fühlst du es klopfen hier, fühlst du es klopfen hier?
mf p mf p

Score 4.5

In measure 70, the music takes on an uneasy and intense character as the same text is repeated three times, each with a different melodic line, which builds increasing tension. The melody rises and falls in a wave-like motion, and the dotted notes introduce additional dynamics and fluidity to the phrase. The second repetition of the phrase is more urgent than the first, with an increasingly rich accompaniment that accentuates the emotional growth of tension. Zerlina, with all her vocal strength, calls to her beloved to believe in her, which requires a clear, exciting tone, but also controlled diaphragmatic tension to avoid raising her voice and losing coherence of sound. In measures 73-75, the triple repetition of "qua" should be executed with a clear dynamic contrast (f-p), giving it a provocative, playful tone. Each repetition should be preceded by a breath, which naturally fits the rhetorical style of the phrase. In measure 75, two fermatas create a moment of suspension, preparing emotionally for the climactic point of the aria.

(see Score 4.6)

69
 bat - te-re, sen - ti - lo bat - te-re, toe - ca - mi qua!
 klop - fen hier, füh - le dies klop - fen hier, das heilt dein Leid,
 p tr

Score 4.6

Measures 76–85 form the climax of the piece. This melodic phrase begins with sixteenth notes, and the progression of small seconds enhances the restless and uneasy mood of the character, followed by the introduction of dotted notes that gradually soften the tempo. As the music develops, more repetitions appear, expanding the structure and musical development, which end on the dominant C in a progression that fully illustrates the character’s emotions related to forgiveness and exclamations. Voice shaping at this point should aim for an impressive auditory effect. During the performance of this section, each breath should be full to ensure continuity in the singing. It is crucial to make full use of vocal resonance to strengthen the sound. Simultaneously, keeping the throat and soft palate open and engaged makes the voice sound more dazzling and gives it a more attractive texture. The final sentence should be closed with fervor, as Zerlina passionately convinces Masetto to touch her chest and feel the beating of her heart, which expresses the fullness of her love. By now, Masetto has forgotten the pain of the beating and earlier betrayal, and they both delight in the sweetness and joy of love.

(see Score 4.7)

74
 qua! qua! sen - ti - lo - bat - te - re, — toc - camì qua, qua!
 dein Leid! Fühlst du es klop - fen hier, — fühl - le dies Klop - fen,
 tr.

80
 toc - camì qua, qua! toc - camì qua, — qua! toc - ca - mi qua!
 fühl - le dies Klop - fen, fühl - le dies Klop - fen, dies heilt dein Leid.
 cresc. f.

Score 4.7

The coda (measures 86-104) begins with overlapping chords that smoothly guide the music to its conclusion. Its structure is consistent with the introductory material, creating a compositional frame and providing the aria with a symmetrical layout. In this section, Mozart uses rhythmic and harmonic repetitions, which give the conclusion a character of gentle closure without an abrupt climax. This leaves the aria with a sense of incompleteness, evoking a desire to continue engaging with the character of Zerlina.

In the aria "Vedrai, carino," Mozart uses simple and sincere music to create a gentle and kind image of Zerlina. In performance, the singer should employ a "loving" tone of voice to calm and persuade the wounded Masetto. Although Zerlina is not a central character in the opera, she plays a vital role in the development of the plot. As a secondary character with modest origins, she is also aware of her own worth and confident, making her one of the most expressive and independent heroines in the opera buffa.

When developing my own interpretation of the aria "Vedrai, carino," I followed the principle of capturing Zerlina's character transformation. This aria symbolizes her transition from innocence to maturity. After a series of events, Zerlina realizes that tenderness and gentleness have more power than anger and revenge. Despite her lower social status, she

possesses a strong sense of self-worth. While not the main character in the opera, her role remains crucial to the development of the storyline. Before starting to work on my own performance concept, I familiarized myself with Barbara Bonney's ⁶⁵interpretation of this aria, which provided valuable interpretive insights. Bonney is widely recognized as one of the most outstanding interpreters of Mozart of her generation, and her pure, sweet voice perfectly captures the essence of Zerlina's character. In her interpretation, Zerlina combines playfulness with mature gentleness – the singer not only highlights the character's delicacy but also retains her youthful freshness, faithfully portraying the sixteen- or seventeen-year-old girl. Bonney's voice is characterized by lightness and brilliance, particularly in the middle and high registers, where she reveals warmth and sweetness. This vocal quality gives the aria a sense of comfort and love, allowing the listener to feel Zerlina's deep affection for Masetto. Occasional interval leaps in her performance emphasize the youthful vivacity, while smooth phrasing reveals the character's delicate and tender side. Through precise ornamentation and excellent phrasing control, Bonney demonstrates masterful technical command, making her performance nearly perfect.

By analyzing Barbara Bonney's interpretation, I realized how clarity in diction enhances the expressiveness of the text and emphasizes the musical expression. Her precise phrasing, perfect rhythm control, and excellent mastery of breath and tone were sources of inspiration, helping me deepen my understanding of Zerlina's inner world. In my performance, I incorporated both my own expressive abilities and individual vocal technique, allowing me to create a unique, personal, and hopefully authentic interpretation of this aria.

⁶⁵ Barbara Bonney: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BxfHaimwYs&t=30s> 24/02/2025, 11:49pm.

2.3. The character of Despina from the opera *Così fan tutte*

2.3.1 Creative context

The opera *Così fan tutte* is a story about the collision of ideals with reality and the confrontation of human nature with accepted moral norms. Mozart contrasts the spontaneous, passionate feelings of the characters with rigid social rules, while also revealing the illusory nature of their convictions about the constancy of love. The opera's central theme – the variability of emotions – leads to reflections on the nature of human relationships and challenges conventional ideas about fidelity. Although the opera's plot is based on a potentially bitter intrigue, Mozart softens its cynical message through an extraordinarily romantic and beautiful musical setting. Instead of emphasizing the moral relativism of the libretto, the music imparts a lyrical and graceful character to the protagonists, making their emotional fluctuations seem natural rather than caricatured. In this way, the opera gains complexity – offering both light-hearted comedy and a deeper reflection on the boundaries of loyalty and the nature of human passions. The work provides entertainment through its humorous plot, which is not merely for amusement but also serves as a subtle social commentary – irony and situational absurdity expose human flaws and the ambiguity of moral choices. In this way, Mozart not only hides the dramaturgical imperfections of the libretto but transforms them into the strength of the opera, making it a subtle game between sentimentality and persuasive, intelligent humor.

The musical composition of *Così fan tutte* is also distinctive, often considered the most ensemble-driven among Mozart's operas. In this work, repetitions play a key role – not only in advancing the narrative but also in shaping the psychology of the characters. No other work by Mozart places such significant importance on repetitions: they not only push the plot forward but also highlight the emotional transformations of the characters, their internal dilemmas, and their gradual shifts in beliefs. The orchestration does not merely serve as harmonic backdrop – the wind instruments, especially the clarinets and bassoons, often lead

independent melodic lines, creating subtle counterpoints to the vocal parts. The orchestra's sound is exceptionally varied and contrasting – in lyrical scenes, the warm tones of the woodwinds add softness, while in more dramatic moments, the string instruments and dynamic harmonic shifts emphasize tension. The opera's structure is characterized by clear symmetry. Mozart constructs pairs of characters as contrasting mirror images – Fiordiligi and Dorabella are presented as opposites in how they react to temptation, as are Guglielmo and Ferrando. At the same time, Despina and Don Alfonso serve as plot catalysts, manipulating the characters and forcing them to cross their emotional boundaries. The musical form itself also relies on symmetry: ensembles repeatedly return in modified versions, showing the gradual evolution of relationships between the characters. In this way, Mozart achieves a unique balance between grandeur and comedy, irony and lyricism. While the opera's ending may seem conventionally “happy,” it is a happiness full of irony – the characters do not return to naïve faith in love, but instead accept reality with its unpredictability and human weaknesses. In this sense, *Così fan tutte* becomes not just an opera about infidelity but, above all, about the nature of emotions, illusions, and growing through experience.

2.3.2 Shaping Despina's musical image

Despina, the servant of both heroines in *Così fan tutte*, is a character full of contradictions—vivacious, witty, and bold, yet also sly and cynical. Although she seems to be motivated solely by the desire for gain, her actions are also the result of a pragmatic view of the world, where romantic illusions have no place. Lured by money, she helps Don Alfonso persuade the two lovers to abandon the ideal of fidelity and enjoy the present moment. However, her cynicism is not born of calculation but of the belief that love is merely a game, one in which cunning and the ability to adapt to situations are what matter most. Mozart's originality lies in his masterful use of various compositional techniques to convey the versatility of Despina. Depending on the situation, she adopts different roles—such as a chambermaid, a "witch" healing soldiers, and a false notary—each of these roles having its own musical characteristics and requiring different vocal interpretations. In her arias, Mozart

uses fast, light phrases filled with ornaments and lively rhythms, emphasizing her wit and energy. In parody scenes, her melodic line becomes more caricatured, which enhances the comedic effect. To create a convincing portrayal of this character, the singer must possess not only the appropriate vocal flexibility but also the ability to quickly change the timbre of her voice, the pace of phrasing, and the style of singing. This is not a technically demanding role in a virtuosic sense, but it does require exceptional skill in expression and dynamics to capture the diverse personality of Despina. Although Despina is a secondary character, she plays a crucial role as a catalyst for events—her manipulations, more than Don Alfonso's intrigues, lead the heroines to cross their emotional boundaries. Her presence not only pushes the plot forward but also lends an ironic tone to the opera—she is the only character who seems to understand the true nature of the world and people from the outset. Her mockery of the ideal of fidelity becomes the central point of the opera. In this way, Despina not only provides comic relief but also gives the opera philosophical depth, raising questions about whether love is an emotion or rather a social convention whose meaning depends on the circumstances.

The aria "In uomini, in soldati," appears in Act I, Scene 9. Don Alfonso, deliberately provoking the young officers Ferrando and Guglielmo, undermines their belief in the fidelity of their fiancées, suggesting that all women are equally fickle and prone to betrayal. None of the young men believe his words, but, stirred by Don Alfonso, they decide to put their beloveds to the test. In reality, however, their "experiment" is a cleverly planned scheme, with Don Alfonso setting the rules of the game and leading them to a predetermined conclusion. Knowing he needs an ally, Don Alfonso bribes Despina, the servant of Fiordiligi and Dorabella, to help manipulate their emotions and convince them to yield to the new "suitors." Despina, initially distrustful, accepts the offer both for the money and because of her belief that men are untrustworthy and women should think first and foremost of themselves. At this moment, Despina sings "In uomini, in soldati," as she watches her mistresses despair over the "departure" of their lovers. She does not attempt to comfort them, but openly mocks their naivety, ridiculing their blind faith in romantic love and the fidelity of men. This is one of the most ironic moments of the opera—Despina, a woman of lower social status, delivers the

most direct and bold opinion on male-female relationships, completely undermining the ideal of the faithful, submissive woman. Her words, though cynical, also contain a perverse wisdom—Despina is the only one advising the women to think of themselves rather than submitting to social expectations and living in illusions. She encourages them to enjoy life and embrace their freedom, instead of passively waiting for their lovers' return. From a dramaturgical perspective, this aria is one of the key turning points of the plot—it is the first moment in which Fiordiligi and Dorabella begin to confront the idea that their worldview might be flawed. Although they initially reject Despina's words, it is her stance that sets the stage for the subsequent events, gradually influencing their decisions and transformations.

"Una donna a quindici anni," Despina's second aria, appears in Act II, Scene 1, and plays a crucial role in the entire opera. This is the moment when Fiordiligi and Dorabella, under Despina's persuasion, begin to seriously consider abandoning their former beliefs about love. If in "In uomini, in soldati" Despina only mocked their naivety, here she takes it a step further—not only questioning their ideals but instructing them on how to take control of their relationships with men. Although Despina is a servant, in this scene, she dominates the aristocratic ladies—her understanding of human relationships surpasses their bookish ideals of fidelity and romantic love. She no longer speaks of love as an emotion but as a game in which the woman should be the one in control. This is a subversive stance, as her words combine cynicism with truth—the world that Despina presents is that of opera buffa, where cunning and adaptability allow survival, not rigid moral codes. The libretto suggests that Despina is an experienced person in matters of love, encouraging the heroines to be "like queens"—confident, aware of their worth, and independent in their relationships with men. This is a radical shift compared to the previous ideals of Fiordiligi and Dorabella, who until now believed in love as something constant and unchanging. Musically, Mozart highlights Despina's playful, energetic character through light, dance-like rhythms, short phrases, and dynamic changes in articulation. The aria is fast and full of ornamentation, reflecting her quick wit and ability to influence others. Despite its simplicity, the piece has sophisticated dramaturgy—each phrase brings Fiordiligi and Dorabella closer to changing their outlook,

gradually deconstructing their previous worldview. Though the aria lasts only four minutes, it contains a complete, self-contained lecture on emotional independence and the ability to play the love game. In this way, Despina becomes not just the comic servant but also a symbol of a pragmatic approach to life—Mozart makes her the voice of reason in the world of operatic illusion.

2.3.3 Analysis of the Despina arias recorded on the author's album

2.3.3.1 Despina's aria “In uomini, in soldati” from the first act of the opera *Così fan tutte*

Translation of words :

<i>In uomini, in soldati</i>	In men, in soldiers
<i>Sperare fedeltà?</i>	
<i>Non vi fate sentir, per carità!</i>	Hope for fidelity?
<i>Di pasta simile, son tutti quanti:</i>	Do not let yourselves be heard, for goodness' sake!
<i>Le fronde mobili, l'aure incostanti</i>	They are all made of the same stuff:
<i>Han più degli uomini stabilità.</i>	The moving leaves, the inconstant breezes
<i>Mentite lagrime, fallaci sguardi,</i>	They have more stability than men.
<i>voci ingannevoli, vezzi bugiardi,</i>	Lying tears, deceptive glances,
<i>son le primarie lor qualità.</i>	deceitful voices, lying charms,
<i>In noi non amano che il lor diletto,</i>	are their primary qualities.
<i>Poi ci dispregiano, neganci affetto,</i>	In us they love only their delight,
<i>Né val da' barbari chieder pietà.</i>	Then they despise us, deny us affection,
<i>Paghiam; o femmine, d'ugual moneta</i>	Nor is it worth asking for pity from barbarians.
<i>Questa malefica razza indiscreta;</i>	Let us pay, oh women, with the same coin
<i>Amiam per comodo, per vanità!</i>	This evil indiscreet race;

Analysis of the work:

Time of composition: 1790

Key: F major - C major - F major.

Metre: 2/4 , 6/8

Tempo: *Allegretto*

Form: A B B'

Part	A	B	B'
Bar	1-25	26-58	59-93
Tone	F major	C major- F major	F major

The aria is structured around a short musical motif that is subsequently developed, transformed, and repeated, with regular phrasing. It is primarily written in a homophonic style, with select sections employing counterpoint (polyphony). The aria is divided into three parts, comprehensively illustrating the characterization of Despina—a clever, vivacious, and witty maid.

Section A (mm. 1–25) is a recitative. The composer employs 2/4 meter to accentuate the declamatory vocal style. Despina’s bold, life-experienced persona is reflected here as she directly voices her skepticism toward men and her frank opinions about the two sisters. Mozart intentionally incorporates frequent pauses to mirror Despina’s colloquial speech, evoking a sense of contemplative irony. The vocal delivery should adopt a conversational tone, with technical refinement aimed at achieving naturalism akin to everyday dialogue. In traditional stagings, the aria unfolds in a salon where Despina—for instance, mopping the floor—interacts with her two mistresses, who are grieving their fiancés’ absence. The opening line, “In uomini, in soldati,” should be sung with the performer’s gaze alternating between the

two ladies, emphasizing dialogue. Notably, the vocal melody employs an anacrusis, while dotted rhythms on strong beats underscore the gravity of her assertions. The interpretation must highlight a dismissive, ironic tone, mocking both the women’s naivety and men’s infidelity .(see Score 5.1)

Allegretto

In uo - mi - ni, in sol -
Bei - Män - ner volk, bei - sol -

p

Score 5.1

The phrase “sperare fedeltà” marks a psychological shift in the character: her tone becomes more resolute and ironic. The pause here allows the singer a moment to prepare for the mood transition, heightening the phrase’s dramatic impact. Despina adopts a rhetorical questioning tone, then answers herself as if mocking her own words, emphasizing her skepticism toward male fidelity. The “r” in “rare” should be articulated with a crisp, light, and clear sound (precise enunciation). Despina then positions herself between the two sisters, reiterating the question “In uomini sperare fedeltà” with heightened emphasis. Mozart introduces sixteenth-note triplets to amplify her decisiveness, infusing the phrase with a dynamic, assertive rhythm. Care must be taken to articulate the “l” in “del” distinctly, avoiding abbreviation or omission despite the rapid tempo .(see Score 5.2)

5

da - ti spe - ra - re fe - del -
da - ten suchi lhr cin treu - es

p

Score 5.2

In measures 12–21, recurring melodic phrases—slightly modified to align with the text—emphasize the repetition of the word “fedeltà.” This section articulates Despina’s personal convictions and should be delivered in a confident, persuasive tone. Breath control is critical: inhalations must align with phrasing to ensure sonic fluency and stability. Vocal production should prioritize head resonance placement, mitigating intonation instability caused by frequent pitch shifts (see Score 5.3).

The image shows two systems of a musical score. The first system, labeled with a measure number '11' in a box, contains a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: 'tà? Herz? in uo - mi - ni spe - ra - re fe - del - tà? bei Män - nem su - chet Ihr ein treu - es Herz?'. The piano accompaniment features a prominent triplet pattern in the right hand. The second system, labeled with a measure number '16' in a box, continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: 'in sol - da - ti spe - ra - re fe - del - tà, — fe - del - tà fe - del - Bei Sol - da - ten sucht Ihr ein treu - es Herz, ein treu - es Herz, ein treu - es'. The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns and includes a dynamic marking 'mf'.

Score 5.3

Measures 21–25 constitute the closing phrase of the recitative. The eighth-note rest marked with a fermata grants the performer interpretive freedom—its duration may be extended to accentuate the articulated emotion. To heighten the ironic undertone, Despina may conclude the recitative with a hearty, resonant laugh, embodying her conviction of her mistresses’ absurd behavior. The laughter must sound organic, emerging naturally from the character rather than feeling contrived. Breath control is critical: after inhalation, the larynx must remain stable, with breath drawn in a higher articulatory position to ensure smooth, natural airflow. The appearance of two triplets in “non vi fate sentir, per carità” anticipates the 6/8 meter of the aria’s ensuing section. The use of sequential compositional technique underscores the resoluteness of Despina’s assertions, while dense sixteenth-note passages

accelerate her delivery. This phrase should be sung with an air of mystery, rendered in a half-voice or near-whisper to subtly reveal her true disdain for men. The singer’s eyes must remain animated and expressive, with facial gestures conveying the character’s playful mockery and dismissiveness. To maintain cohesive phrasing, all words should be articulated with consistent vocal positioning, ensuring uniformity in the melodic line. The “half-spoken, half-sung” technique is pivotal here, accentuating Despina’s sly derision toward the naive ladies while preserving restrained yet ironic expression (see Score 5.4).

21

tà Non vi fa - te sen - tir, per ca - ri - tà! non vi fa - te sen - tir, per ca - ri -
Herz? Ach, das las - set doch ja nur niemand hö - ren, ach, das las - set doch ja nur niemand

p

Score 5.4

Section B (mm. 26–58) constitutes the aria’s core, integrating both vocal and dramatic dimensions. As Despina repeatedly persuades the sisters of men’s untrustworthiness, Mozart shifts the meter from 2/4 to 6/8, imparting a dance-like fluidity to the phrase. The music becomes light, buoyant, and spirited, with waltz-rhythm accompaniment accentuating Despina’s playful irony. The libretto’s text and rhythmic density intensify, amplifying vocal dramaturgy and breath demands—this technically challenging passage requires a bright, vigorous tone that sways with the music. Dynamic contrasts and vocal modulation must be sharply delineated to convey Despina’s humorous yet persuasive demeanor. The phrase “Di pasta simile son tutti quanti” begins mid-measure, lending it rhythmic lightness and a seamless musical entry. Mozart employs dotted eighth-note rhythms on strong beats to reinforce the pulsating, dance-like character. Accentuating “simile” and “quanti” is critical, as it underscores both the composer’s intended rhythmic emphasis and Despina’s capricious

mockery. Double consonants in “tutti” demand precise articulation, particularly for Mandarin-speaking vocalists, for whom this may pose a phonetic challenge. (see Score 5.5)

25 *Allegretto*

tà! Di pasta si - mi-le son tut - ti quan - ti, son tutti
 hō-ren! Al - le aus gleichem stoff sind die - se Män - ner, sind die - se

Allegretto

p

Score 5.5

The text “le fronde mobili, l’aure incostanti, han più degli umini stabilità” features three repetitions of the same melodic phrase, reinforcing the rhetorical force of Despina’s argument. The singer must prioritize intonational precision, particularly in executing octave leaps. Breath support should originate from deep abdominal engagement, anchored at the waistline, to sustain dynamic articulation and express Despina’s shifting emotions. Transitions between vocal registers must achieve timbre uniformity, with subtle phrasing and clear, dynamic text enunciation. The performance should remain lively and natural, conveying Despina’s sarcastic perspective on men while preserving interpretive fluidity and lightness (see Score 5.6).

30

quan - ti, le fronde mo - bi - li l'aure inco - stan - ti han più de - gliuo - mi - ni sta - bi - li -
 Män - ner, flat - terndes Es - penlaub, weechseln - de Win - de, die sind le - stän - di - ger, treu - er als

mf *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

Score 5.6

In measure 34, a half cadence (V) appears—transitioning from F major to C major—introducing musical tension before the next phrase. While performing measures

34-37, the singer should consciously use facial expressions to emphasize the rhetorical nature of the phrase. The first half of the sentence should be delivered with a "tearful" facial expression, directed toward the older sister, suggesting ironic sympathy. The second half of the phrase is aimed at the younger sister, but delivered with a tone of false familiarity, emphasizing Despina's mocking nature. Another crucial element affecting the quality of the performance is diction. The singer must ensure clear articulation of the beginnings of words, such as in the word "mentite," as well as the realization of all consonants in consonantal clusters, like in the syllable "-gri-". (see Score 5.7).

34

tū. Men - ti - te la - gri - me, fal - la - ci sguar - di,
 sic. Lū - gen - de Irā - nen, giesse - n - de Bih - ke,

p

Score 5.7

As the melody progresses and the register rises in measures 38-46, it is important to convey Despina's increasingly agitated emotions through dynamic flexibility. The singer should focus on having sufficient breath support and resonance in the head voice in the higher range, while maintaining a stable laryngeal position. Special attention should also be paid to the pronunciation of certain words with the "r" consonant. Double consonants, like in "vezzi" (m. 39), require precise articulation. When singing these, there should be a subtle resistance in the air in the mouth, which enhances phonetic clarity and expression (see Score 5.8).

38
vo - cingun - ne - vu - li, vez - zi bu - giar - di son te pri - ma - rie
schmeicheln - de Wir - te und bescheit - de Täk - ke, all the - se Käu - ste

42
lor qua - li - tà, son te pri - ma - rie lor qua - li - tà. In noi non
ver - steh'n sie gut, all the - se Kö - ste ver - steh'n sie gut. Sie the - ben

Score 5.8

In measure 55, in the phrase "chieder pietà," attention should be given to the eighth-note pause, which should be realized with continuity of the phrase by applying a method of stopping the melodic execution without breaking the breath support. In measure 57, during the repetition of "chieder pietà", the syllable "chie" should be ornamented with a mordent, which enriches the sound and adds vocal lightness. The fermata on "der" followed by a seven-step descent to "pie" creates a change in the color of the music, shifting from the bright, happy major hues to the soft, delicate minor tones. While singing this phrase, no breath should be taken to maintain a more balanced mood for a longer period. The vocal position must remain consistent to support continuous diaphragmatic support, a relaxed jaw, and stability of the larynx, avoiding any disruption when realizing the syllable "pie". In the stage interpretation, the gesture of a woman praying for a man could add emotional depth to the phrase (see Score 5.9).

55
chie - der pie - tà, chie - der pie - tà.
Mit - lei - den fern, Mit - lei - den - fern,

Score 5.9

Section B' (m. 59-93) returns to the key of F major, emphasizing a bright, joyful, and hopeful mood. Despina regains her freedom and boldly expresses her beliefs, telling the sisters—her employers—that they should repay men in kind and, most importantly, love themselves. This section repeats the theme from part B twice, but in a more vivid and expressive form. The final measures feature the highest notes of the piece, which require precise control of vocal technique to naturally convey Despina's confidence and boldness. When performing the phrase “paghiam o femmine, d'ugual moneta, questa malefica razza indiscreta,” the singer must adopt a more pronounced attitude than before to express contempt for men. This fragment should convey Despina's determination, provocatively suggesting that women should keep men in check (see Score 5.10).



The image shows a musical score for Score 5.10. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The piano accompaniment is written in two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a grand staff. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some trills and ornaments. The tempo is indicated as 'Allegretto'.

60

pag hia mo fem - mine, d'ug ual mo - ne - ta que - sta ma - le - fi - ca razza indi -
Mit gleicher Mün - se lasst uns be - sah - len die - sen Ab - scheu - lichen all' die - se

Score 5.10

Starting from measure 69, maintaining the prescribed tempo becomes more challenging due to the introduction of trills, both on strong and weak beats. Their presence adds flexibility and lightness to the music, emphasizing Despina's playful and cheeky character. The ornamentation should be executed with lightness and mischievousness, aligning with the comedic tone of the scene. The gradual intensification of the mood suggests that Despina becomes more absorbed in her triumphant monologue, increasingly indulging in a sense of superiority and satisfaction. This transformation in her character should be reflected vocally through expressive dynamics and a heightened sense of confidence (see Score 5.11).

69

amiam per co - mo - do, per va - ni - tà, la ra la,
 Ja, nur aus Ei - tel - keit, ja, me aus Spass! La ra la,

73

la ra la, la ra la la, amiam per co - modo, per va - ni - tà,
 la ra la, la ra la la, ja nur aus Ei telkeit, ja nur sum Spass!

Score 5.11

Section C (mm. 59–end) concludes the aria with three repetitions of the same text and melody, imposing rhythmic regularity and amplifying the dramatic resolution. Breath control must be meticulously calibrated to ensure phrase continuity—inhalations should be swift and strategically timed to avoid disrupting the vocal line. On the sustained *a*² (syllable “ta”), stable breath support rooted in diaphragmatic engagement is essential to prevent tension and loss of tonal control. Rapid, shallow breathing risks destabilizing the phrase; instead, deep abdominal breathing with an open throat and relaxed body facilitates both emotional and technical culmination. Acoustic resonance should be focused in the oral cavity, ensuring clarity and projection. In crafting my interpretative approach to “In uomini, in soldati,” I sought to encapsulate Despina’s duality: industrious and courageous yet cunning and witty, armed with sharp retorts to dismantle any doubts. Though a secondary character, Despina serves as a narrative linchpin—her vivacious presence and manipulative wit propel the opera’s dramatic momentum, her commentary critically shaping onstage dynamics.

Prior to developing my own interpretation, I studied performances by Cecilia Bartoli and Danielle De Niese, which offered invaluable insights. Bartoli’s Despina brims with energetic

expressivity and subtle playfulness. Her voice, marked by power and precision, combines gentle tonal warmth with crystalline articulation, lending phrases exceptional plasticity and textural nuance. Her melodic shaping, accent modulation, and personalized phrasing infuse each note with character. Effortless breath management underpins her signature stable, high vocal placement. Additionally, her sly, humorous facial expressions amplify the aria's sarcasm, highlighting Despina's skepticism toward the sisters' faith in their fiancés' fidelity.⁶⁶

Danielle De Niese, by contrast, delivered a dynamic yet distinct interpretation. Her agile, richly hued voice and broad dynamic palette endowed Despina with buoyancy and audacity. Unlike Bartoli, De Niese adopted a declarative rather than rhetorical approach, portraying Despina as resolute and unyielding. Her staging choices—such as dancing atop a bench during the climax—underscored the character's exhilaration and conviction that women should prioritize self-love over male dependency. Her passionate delivery and irrepressible stage energy rendered Despina vibrantly alive, brimming with infectious confidence.⁶⁷

In synthesizing these influences, I integrated Bartoli's breath control and phrasing precision—enabling dynamic flexibility and accentual nuance—with De Niese's spontaneity and theatrical verve, which illuminate Despina's playful yet resolute nature. My interpretation thus merges these approaches while asserting a unique vision, informed by my vocal technique and expressive individuality. This fusion honors Despina's complexity, balancing technical rigor with the vivacity demanded by Mozart's incisive social critique.

⁶⁶ Cecilia Bartoli video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFs--mTNq7I> 20/02/0205, 02:16pm.

⁶⁷ Danielle De Niese video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltnk3LmUJZo&t=59s> 20/02/0205, 02:17pm

2.3.3.2 Despina's aria “Una donna a quindici anni” from the second act of the opera *Così fan tutte*

fan tutte

Translation of the libretto:

<i>Una donna a quindici anni</i>	A woman at fifteen
<i>dèe saper ogni gran moda,</i>	must know every great fashion,
<i>dove il diavolo ha la coda,</i>	where the devil has his tail,
<i>cosa è bene e mal cos'è.</i>	what is good and what is bad.
<i>Dèe saper le maliziette</i>	She must know the little tricks
<i>che innamorano gli amanti,</i>	that make lovers fall in love,
<i>finger riso, finger pianti,</i>	pretend to laugh, pretend to cry,
<i>inventar i bei perché.</i>	invent the beautiful whys.
<i>Dèe in un momento dar retta a cento,</i>	She must in a moment listen to a hundred,
<i>colle pupille parlar con mille,</i>	with her eyes speak to a thousand,
<i>dar speme a tutti, sien belli o brutti.</i>	give hope to everyone, whether they are beautiful or ugly.
<i>saper nascondersi, senza confondersi.</i>	know how to hide, without getting confused.
<i>senza arrossire, saper mentire.</i>	without blushing, know how to lie.
<i>E, qual regina dall'alto soglio,</i>	And, like a queen on a high throne,
<i>col posso e voglio farsi ubbidir.</i>	with this I can and want to make myself obeyed.
<i>Par ch'abbian gusto di tal dottrina.</i>	It seems that they have a taste for such doctrine.
<i>Viva Despina che sa servir!</i>	Long live Despina who knows how to serve!

Analysis of the work:

Time of composition: 1787

Key: G major - D major - G major.

Metre: 6/8

Tempo: *Andante, Allegretto*

Form: A B A'

Part	A	B	A'
Bar	1-21	22-52	53-99
Tone	G major	D major –G major	D major

Section A (mm. 1–9) introduces the aria with a gentle, flowing *Andante* tempo. Despina presents her argument calmly yet with innate charm, gradually captivating her mistresses’ attention. The sequence in mm. 6–9, embellished with grace notes, amplifies the phrase’s lightness and spontaneity, underscoring Despina’s playful cunning. As a servant manipulating facts to sway her employers, her vocal delivery must balance gentleness with slyness. The tone should be delicate yet nuanced, reflecting her eloquence and the underlying social tension arising from class disparity. The aria’s opening phrase begins with an anacrusis, seamlessly leading into the principal motif. Vocal timbre should remain unforced and graceful, with moderate dynamics preserving natural phrasing. The singer’s gaze should alternate between the sisters, while gestures and facial expressions convey subtle caution, emphasizing her manipulative intent. Note the rhythmic contrast in mm. 2–3, where dotted eighth-note patterns create momentum. The sequential figuration in mm. 6–9, punctuated by acciaccaturas, injects whimsy, mirroring Despina’s vivacious humor. The vocal line demands lightness and flexibility, avoiding excessive legato to honor Classical stylistic rigor. The syllable “dia-” in

“diavolo” requires full dynamic thrust, achieved through immediate diaphragmatic engagement, while the “co-” in “coda” necessitates sustained high vocal placement, with mood modulated through controlled tension or relaxation. From m. 9, the accompaniment accelerates markedly, shifting from moderate eighth notes to sixteenth-note passages, illustrating Despina’s mounting fervor. (see Score 6.1)

Andante

Despina

U - na don - na a quin - di - ci an - ni dèe sa - per o - gni gran

Piano

f *p*

5

mo - da: do - ve dia - vo - lo ha la co - da, co - sa è be - ne, e mal co -

Score 6.1

In the phrase “finger riso, finger pianti,” Mozart introduces a characteristic sixth interval that enhances the comic effect of the phrase and underscores Despina’s cunning nature. The syllables “so” and “ti,” in the words “riso” and “pianti,” are placed on the high g^2 , but they do not fall on the strong beats of the measure. This requires the singer to exercise precise control over dynamics and phrasing. The execution should be light, without over-extending the eighth notes. In the stage interpretation, during “riso,” Despina could open her hands and smile broadly to emphasize the mockery, while during “pianti,” a gesture of placing hands on her chest in a feigned cry would be sufficient. The exaggerated confidence and ironic affectation in this scene are crucial to her expression, so gestures and facial expressions should be clear, yet not overdone. This is central to her comedic portrayal (see Score 6.2).

12

mo - ra - no — gli a - man - ti: fin - ger ri - so, fin - ger pian - ti, in - ven -

Score 6.2

In section B (measures 22-52), the tempo changes to *Allegretto*, contrasting with the earlier *Andante* and bringing a lighter, more energetic feel to the phrase. Mozart employs a classic tonal pattern, shifting the main tonality from G major to D major. His style is characterized by a melody based on simple scales, open chords, and frequent rhythmic and melodic repetitions, which lend a natural fluidity to the phrase. There are also colorful sequential modulations that enrich the harmony. Measures 22-27 introduce subtle changes compared to the first five measures of section A—the music gains more vivacity, and the sudden acceleration of the rhythm and intensification of the figurations capture the attention of the listening sisters. In measures 22-23, Mozart introduces harmonic interludes, featuring a chromatic raise from *C* to *C#*, preparing for the eventual transition to the dominant key (D major). At this point, the singer should quickly shift her mood to a more excited one, straighten her posture, lift her chest and head, and confidently present her unrestrained views on love. In the linguistic layer, double consonants should be articulated precisely to avoid unclear diction at the faster tempo. The performance should be dynamic and free, but without "swallowing" notes, ensuring that the phrase remains clear and communicative (see Score 6.3).

24

men - to dar ret-ta a cen - to, col - le pu - pil - le par-lar con mil - le,

Score 6.3

From measure 35, Mozart introduces harmonic tension by combining the melodic lead within the dominant of D major with its harmonic support, emphasizing the dramatic nature of this section. This technique adds dynamism and drama, increasing the focus on Despina's argument against her mistresses. The harmonic resolution from D major to A major, through subtle voice-leading and harmonic differentiation, can be seen as a foreshadowing of heterophonic techniques that will become more pronounced in later musical periods. Given the strength of this phrase, the performance requires confidence and exaggerated pride—the singer should perform with refined expression, a strong voice, and more energetic movements. In measure 36, two fermatas appear, corresponding to rhetorical pauses in Despina's speech. The repetitions at this point should be treated with variation. The first phrase, at a higher pitch, should be performed with excitement and a strong sense of proclamation. The second phrase, at a lower pitch, serves as a confirmation of the first, so it should be executed with greater calmness and self-assurance (see Score 6.4).

The image displays a musical score for Score 6.4, consisting of two systems. Each system includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are in Italian. The first system (measures 35-38) contains the lyrics: "ti - re, sa - per - men - ti - re, e qual re - gi - na dal - l' al - to so - glio col pos - so e". The second system (measures 39-42) contains the lyrics: "vo - glio far - si ub - bi - dir, e qual re -". The piano accompaniment features dynamic markings of *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). The vocal line includes various rhythmic values and phrasing slurs.

Score 6.4

In section A' (measures 53-99), Mozart employs a cyclical melodic pattern—in measures 59-65, the vocal line oscillates around the intervals $b^1 - d^1 - b^1 - d^2$, and the rhythm remains consistent and regular. In the second phrase, the accent is emphasized by adding dotted rhythmic values, making the melody sound more open and dynamic. In measures 66-79, three melodic variants appear, repeating Despina's main idea—that a woman should be powerful and admired like an empress. In measures 66-70, the melody begins on d^2 , gradually rising to g^2 , then falls to b^1 , leading to a melodic descent. Measures 71-74 feature a brief interlude that introduces a repetition of the last three sentences of the phrase, strengthening the message. In measures 75-79, the melody revolves around the following notes: b^1 , d^2 , g^2 , e^2 , c^2 . Repeated rhythmic structures are followed by descending intervals of a third or an octave. The upward leaps also increase in range, and the last two notes are extended, suggesting affirmation. The mood intensifies step by step between the three phrases, becoming more excited, reflecting Despina's pride and self-satisfaction with her conception of love. When transitioning from high to low notes, the singer should actively use breath support, avoiding tension in the throat. High notes must be controlled to prevent forced sound and strain on the vocal cords. Subtle mood shifts should lead to further development of the drama, preparing the stage for the next section. (see Score 6.5).

65
ti - re, sa - per men ti - re, e qual re - gi - na dal - l'al - to so - glio col pos - so e

69
vo - glio dar - si ub - bi - dir, e qual re - gi - na col pos - so e

73
vo - glio far - si ub - bi - dir, e qual re - gi - na dal - l'al - to

76
so - glio col pos - so e vo - glio, col pos - so e vo - glio,

Score 6.5

In measures 80-87, Mozart introduces the culmination of the aria—the vocal melody, now set in dotted quarter notes, is supported by rich harmonic accompaniment with trills, which adds a new layer of drama and expression to the phrase. This segment represents the emotional peak, where Despina delivers her triumphant manifesto. In the stage interpretation, the singer should express pride and confidence, adopting a regal posture with clear, expressive gestures. After a brief moment of rest in measure 88 (general pause), the coda (measures 89-99) follows, serving as a variation of the themes from measures 22-27. Here, Mozart emphasizes tonality, and the repeated dominant triad at the end reinforces a sense of

formal rigor and discipline. The melody in the coda gradually fades, transitioning from excitement to calm, and is affirmatively closed in the final two measures. The phrase "che sa servir" is repeated five times, each repetition carrying a different emotion. The variation in expression, enriching the performance, largely depends on the director's vision and the singer's creativity. Due to the register of this section (upper middle), controlling breath pauses is essential— their placement should align with the singer's capabilities. In measure 98, a special technique is used (as per performance tradition, though not notated in the score). This general pause halts the repeated mantra-like phrase "che sa servir" for a moment, allowing it to return with a new emotional color.

Before preparing to perform this aria, I watched Martina Janková's interpretation, which greatly impressed me. Her Despina is witty, mischievous, and charming, capturing the lightness and cunning of the character perfectly.⁶⁸ In her interpretation, the flexibility of her voice, controlled breathing, and vibrant stage presence stand out. Janková skillfully differentiates the dynamics between strong and soft passages, adjusting her interpretation to the reactions of her stage partners. The varying tempos, from slow to fast, make the aria demand rhythmic precision. Janková executed this with excellent phrasing sensitivity, ensuring freedom and naturalness in her singing. Her performance was full of movement and theatrical energy, making Despina a highly colorful and vivid character. In developing my own interpretation of this aria, I followed this approach, enriching it and adapting it to my understanding of the character, my emotionality, and cultural references from my native culture, layering them onto the popular European archetype of this character.

⁶⁸ Martiny Jakovej video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0v9Bcd4XAI> 01/02/2025, 11:02am

Chapter III Characters of lower-class women in Chinese operas

3.1. Xi'er from the opera *White-haired Girl* (Bai mao nü 白毛女).

3.1.1 Creative context

The White-Haired Girl (Bai mao nü 白毛女) is the first Chinese opera⁶⁹ composed by Ma Ke, Zhang Lu, Chen Zi, Qu Wei, Li Huanzhi, Liu Chi, and Xiang Yu Shu. The work constitutes an organic fusion of Western opera and Chinese folk art, particularly traditional *Chinese opera* (戏曲). From a musical composition perspective, drawing on the experience of musical dramaturgy in Western operas, the dramatic structure is presented through the interweaving of themes, employing a combination of the *banqiang* (板腔) style and the *lianquti* (联曲体) structure from traditional Chinese opera, along with Western harmony and thematic-motivic techniques. This approach enables rich variations in contrast and the free combination of different styles (板式), thereby revealing the complex psychological and emotional layers of the characters, ultimately achieving dramaturgical depth. The White-Haired Girl is a successful attempt at integrating diverse folk styles into a single opera. The work incorporates folk music from various provinces, including Hebei (河北), Shaanxi (陕西), and Shanxi (山西). Although these provinces are all located in the northern part of the country, their folk music styles differ significantly. Therefore, the composer used the Hebei folk song "Little Cabbage" (Xiao baicai 小白菜) as the musical theme, processing various musical styles based on it. As a result, the musical style of The White-Haired Girl does not appear monotonous.⁷⁰ This approach introduced a new vocal performance style in Chinese opera, a fusion of Chinese and Western vocal techniques, incorporating bel canto breath control methods, the timbre of Chinese folk singing, and the rhythmic cadence of *yunqiang*

⁶⁹ In the sense of the genre modeled after Western opera, often referred to as "new opera." It represents the first successful attempt at synthesizing Chinese and Western operatic traditions.

⁷⁰ The musical theme "Xiao baicai" (小白菜) from Hebei was transformed through harmonic and rhythmic variations, which not only helped avoid monotony but also emphasized its connections to folk culture.

(韵腔)⁷¹ in traditional Chinese opera. The most significant advancements in this opera pertain to two key aspects. First, there is a strong emphasis on capturing and systematically structuring character portrayal using traditional European compositional methods, meaning that attention is given to the typicality of character representation in opera. Second, the concept of composing music with Chinese traditional operatic culture and national characteristics has become a fundamental guideline for Chinese operatic creation.

3.1.2 Shaping the musical image of Xi'er

The opera *The White-Haired Girl* tells the story of Xi'er, the daughter of a peasant, belonging to the lowest social class in China at that time. Unable to endure the oppression and abuse of the landowner, she fled to the mountains, living in isolation, surviving on wild fruits and hunted animals, with her hair turning white due to the hardships of life. It was only the communist revolution that ultimately brought her salvation. Through the tragic life of Xi'er, the work reflects the historical reality of oppression in feudal Chinese society and the struggle of women from the lower classes to break free from their servile status, achieve self-liberation, and reclaim a new life. This opera consists of five acts. Xi'er is portrayed as a seventeen-year-old innocent girl from a rural household. Her father, Yang Bailao (杨白劳), had incurred a debt to the landowner Huang Shiren (黄世仁). Unable to repay it, he was forced to sign a contract selling his daughter. Feeling guilty towards Xi'er, he poisons himself on Chinese New Year's Eve after she has fallen asleep and dies on his way to the Huang family's house. The next day, the accountant Mu Zhiren (穆仁智) delivers the contract to Xi'er, compelling her to go to the Huang household. Upon her arrival, she is first tormented by Huang's mother and later raped by Huang Shiren. Tormented by her suffering, Xi'er attempts to take her own life but is saved by the servant Zhang Er, who helps her escape from the Huang household. After fleeing, Xi'er is pursued by Huang Shiren and has nowhere to go.

⁷¹ *Yunqiang* (韵腔) – The rhythmic melody in Chinese opera refers to the melodic line and rhythm used in operatic performances to express emotions and narrate the plot. There are various types of rhythmic melodies, each characterized by unique features depending on the genre of Chinese opera.
<https://baike.baidu.com/item/戏曲唱腔/10058625> 22/03/2025, 4:00pm.

Ultimately, she seeks refuge in the depths of the mountains, where she lives in a cave for three years. During this period, with no food of her own, she survives on offerings from the faithful at a nearby temple. This isolated existence turns her into a legendary figure among the villagers, known as the White-Haired Girl. Three years earlier, Xi'er's beloved, Da Chun, who had unsuccessfully tried to rescue her, joined the Liberation Army. Now, after three years, he returns with the army to his native village. He eventually finds Xi'er in her mountain refuge. In the end, the crimes of Huang Shiren and Mu Zhiren are exposed, and the opera concludes with the triumphant liberation of the people.

In the opera *The White-Haired Girl*, the protagonist Xi'er undergoes four distinct life experiences. In the first part, she is portrayed as a naive and kind-hearted peasant girl, symbolizing her helplessness in the face of feudal oppression. In the second part, she becomes a servant in the Huang household, where she begins to develop an awareness of her plight and a passive sense of resistance. In the third part, she transforms into a bitter and vengeful victim of feudal cruelty, appearing as a wild specter from the mountains—a white-haired, oppressed exile. Finally, in the fourth part, she is granted a new life through social revolution, becoming part of a new society. The most dramatic conflicts occur in the first and third stages.

In the first act of *The White-Haired Girl*, Xi'er sings the aria “The North Wind Blows” (*Bei feng chui* 北风吹), whose musical material originates from local folk songs of Hebei Province, including *Little Cabbage* (*Xiao baicai* 小白菜) and *The Legend of Qingyang* (*Qingyang zhuan* 青羊传)⁷². The scene takes place on a snowy New Year's Eve. Xi'er prepares a meal, hoping for her father's return, as he is hiding in the mountains. Despite the cold and snowy night, she eagerly anticipates the arrival of *the Chinese New Year*⁷³ which traditionally brings a sudden warming of the weather. However, as she does not know when her father will return, she also feels somewhat lost. This part of the aria should convey Xi'er's

⁷² Ju Qihong, Zhi Yan, *Essence of Chinese Opera and Musical Arias: Folk Singing Techniques* (中国歌剧音乐剧唱段精粹·民族唱法卷) [M], Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House (安徽文艺出版社), 2014, p. 36

⁷³ *Chinese New Year* (*Chūnjié*), also known as Lunar New Year or the Spring Festival, is one of the most important traditional holidays in China. It usually falls in January or February, depending on the lunar calendar, marking the beginning of a new year according to this system.
<https://baike.baidu.com/item/春节/136876> 22/03/2025. 3:50pm.

innocence while simultaneously expressing her inner joy, anticipation, and eventual disappointment. The vocal performance should maintain a bright and pure timbre (without excessive vibrato) to create the image of a pure and beautiful young girl, one that captivates and draws the audience's attention. The second section describes Xi'er anxiously waiting at home for her father's return on New Year's Eve. In the first two lines, the words "I" (我), "heart" (心), and "await" (等) appear on an anacrusis, rhythmically expressing her restless anticipation of her father's homecoming. The bright, pure vocal tone⁷⁴ is meant to convey Xi'er's joy while portraying an image of a heroine anxiously awaiting her father's return. The third section depicts the moment when her father finally returns home, bringing New Year's gifts for Xi'er—flour and red ribbons. Although she does not wear flowers in her hair, she is overjoyed, as she had eagerly anticipated her father bringing home the promised flour for the New Year. Unexpectedly, he also gives her a red ribbon.⁷⁵ In this section, the use of a sweet and tender vocal tone is crucial to expressing the heroine's happiness and excitement.

In the third section, Xi'er transforms into the titular White-Haired Girl. Her aria, *Hatred as High as the Mountains, Vengeance as Deep as the Sea* (恨似高山仇似海), can be divided into three sections. The first section, primarily lyrical with a secondary dramatic function, expresses the resentment (as well as the condemnation of feudalism) that Xi'er has suppressed in her heart for years, unable to share it with anyone. Thus, when she encounters Huang Shiren again, the hatred within her erupts, overwhelming her. The second section, *I Must Take Revenge* (要报仇), focuses on the painful experience of living in a cave for three years, igniting Xi'er's determination for vengeance (within the revolutionary message of the opera, this section serves as a call for class struggle). In the third section, *I Am an Undying Spirit*⁷⁶ (我是不死的鬼), Xi'er once again rekindles her outrage and fury. She hurls angry questions at the river, calls upon the heavens, and ultimately responds to herself, showcasing her resolute and indomitable character through self-affirmation. This section also serves as a

⁷⁴ A "bright, pure timbre without vibrato" refers to the folk singing style of northern China, intentionally distinguishing itself from the ornamented techniques of traditional opera (e.g., Peking Opera).

⁷⁵ Red ribbons in Chinese culture symbolize good fortune and belonging to the people (e.g., their revolutionary connotations after 1949).

⁷⁶ A metaphor for resistance and rebellion against feudalism.

symbol of revolutionary hope. The composition powerfully conveys the hatred that fills Xi'er's heart, narrates her tragic experiences, and presents her as a courageous, strong, and rebellious figure.

The performer, in shaping Xi'er's musical portrayal, should possess a comprehensive and eclectic vocal vision, intertwining elements of traditional Chinese opera, Chinese folk singing⁷⁷, and *belcanto* techniques. This fusion should illustrate the different emotional states of Xi'er before and after her transformation, drawing from various stylistic approaches⁷⁸ to depict a constantly evolving Xi'er. However, Xi'er's transformation should not be interpreted solely from a psychological perspective; it also serves as an allegory for China's transition from feudalism to socialism.

3.1.3 Analysis of Xi'er arias recorded on author's album

3.1.3.1 Xi'er's aria "The north wind blows" (Bei feng chui 北风吹) from the first act of the opera *The White-haired Girl* (Bai mao nü 白毛女).

Libretto translation :

北风吹，雪花飘，	The north wind blows, snowflakes flutter,
雪花飘飘，年来到	Snowflakes flutter, the New Year is coming
爹出门去躲帐整七天	Dad went out to hide from his debts for seven days
三十晚上还没回还	He still hasn't come back on the night of the 30th
我盼爹爹心中急，等爹回来心欢喜。	I am anxious for Dad, and I am happy when he comes back.

⁷⁷ e.g., *crying glissandi* characteristic of Shaanxi folk music, emphasizing the heroine's rural origins

⁷⁸ including the *yunqiang* technique from traditional opera, the aforementioned *crying glissandi* from folk music, and *bel canto* projection to emphasize revolutionary pathos.

爹爹带回白面来，欢欢喜喜过个年	Dad brings back white flour, and we celebrate the New Year happily
卖豆腐挣下了几个钱，集上称回来二斤面	I made some money from selling tofu, and weighed two pounds of flour at the market
带回家来包饺子，欢欢喜喜过个年	Brought it home to make dumplings, and celebrate the New Year happily
人家的女儿有花戴，我爹钱少不能买	Other girls have flowers to wear, but my dad doesn't have enough money to buy them
扯回了二尺红头绳	Brought back a two-foot red headband
给我扎起来，扎呀扎起来。	Tie it up for me, tie it up, tie it up.

Analysis of the piece:

Time of composition: 1945

Key: Pentatonic gong mode with elements of G major

Metru: 3/4 2/4 4/4

Tempo: Allegro

Form: A B A' (reprise)

Part	A	B	A'
Measure	1-14	15-38	39-45
Key	Pentatonic gong mode with elements of G major		

The aria is performed in Act I when Xi'er prepares for New Year's Eve, waiting for her father's return. The scene highlights her innocence and hope, contrasting with the impending

tragedy. It follows a ternary form (A B A') with variation elements, characteristic of the synthesis of folk and Western styles.

Section A (measures 1-14) is set in 3/4 meter. The melody has a gentle, folk-like character, based on repeated motifs and short phrases. The melodic line covers a narrow intervallic range (predominantly seconds and thirds), which is typical of folk songs. The opening phrase is calm and fluid, with slight syncopated accents that emphasize key words ("bei feng" – "north wind"). The rhythm is regular, with smoothly developing phrases. The tempo, marked *Allegro*, gives the music a moderate yet light and somewhat dance-like character, with distinct syncopated accents on key words (e.g., "bei feng" – north wind). The orchestration, with a delicate background of strings and bamboo flutes (*dizi*, appearing in some performance versions), underscores the protagonist's solitude. At this moment, Xi'er is carefree, innocent, and joyful. She has just returned from her aunt's house, thinking that the Spring Festival is approaching. Snowflakes are swirling in the air, and she is immersed in a cheerful mood. When singing this section, the performer must breathe deeply and smoothly, singing with a pure and unembellished tone, bright and soft. "The north wind blows, and snowflakes are falling" (北风吹, 雪花飘) is the first line sung by Xi'er. To fully capture the scenic imagery, the singer should visualize the surrounding landscape and convey the swirling snowflakes through vocal timbre and subtle articulation. The melodic line requires a fluid and sustained breath, and the tone should be pure, natural, and soft, reflecting Xi'er's simple and girlish nature. When articulating the text, it is essential to consider the regional pronunciation features of folk songs from Hebei, which are crucial for the authenticity of the performance. The pronunciation of the word "wind" (风, fēng) is particularly significant. In this case, the method of articulating "horizontal" characters with a "vertical" mouth position (横字竖咬) ensures both precise pronunciation and a rounded tonal quality. The pronunciation of "huā (花)" can be replaced with "huār (花儿)," adding an embellishing final "r" typical of the region's speech. The character 飘 corresponds to three notes and three syllables (p – i – ao). To enhance the artistic quality of the performance, it is necessary to precisely assign each syllable of 飘 to the three successive notes: a1 corresponds to "p," e1 to "i," and g1 to "ao."

This singing approach maintains clear diction while allowing the melodic line to flow naturally with the phrasing of the text. By adding a sigh during the pause for breath, the singer can express Xi'er's anxiety as she awaits her father's return. A grace note ($\#g^1$) has been added before the word "come" (lái, 来), which makes the melody sound more fluid (see Score 7.1).

北 风 (那个) 吹, 雪 花 (那个) 飘, 雪 花 (那个)
 爹 出 门 去 躲 账 整 七 (那个) 天, 三 十 (那个)

Score 7.1

In the following passage, the melody is repeated with new lyrics. As Xi'er goes to open the door, she suddenly realizes that the Chinese New Year has arrived, yet her father, who is hiding in the mountains, has not returned. The mood gradually evolves—Xi'er transitions from joy and anticipation to worry and confusion. This section's emotional atmosphere can be described as "worried" and "lost." Although the melody repeats, the singer can convey Xi'er's emotional transformation through variations in articulation and vocal dynamics. In the second part of the text, a more colloquial and natural vocal quality is recommended, enhancing the authenticity of the character and reinforcing her folk-like nature. The vocal tone should not be overly rigid but rather fluid and enriched with subtle intonational variations, in keeping with

the tradition of northern Chinese folk songs. The addition of slight glissandi enhances the naturalness of the singing, reflecting the spontaneity of folk storytelling. Subtle tonal shifts should not be overlooked. For example, in the phrase "For these entire seven days" (整七那个天), the tone of the character "te" (那 那) should be considered part of the melodic expression and highlighted through breath control to convey a sense of helplessness over the father's inability to return home due to his debts. The pronunciation of sānshí (三十) approaches sānshír (三十儿), with the "r" sound sung casually yet distinctly enough to be audible to the audience. The phrase "I have not yet repaid" (还没回还) is treated in the same manner as the preceding phrase "The New Year is arriving" (年来到) (see Score 7.2).

Score 7.2

The second section (mm. 15-38) transitions to a 2/4 meter, which enlivens the rhythm and accentuates the shift in Xi'er's mood. Her emotions evolve rapidly—from initial confusion and worry to hopeful anticipation of her father's return. The shift from 3/4 to 2/4 imparts greater energy and mobility to the phrases, reflecting the protagonist's increasingly joyful expectation. Shorter rhythmic values make the singing feel more natural and speech-like, reinforcing Xi'er's folk-like character. In measures 18, 20, and 22, the phrases begin with an

upbeat, requiring careful breath management. The phrase “waiting for father’s return with joy” (等爹回来心欢喜) demands particular attention. Compared to the previous two upbeat phrases, the duration of this phrase has been extended to nine and a half beats. Special care must be given to the breath support on the word “joy” (喜) on the fourth beat to maintain the phrase’s lightness. Measures 27-37 express Xi’er’s hopeful anticipation, so the interpretative approach should highlight the innocence and simplicity of a rural girl. In the phrase “Father brought back white flour” (爹爹带回白面来), the sixteenth notes should be sung precisely in their designated place but with both lightness and flexibility. In the words “happily celebrate the New Year” (欢欢喜喜过个年), Xi’er’s mood shifts from anxious waiting for her father to delightful fantasies of celebrating the New Year together. The singer’s facial expressions should naturally remain relaxed and joyful. Measure 33 once again begins with an upbeat. Proper breath preparation at this point is essential to sing the nine-and-a-half-beat phrase 欢欢喜喜过个年 without tension or excessive vocal strain. This phrase serves as the emotional climax of the section, so its delivery should convey even greater lightness and expressiveness. (See Score 7.3)

22
等爹回来心欢喜。爹爹带回白面来,

22
等爹回来心欢喜。爹爹带回白面来,

Score 7.3

The third section of the aria (mm. 39-45) transitions into a lively 4/4 meter. This is the most exuberant part of the piece, where Xi'er, with full enthusiasm and joy, imagines a happy New Year's celebration. The singer should convey the third level of interpretation, blending Xi'er's innocence and liveliness. The vocal timbre should remain sweet and warm but with increased lightness and agility, reflecting the character's joyful excitement. Measures 39-42 are characterized by shorter note values, primarily a combination of eighth and sixteenth notes. The rhythm is faster, with the notes precisely corresponding to each syllable of the text. This requires the singer to maintain an active and flexible diaphragm to sing with both lightness and resonant strength, achieving a smooth and dynamic delivery (抑扬顿挫). The libretto should be sung clearly, distinctly, and gently, ensuring a harmonious connection between the sound and the text. There should be a noticeable contrast in vocal interpretation between the phrases "Hey, celebrate the New Year" (哎, 过呀过个年) and "Hey, tie it up" (哎, 扎呀扎起来). Both instances of "Hey" (哎, āi) must originate from the heart, delivered with a slight sigh to evoke an emotional response from the audience, conveying Xi'er's innocence and inner simplicity. The phrase "Hey, tie it up" (哎, 扎呀扎起来) serves as the closing section of the aria. Starting from the character 扎, a gradual ritardando should be applied, following the emotional flow of the phrase. The character 来 can be sung with a trill and an appropriate lengthening, depending on the singer's breath control capacity. The voice should remain focused and bright, fully infused with personal emotions, allowing the audience to feel Xi'er's joy at being pampered by her father. The aria should conclude with a strong final beat, synchronized with the accompaniment's final chord. (See Score 7.4)

Score 7.4

The final section of the aria constitutes the emotional culmination, revealing Xi'er's love for life, her sincere and simple affection for her family, and her naïve yet optimistic outlook on the future. Through contrasts in dynamics and rhythm, as well as changes in meter, the music emphasizes the gradual intensification of the protagonist's joy, reaching a moment in which her emotions attain their fullest expression. In developing the performance concept for the aria "The Northern Wind Blows" (北风吹), my primary objective was to find an individual vocal expression that integrates Chinese traditional vocal techniques with the Western operatic singing school, while also shaping the character of Xi'er with a distinctive artistic style. This aria is a key component of both the thematic and musical portrayal of Xi'er, highlighting her innocence and simplicity as well as her inner strength and emotional depth.

Before formulating my own interpretative approach, I thoroughly familiarized myself with Peng Liyuan's (彭丽媛) interpretation of this aria.⁷⁹ Her performance served as a valuable source of inspiration for me. Peng Liyuan is highly esteemed in the Chinese vocal

⁷⁹ Peng Liyuan (彭丽媛), born on November 20, 1962, in Shandong Province, China, is a renowned Chinese soprano, the first in the country to obtain a master's degree in national singing, and a first-class actress. She receives a government scholarship awarded by the State Council. In 1986, she won first place in the national singing category of the professional group in the CCTV Young Singers Television Competition. In January 2017, the Juilliard School in the United States awarded her an honorary doctorate. She has performed in operas such as *The White-Haired Girl*, *The Party's Daughter*, *The Ballad of Mulan*, and others.

Peng Liyuan (彭丽媛) video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUFUwRQM12s> 26/02/2025, 7:34pm.

music world due to her unique singing technique and exceptional artistic talent. Her portrayal of Xi'er not only preserves the characteristics of Chinese folk vocalism but also incorporates Western operatic vocal techniques, which are grounded in a scientific approach to vocal emission. This integrated singing style allows her to convey both the delicate and subtle beauty of Chinese folk music and the broad vocal range and dramatic tension characteristic of operatic arias. Her precise articulation, full enunciation of sounds, and application of Chinese singing techniques enhance the melody while simultaneously emphasizing subtle emotional expression.

By analyzing Peng Liyuan's interpretation, I realized how her flawless vocal technique precisely shapes the character. Her masterful control of breath and expressive conveyance of emotions coexist, making her singing a fusion of strength and youthful liveliness. Her stage performance, characterized by bright eyes, quick and lively glances, light and joyful movement, and fluid, cheerful musical language, became a source of inspiration for me. All of these elements profoundly influenced my understanding of this aria. Through this analysis, I became aware of how crucial it is to explore vocal possibilities and deepen emotional expression in order to create my own unique interpretation of Xi'er.

3.1.3.2 Xi'er's aria “Hatred like a mountain, sorrow like the sea” (Hen si gaoshan chou si hai 恨似高山仇似海) from the fourth act of the opera *The White-haired Girl* (Bai mao nü 白毛女).

Translation of words:

恨似高山仇似海，路断星灭我等待	Hatred stands as tall as mountains, and resentment runs as deep as the sea. The path is severed, the stars have vanished, yet I remain waiting.
冤魂不散我人不死，雷暴雨翻天我又来	I shall not perish until the wronged souls have dissipated; when thunderstorms overturn the sky, I shall return.
闪电哪快撕开黑云头，响雷啊你劈开那天河口	Lightning, tear apart the dark clouds! Thunder, shatter the gates of the Celestial River!
你可知道我有千重恨，你可记得我有万重仇	Do you know that my hatred is as immense as a thousand mountains? Do you remember that my resentment is as vast as ten thousand seas?
山洞里苦熬三年整，我受苦受罪白了头	For three long years, I suffered in the depths of a cave, my hair turning white from pain and torment.
我吃的是树上的野果，庙里的供献	I survived on wild fruits from the trees and offerings left in the temple.
苦撑苦熬天天盼老天爷睁眼，我要报仇	Enduring hardship and agony, I prayed each day for the heavens to open their eyes—I must seek vengeance!
我是叫你们糟蹋的喜儿，我是人	I am Xi'er, the one you trampled upon, but I am still a human being!
大河的流水你要记起，我的冤仇要你做证	Great river, remember my suffering; bear witness to my grievance!

喜儿怎么变成这模样？为什么问你，你不做声	What has become of Xi'er? Why, when I ask myself, do I remain silent?
难道是霹雷闪电你发了抖，难道你耳聋眼瞎找不见我人影	Are the thunder and lightning making me tremble? Am I deaf and blind, unable to find even my own shadow?
我浑身发了白，为什么把人逼成鬼	My entire body has turned white—why must humans be driven into ghosts?
问天问地都不应，好！我就是鬼，我是屈死的鬼！	I cry out to the heavens and the earth, but no response comes. Fine! Then I am a ghost—I am a spirit wronged in death!

Analysis of the work:

Time of composition: 1945

Key: B \flat - major

Metre: 4/4 2/4 6/4 5/4 4/4

Tempo: *Rubato*

Form: The aria has a recomposed, narrative-dramatic character, with smooth transitions between sections, reflecting changes in emotion (from grief to anger). Three sections can be distinguished in it: A B C

Part	A	B	C
Bar	1-21	22-47	48-91
Tone	B \flat major		

Part A (mm. 1-21) The prelude (mm. 1–7) is constructed to convey the atmosphere of the night preceding a storm, full of lightning and thunder. In the accompaniment texture, tremolo, triplet figurations, and sixteenth-note chordal rhythms in both hands are used to build tension and a dramatic mood. The dynamics develop in the scheme *ff* – *mf* – *f*, while the tempo gradually accelerates, intensifying the dramatic expression. This structure prepares the listener for the emotional entrance of Xi'er and forms the basis for the first word of the text – "hatred" (恨), which gains particular intensity due to the emphasis in the accompaniment. (see Score 8.1)

The image shows a musical score for Part A (mm. 1-21) in 4/4 time. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system (mm. 1-4) features a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a bass clef. The dynamics are marked *ff* (fortissimo) in the first measure, *mf* (mezzo-forte) in the second measure, and *f* (forte) in the fourth measure. The music includes triplet figures in both hands and sixteenth-note chordal rhythms. The second system (mm. 5-8) continues the accompaniment with similar rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings, including a *pp* (pianissimo) marking in the final measure.

Score 8.1

(mm. 8-21) This section consists of only four sentences but is the most important part of the entire aria, setting the tone for the piece. The vocal entrance “Hatred like a mountain, sorrow like the sea” (恨似高山仇似海) reflects an expressive melodic line characteristic of the musical theater of the Hebei region. (mm. 8-12) The first sentence of the aria, "hatred like a mountain..." (恨似高山...), is an opening that mirrors the penetrating melodies of Hebei opera, and the word "hatred" (恨) should be sung with a feeling of a scream. It should be performed using the vocal technique of traditional Chinese opera, *penkou* (喷口)⁸⁰utilizing

⁸⁰ *penkou* (喷口) is a singing method in Chinese opera that exaggerates the character's head movements to illustrate a powerful expression involving the lips and teeth when spitting words and sounds. <https://wiki66.com/%E5%96%B7%E5%8F%A3> 30/01/2025, 5:47pm.

deep breathing and diaphragm tension to control the breath. Maintaining resonance in the nasal and head cavities, the tone should be penetrating and excited, in the fervor of hatred, releasing all the suppressed emotions in the heroine's heart. After the phrase "hatred like" (仇似), there is a pause, preparing the ground for the word "sea" (海), paving the way for the emotions to be expressed. The rhythm of the section uses *vibrato* and *fermatas*, showcasing the prolonged suppression of emotions and Xi'er's enduring pain and hatred. (see Score 8.2)



Score 8.2

In measure 13, on the words "the road ends, the stars are extinguished, I wait..." (路断星灭, 我等待...), the accompaniment suddenly stops, then resumes with the use of vibrato, reflecting the hatred-filled heart of Xi'er, who cannot complain but patiently waits for revenge. In the following sentence, "I will not die until the wronged souls disappear" (冤魂不散, 我人不死), a pause is used to emphasize the dramatic expression. Especially the word "death" (死) should be pronounced with clenched teeth, so that it sounds clear and forceful, passing through the gap between the teeth. In "After the thunderstorm, I return again" (雷暴雨翻天我又来), while singing the word "return" (来), I borrow a singing technique from the famous Chinese soprano Peng Liyuan, using the *tuoqiang* (拖腔)⁸¹ technique. (see Score 8.3)

⁸¹ *tuoqiang* (拖腔) is a vocal technique in traditional Chinese opera (戏曲) or quyi theater (曲艺) that extends the pronunciation of a word to express emotion. It can be short or long and appear in the middle or at the end of a sentence. In singing, *tuoqiang* (拖腔) is often an extension of the word's ending, and in some cases, it is accompanied by words added to maintain the meter of the verse (衬字) or modal particles (衬词). This technique allows for greater expressiveness in the original song.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/戏曲中的拖腔/56305887> 30/01/2025, 5:48pm.

12

路断星天 我等待,

f *mp*

16

冤魂不散我人不死, 雷暴雨翻天

mf

19

我又来!

p

Score 8.3

Part B (mm. 22-47)

This section describes Xi'er's dramatic experiences, her three-year isolation in the mountains and forests, the lack of daylight, and her life sustained by temple offerings. Due to a deficiency of salt, her hair turned white, and the entire village began to perceive her as the White-Haired Girl. Xi'er carries deep pain within, but also growing fury. In terms of performance, the voice color should change – it is no longer as high and clear as in the first part of the aria, but softer, with a subtle hint of lament, reflecting the heroine's loneliness and

suffering. The interlude (mm. 22-24) serves as an introduction – in the accompaniment, triplet figures appear, gradually building tension. The dynamics rise from *mf* to *f*, amplifying the effect of the howling wind, symbolizing the harsh living conditions of Xi'er. From measure 24, the accompaniment in the left hand transitions to an octave texture, while the right hand spreads harmonic triads in triplets, creating a fluid melodic line. This technique refers back to the earlier interlude, gradually emphasizing the rising emotions. From measure 25, the tempo gradually accelerates, and the accompaniment becomes increasingly intense – from vibrato to sixteenth notes, reflecting Xi'er's emotional conflict. The heroine feels conflicting emotions – anger towards social injustice, but also desperation, through which she can only turn to supernatural forces. In the phrase “Thunder, lightning – hear me!” (雷、闪电), the singer should emphasize the inner hatred, which is reflected in the score by sudden dynamic jumps and fermatas. In the words “pierces” (撕) – measure 28, “splits” (劈) – measure 28, “turned white” (白) – measure 36, and “waited” (盼) – measure 43, the performer should apply the *penkou* (喷口) technique. This requires a strong clenching of the mouth before pronouncing the sound, followed by an explosive release of air, which gives the phrases exceptional dramatic power. This technique enhances the emotional intensity and amplifies Xi'er's anger. (see Score 8.4)

29

你可知道我有千重恨! 你可知道我有万重仇!

32

山洞里苦熬三年整, 我受苦受罪

36

白 头!

Score 8.4

During the singing of measures 40-43, the singer should use vocal techniques that imitate crying. This requires a delicate, gentle, and full sound to emphasize Xi'er's suffering, as she has lived in isolation for three years in a dark cave, awaiting justice. The phrase "I must take revenge" (我要报仇) in measure 45 marks the climax of this section. Performing this phrase requires the use of the *tuoqiang* (拖腔) technique, which involves stretching the melodic phrase, highlighting Xi'er's determination. The natural voice gradually transitions into a mixed register, and in the lower notes, it returns to the *kuqiang* (哭腔) technique, further enhancing the effect of lament and drama. This moment should sound with full tension, with vibrato in the higher registers, perfectly showcasing Xi'er's inner pain and determination. In

the accompaniment, the left hand plays tonic chords in a vibrato technique, while the right hand moves from triplets to rapid sixteenth notes. This sudden change in musical texture makes the music heavier, more tense, and full of drama. The denser accompaniment, reinforced by a forte dynamic and sudden accents, amplifies the emotional intensity of this phrase. In terms of performance, the interpretation of this section should convey the full emotional state of anger and despair that Xi'er experiences, reaching the peak of determination in her pursuit of revenge. (see Score 8.5)

40

我吃的是山上的野果 庙里的供献, 苦撑 苦熬 天天 盼,

44

老天爷 睁眼 我要报 仇!

Score 8.5

In Part C (measures 48-91), the music adopts the structure of traditional Chinese opera (戏曲), transitioning from the *sanban* (散板) style⁸² to the *yaoban* (摇板) style⁸³ and back again. This section mainly consists of Xi'er's accusations, and her emotional journey shifts

⁸² *sanban* (散板) refers to a musical term in traditional Chinese music, meaning slow tempo and irregular rhythm in free meter. It is often used in traditional instrumental music, Chinese folk songs, and Chinese opera.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/散板/31420?fr=aladdin> 31/01/2025, 5:40pm.

⁸³ *yaoban* (摇板) is an important rhythmic form in traditional Chinese opera music, known for its free rhythm and improvisation. It is widely used in operatic performances, such as Peking opera or Kunqu, to express tense, intense, or emotionally complex scenes.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/摇板/3798147> 31/01/2025, 5:41pm.

from initial disbelief to a slight restraint of emotions, then sorrow, followed by grief and anger. Emotions gradually accumulate, culminating in a full explosion. In measures 48-52, there is a drop in dynamics, as the accompaniment features a downward progression of continuous triplets, bringing forth emotions with the phrase "I am Xi'er, whom you have destroyed" (我是叫你们糟蹋的喜儿). Here, the accompaniment *uses pauses* (留白), creating more expressive space for the vocalist to deliver the phrase. Singing this line, I have studied and borrowed the technique used by the young Chinese soprano Lei Jia. Lei Jia's interpretation employs the *kuqiang* (哭腔) style⁸⁴ from Chinese opera, vividly portraying how Xi'er endures suffering in order to achieve her goal. For words ending in "r" 儿, I apply another Chinese opera technique called *souyin* (擞音)⁸⁵ to convey the overwhelming desire for revenge breaking through rational emotions. The recitative *nian bai* (念白)⁸⁶ in the fragment "I am human" (我是人) adds dramatic tension, reflecting Xi'er's inner feelings such as sadness, indignation, and determination. (see Score 8.6)

Score 8.6

⁸⁴ *kuqiang* (哭腔) is a vocal technique mimicking the sound of crying to express sadness, suffering, or grief. It is widely used in traditional Chinese opera and folk songs, where the trembling voice, interrupted breathing, and pitch fluctuations intensify emotional expression and musical drama.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/哭腔/8432917> 31/01/2025, 5:48pm

⁸⁵ *souyin* (擞音) literally means "trembling sound," also known as *souqiang* (嗽腔, "coughing style of singing"). It is one of the traditional Chinese operatic vocal techniques where sound is produced by blocking airflow through the throat.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/擞腔/54144638> 31/01/2025, 5:49pm

⁸⁶ *nian bai* (念白) is a unique expressive technique in Chinese opera that dramatizes and musicalizes language with a tone between speech and song. It is often used to express a character's inner monologue or a dialogue between characters, reflecting their thoughts and emotions.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/念白/9803835> 31/01/2025, 5:50pm

In measures 60-65, the music transitions into the *yaoban* (摇板) style, characterized by a more rocking and flowing rhythm, while still maintaining dramatic tension. This section also introduces *jinla-manchang* (紧拉慢唱) – a typical technique in Chinese opera that combines fast instrumental accompaniment with slow singing.

A series of dramatic questions follows, with Xi'er asking: "What happened?" (怎么?), "Why?" (为什么?), and "Could it be?" (难道?), which represents the culmination of her accumulated anger and suffering. The accompaniment intensifies the tension – sixteenth notes in the right hand, sharp dyads, and eighth-note rests in the left hand make the music increasingly tense. In measure 65, the phrase is repeated, and the *runqiang* (润腔) technique is applied. The words "you" (你) and "I" (我) are repeated several times, and the rhythm gradually accelerates. This is characteristic of *runqiang* (润腔), a technique in which the phrase is smoothly extended, adding drama and emphasizing Xi'er's desperation as she demands answers to her questions.

In measure 73, the climactic moment arrives with the word “zbielało” (白).

The vocal articulation here is multi-layered, combining three techniques: *tuoqiang* (拖腔), which extends the note, adding emotional depth; *penkou* (喷口), a explosive effect that highlights Xi'er's sorrow and determination; and *souyin* (擞音), a trembling end to the phrase that expresses crying, helplessness, and bitterness.

Throughout the section, the dynamic and emotional tension continuously builds – both in the vocal line and in the accompaniment. The orchestration grows more intense, and Xi'er's voice shifts from full expression in the mixed register to a more shaken *kuqiang* (哭腔) sound, culminating in an emotional explosion at the end of the section. (see Score 8.7)

56

大 河 的 流 水 你 要 记 起，

【摇板】

61

我 的 冤 仇 要 你 作 证， 喜 儿 怎 么 变 成 这 模 样， 为 什 么 问 你

65

你 你 你 你 你 不 做 声？ 难 道 是 劈 雷 闪 电 你 发 了 抖，

68

难 道 你 耳 聋 眼 瞎， 找 不 见 我 人 影。

72

我 我 我 我 我 我 我 我 浑 身 发 了 白。

Score 8.7

At the end of the aria, Xi'er addresses the Heavens with a question that receives no answer. She then wipes her tears and, in anger, sings: "The spirit unjustly condemned to death" (屈死的鬼), "The spirit wronged to death" (冤死的鬼), "The spirit undying" (不死的鬼). During this section, the tempo should continuously increase, and the voice should build greater tension, reaching a more penetrating, resolute sound. This vocal intensity enhances the portrayal of Xi'er's sorrow, hatred, and, simultaneously, her determination. The voice needs to convey a sense of inner conflict and unstoppable will, reflecting both the emotional pain of being wronged and the relentless pursuit of justice. In this moment, the vocal delivery should evoke a chilling, almost otherworldly energy, symbolizing the transition from grief to vengeful resolve. The increasing tempo and rising vocal tension culminate in a powerful, emotional climax that represents the character's defiance against fate and the unresolved vengeance that drives her. (see Score 8.8)

83
(白)好! (唱)我就是鬼, 我是屈死的鬼, 我是冤死的鬼, 我是
不死的鬼!
87
accel. *f* rit.

Score 8.8

The aria "Hatred like a Mountain, Sorrow like the Sea" is the most dramatic, longest, and most difficult aria in the opera *The White-Haired Girl*. In order to perform this piece

effectively, I referred to the performances of Guo Lanying (郭兰英)⁸⁷, Peng Liyuan (彭丽媛), and Lei Jia (雷佳). In the end, I summarized the essence of their concepts and integrated them into my own singing. Guo Lanying's singing is based on Chinese operatic singing, inheriting and passing on the characteristics of *run qiang* (润腔) and *tu yao zi* (吐咬字) in traditional Chinese opera. Peng Liyuan, drawing on Chinese folk singing, combines Western operatic singing methods and adopts more *run qiang* (润腔). Lei Jia's version is more dramatic in its details, as it strengthens the appoggiatura, expands the resonating chambers, and increases the temporal value of the melody, thus emphasizing Xi'er's hatred. The interpretations of Guo Lanying, Peng Liyuan, and Lei Jia have provided me with inspiration on many levels: from breath control, through subtle changes in voice timbre, to multi-layered emotional building and the integration of language with music. Their performances show how precise vocal technique can serve deep dramatic expression and effectively convey Xi'er's complex emotions.⁸⁸

These elements have allowed me to deepen the interpretation of Xi'er and give her an individual character, combining traditional elements of Chinese opera with a modern approach to vocal expression.

3.2. Jinzi from the opera *The Savage Land* (Yuanye 原野).

3.2.1 Creative context

In terms of musical composition, the composer Jin Xiang fully utilizes the expressive power of various vocal forms, as well as the orchestra, in the musical-dramatic

⁸⁷ Guo Lanying (郭兰英), born on December 31, 1930, in Shanxi Province, China, graduated from the North China United University Art Troupe. She is a Chinese soprano, opera actress, and performer of Jinju opera, as well as a pedagogue in the field of national vocal music. She received the first-ever Chinese Golden Record, the Lifetime Achievement Award in Chinese Opera Art, and the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 7th edition of the Chinese Golden Music Award "Golden Bell." She has performed in many operas, such as *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女) and *The Marriage of Xiao Erhei* (小二黑结婚).

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/郭兰英/31567> 22/03/2025, 4:00pm.

⁸⁸ Guo Lanying (郭兰英) audio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqtb-EIZ7s8> 01/02/2025, 2:10pm.

Peng Liyuan (彭丽媛) video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DdaYteFQQM> 01/02/2025, 2:11pm

Lei Jia (雷佳) video: <https://haokan.baidu.com/v?pd=wisenatural&vid=4249492877306329988> 01/02/2025, 2:12pm

development.⁸⁹ At the same time, the entire opera has a *connected structure* (通连体), combining the *ballad form* (歌谣体) of Chinese folk opera with the structure of *banqiang* (板腔体), or a *form divided into sections* (分曲结构).⁹⁰ The achievement of musical integrity across the opera, due to the partial incompleteness of borrowed forms, helps avoid the pursuit of fragmentary musical integrity and the fragmentation of overall dramatic development, ensuring the dramatic cohesion of the opera. The composer uses contemporary European compositional techniques (e.g., harmonies inspired by Impressionism) to develop conflict and create dramatic situations, while also creatively absorbing certain features of folk music (e.g., Chinese microtonality combined with cluster harmonies), making *The Wilderness* a work that is both international and ethnically characterized. The composition of the aria for Jinzi focuses more on its dramatic function, while maintaining a balance between lyricism and drama, the individuality of the character, and the singability of the melody. Moreover, the vocal part of the piece is highly original and artistically engaging, fulfilling the needs of musical theater. The composer uses large intervallic leaps to represent inner conflict, while basing lamentations on the pentatonic scale, alluding to the simplicity of folk music.

The wide ideological and musical scope of the work allowed the composer to utilize operatic thinking⁹¹ to create the structure of the work. Modern techniques such as polytonality, microtonality, and aleatoricism are used to express the distortion of human nature and the deformation of nature; romantic and impressionistic techniques are employed to regenerate human nature and the beauty of the original colors of nature; while techniques such as structural ambiguity, weakened melody, and the multi-layered combination of sharp

⁸⁹ The opera was created in the 1980s, during the period of the liberalization of Chinese culture, which explains its experimental character.

⁹⁰ Jin Xiang merges traditional structures of Chinese folk opera:

- **Banqiang (板腔体)**: A system of rhythmic-melodic patterns typical of Peking opera, used to build dynamic dramatic transitions.
- **Ballad form (歌谣体)**: Simpler, song-like forms that emphasize lyricism and narration.
- **Connected structure (通连体)**: The composer's original term, referring to smooth transitions between sections, avoiding rigid divisions into "numbers."
- **Divided form (分曲结构)**: However, it retains the distinctiveness of key arias (e.g., Jinzi), creating a dialectic between continuity and separation.

⁹¹ Yu Qihong, "Operatic Thinking and the Opera *The Wilderness* as Its Practical Example" ("歌剧思维"及其在〈原野〉中的实践) [J], *Chinese Musicology (中国音乐学)*, 2010(3).

intervals are used to organize dramatic fragments, such as recitatives, *yunbai*, and speech.⁹² These techniques also express what the composer (Jin Xiang) referred to as "misty scenes"⁹³, referring to the uncertainty regarding the fate of the opera's characters, thus praising the beauty of human innocence but also the wild, primal nature—instincts that were suppressed, repressed, and even forbidden for the lowest social classes. This creates a stark contrast with the strange beauty of distorted appearances.⁹⁴

Like many other operas, *The Savage Land* also relies on thematic approaches within the musical structure, with the composer designing three main themes for the entire opera: the theme of "wild nature," which is both low and sorrowful, yet also elegant and distant; the "love" theme,⁹⁵ which is soft and lyrical, with deep and evolving emotions; and the awe-inspiring theme of "darkness."⁹⁶

Jin Xiang's *The Savage Land* is an attempt to synthesize the traditions of the East and the West, where the character Jinzi becomes a carrier of universal themes: the struggle for autonomy, the beauty of nature, and social oppression. Through innovative techniques, the composer creates a work that has both a local (Chinese identity) and global (avant-garde language) dimension.

3.2.2 Shaping the Musical Image of Jinzi

This is an opera in four acts. The action takes place in the 1930s in a poor and backward village in northern China. A poor peasant, Chou Hu (仇虎), is imprisoned due to the scheming of the local landowner Jiang Yanwang (焦阎王). His father and sister also fall victim to Jiang Yanwang's persecution and die tragically. Filled with anger and a desire for

⁹² It should be emphasized that *yunbai* is a stylized recitative with tonal intonation, different from everyday speech.

⁹³ Jin Xiang, *Confusion and Search* (困惑与求索) [M], Shanghai Music Publishing House (上海音乐出版社), 2003, pp. 94-95.

⁹⁴ "Strange beauty": Improvised percussion sections (e.g., *paigu*) contrast with the rigid structures of the orchestra, reflecting the conflict between nature and civilization.

⁹⁵ A lyrical melody in the *pelog* scale (Indonesian, but adapted in Chinese folk music), highlighting the universality of emotion.

⁹⁶ The contrast between "wild nature" (a low theme using the *dizi* – bamboo flute) and "darkness" (clusters in strings) symbolizes the struggle between instincts and societal norms.

revenge, Chou Hu decides to kill Jiang Yanwang to avenge his family. After escaping from prison and overcoming many difficulties, Chou Hu returns to his native village, only to learn that Jiang Yanwang is already dead. Bereft of purpose and consumed by a sense of loss, Chou Hu redirects his vengeance to Jiang Yanwang's son, Jiang Daxing (焦大星). Jiang Daxing is a mild-mannered man with a weak character; he was once a childhood friend of Chou Hu. Now, he is married to Chou Hu's former lover, Jinzi (金子). Jinzi lives in extreme hardship within the Jiang family, enduring oppression, suffering, inner conflict, and confusion. Chou Hu, wishing not only to avenge his family but also to free Jinzi from the chains of the feudal household, ultimately kills the innocent Jiang Daxing. Using deceit, he also manipulates Jiang's mother into killing her own grandson, Xiao Heizi (小黑子). Although Chou Hu has exacted his revenge, he feels neither satisfaction nor joy from its fulfillment. Tormented by both hatred and guilt, he ultimately brings about his own destruction.

When Jinzi first appears on stage, she immediately gives the impression of a beautiful woman who was born on fertile soil—free, full of raw life force and passion, energetic, yet suffering from repressed emotions. She is attractive, witty, and unrestrained, wild, tough, and courageous. She is fiery, dominant, and disregards conventions, yet she is also kind, simple, and internally rebellious against feudal ethics. Composer Jin Xiang employs a variety of musical techniques to place the extraordinarily complex character of Jinzi within a web of intricate relationships. It is with characters endowed with beauty and vitality, like Jinzi, that the audience can connect with the ideals and experiences of the character, the changing nature of their fate, and their ultimate conclusion. It is through these characters that the sharpness of conflicts can be felt, and the deep significance of events understood as the musical drama unfolds step by step.⁹⁷

The aria "Oh, it's dark again" (Ai, tian you hei le, 哦, 天又黑了) from the first act of the opera *Wild Shore* (Dziki brzeg) represents a pivotal moment for the character Jinzi. After a heated argument with her mother-in-law, who viciously insults her, and witnessing the

⁹⁷ Jiao Jie, *Preliminary Study on the Beauty of Opera* (歌剧美的初探) [J], *Chinese Musicology* (中国音乐学), 1985(4), pp. 29-30.

weakness and cowardice of her husband, Jiao Daxing, Jinzi expresses her frustration and disillusionment with her current life. Jiao Daxing's indecision and inability to provide a sense of security or warmth in their home lead Jinzi to despise him. She yearns for a man who can be strong, responsible, and capable of standing by her side, offering her freedom and happiness. In the aria, Jinzi reflects on the oppressive, feudal society surrounding her and reveals her strong desire for a life full of freedom. This aria serves as a bridge between the first and second parts of the act, establishing both the historical backdrop and Jinzi's personal conflicts, setting the stage for the unfolding drama.

The aria "Ah, my Hu!" (啊, 我的虎子哥) in the second act is one of the most emotionally charged moments in the opera. This aria expresses Jinzi's love for Chou Hu, marking the return of a long-lost love. The appearance of Chou Hu after many years reawakens the love within Jinzi that had withered away. Their ten days together are filled with love and tenderness, making Jinzi glow with joy, her voice soft and affectionate, her eyes bright like water, and her smile radiating warmth. However, conflicting emotions of love and hatred wrestle within her heart. While she loves Chou Hu, she resents his abandonment in the past, the pain, and the torment she endured when he left her in the dark world. She fears that these ten days together may just be an illusion, and Chou Hu will once again leave her. Ultimately, the conflict in her heart resolves in favor of her passionate love, and she runs to him, embracing him tightly and refusing to let go, crying out: "How could I not love my beloved? How could I not love? How could I lose you?"(亲人啊, 我哪能不疼, 难能不愛, 哪能丢了你?). In this aria, the return of her lover evokes memories of their past love, and the music mirrors the intensity of her emotions. Symbolically, Jinzi can be seen as a metaphor for the "wild nature" that is repressed by feudal structures. Her musical portrayal, with its improvised phrases and irregular rhythms, contrasts with the rigid forms that represent the established feudal order, highlighting the tension between the natural world and the oppressive societal constraints.

3.2.3 Analysis of the Jinzi arias recorded on the author's album

3.2.3.1 Aria Jinzi “Oh, it's getting dark again.” (Ai, tian you hei le 哦，天又黑了) from the first act of the opera *The Savage Land* (Yuanye 原野).

Translation of the libretto :

哦，天又黑了，哦，我的心更暗。	Oh, the sky is dark again, oh, my heart grows darker.
这一天天，长得永远过不完	The days are as long as if they would never end.
等来了早晨，又熬到夜晚。	Waiting for the morning, enduring sleepless nights.
浪漫的夜啊，闷得像坟墓一样，	Romantic night, suffocating like a tomb.
多想有那么一天太阳亮的耀眼	I long for the day when the sun shines brightly.
云高高，天蓝蓝，我变成一只小鸟。	Clouds are high, the sky is blue, I turn into a little bird.
想飞，飞的自在，想落，落在树尖。	I want to fly, fly freely, I want to land, land on the top of the tree.
再也听不到那声声咒骂，再也看不到那阴沉沉的脸，	Never to hear those curses again, never to see that gloomy face.
什么时候能如了我的心愿，我的心愿!	When will my heart's wish be fulfilled, my wish!
天又黑了，我的心更暗，	The sky darkens again, my heart grows darker.
又要去守着孤灯，又要去伴着凶神。	I must keep watch over the lonely light, accompanied by fierce demons.
梦里黑发熬成白发，醒来时一颗心碎成儿瓣。	In my dreams, my black hair turns white, and upon waking, my heart is shattered into pieces.
不! 这难道就是我金子的命? 我要	No! Is this really the fate of Jinzi? I want to live, live, live!

活下去，活下去，活下去!	
水里火里，天上人间，	In water and fire, in heaven and on earth,
我金子，总有变成飞鸟的一天!	I, Jinzi, will one day become a bird!

Analysis of the work:

Time of composition: 1987.

Tone: Compilation of E major with Chinese national scales (mainly pentatonic yu scale).

Metre: 3/4 5/4 8/4 4/4 7/4 (mainly 3/4 and 4/4, plus irregular phrases due to the prosody of the text)

Tempo: *Allegretto, Allegro*

Form: Recomposed musical form A B C B D, with recurring motifs, without rigid sections.

Part	Preludium	A	B	C	B	D
Bar	1-11	12-25	25-31	32-43	43-55	56-85
Tone	E major					

When singing this aria, it is important to control two emotions of Jinzi. The first is lamentation over her fate and the disgust with her dark life, while the second is the longing for a better future. Additionally, regarding the singing method, a combination of Chinese folk singing and bel canto is used, which allows for vocal expression that conveys necessary

changes and the strength typical of Chinese musical theater. The poignant and sincere singing ensures that Jinzi's love and hatred, innocence, and passion are well interpreted.

It is worth noting that in this aria, the tonality is formed through the combination of Chinese national scales and modern tonality, which is evident in the melody of the piano accompaniment. However, based on the tonic E in the left hand of the piano, we can say that all key changes revolve around the key of E major. The aria's scores that I used during the recording were arranged in the form of a piano reduction.⁹⁸ Therefore, my analysis partially refers to the piano reduction, though I also paid attention to the original orchestral accompaniment in significant details.

Jinzi's aria accompaniment stands out for its irregular formal structure, in contrast to the strictly organized art songs, as well as its flexible and changing rhythmic pattern. The texture of the piano accompaniment creates an organic whole with the main vocal melody. The rhythmic pattern accompanying the vocal line symbolizes emotional changes in the character and, to some extent, defines the singer's breath.

Prelude (measures 1-11) The prelude begins at an Allegretto tempo and is divided into two parts. The first part introduces a 3/4 meter, and the second part presents a vocal introduction in a *sanban* rhythm (散板). The introduction section is based on overlapping chords (imitating effects of the string section), accompanied by a descending melodic line in chords and a phrase ending in *poco rit.*, which seems to pull Jinzi's heart back into a valley of sorrow. In measure 7, there is a transition to a free rhythm (散板), with the use of ornaments and syncopations in the percussion part, reflecting Jinzi's inner unease and gradually intensifying rhythm, reminiscent of Jinzi's sad whisper, expressing her sorrow. In the orchestral accompaniment, the sound of Tubular Bells, glockenspiel, and vibraphone is introduced in unison. Then, the flute and clarinet enter, supported by pedal bass sounds from the double bass, creating an atmosphere of dead silence. At this point, Jinzi, sitting alone in

⁹⁸ A piano reduction is an arrangement of an orchestral or ensemble score for piano, retaining basic elements of the composition such as melody, harmony, and rhythmic structure. It is used to allow a performance of the composition without the full orchestral ensemble.

the plain, begins her internal monologue.

(See Score 9.1)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Score 9.1. The upper system is for the Violin (Vi.) part, beginning at measure 12. It features a tempo marking of 'Allegretto' with a quarter note equal to 90, and a dynamic marking of 'mp'. The lower system is for the piano accompaniment, featuring instruments such as Chime (管钟), Violin (Vi.), Flute (Fl.), and Harp (Hp.). The score includes a 'poco rit.' marking and measure numbers 450 and 453A.

Score 9.1

Section A (measures 12-55) The tempo marking changes to 54, starting at b^1 with a dynamic of *mp*, slowly introducing sound. The string instruments are limited to continuous bass notes, further building the overwhelming atmosphere. In the first phrase, " Ah, it's getting dark again " (哦, 天又黑了), to reflect Jinzi's struggles in life and her melancholic mood, I sing with a tone of sighing and helplessness, controlling the volume and timbre of my voice through breath. This phrase requires a muted tone to represent the falling darkness, a sound that suits Jinzi's mood at this moment. The augmented fourth in the accompaniment, appearing in measures 15-17, illustrates the feeling of dissonance and an oppressive atmosphere, evoking a sense of disharmony and heaviness. In the phrase " Ah, my heart grows darker " (哦, 我的心更暗), there is a slight fluctuation in the melody, reflecting a more sorrowful, sighing tone from Jinzi. The word "ciemniejsze" (darker) can particularly emphasize this by the voice, expressing Jinzi's sigh over her life and fate. Both phrases maintain a relatively muted tone, conveying the internal torment of the character. (See Score 9.2)

金子: $\text{♩} = 54$
Jin Zi: *mp*

歌, 天又黑了,
Ah, the sky grows dark.

454A 455 *mp*
Cl. Hp.

14

歌, 我的心更暗。
Ah, my heart is dark-er still.

mp Fl. Cl. *mp* Hp.

Score 9.2

In measures 18-21, the rhythm gradually becomes more fragmented. In measures 18-20, the same melody repeats three times, progressing downward. Using triplets and adding vibrato, the melody gains a trembling character. The use of glissando expresses Jinzi's inner fear. In the section of the libretto, " Day after day, so long as if they would never end, waiting for the morning and staying awake until late at night. " (这一天天啊, 长的永远也过不完, 等来了早晨, 又熬到黑夜), first, I focus on the tone of narration, and second, I use the well-known traditional Chinese opera technique of a wailing voice, *kuqiang* (哭腔), to express Jinzi's anxiety. At the phrase " Longing for the autumn nigh " (又熬到黑夜), the melody gradually becomes longer, and the use of legato makes the phrase fuller, creating the impression that the character is sinking into the darkness. This is a clear contrast to the triplets in measure 18. This phrase not only expresses Jinzi's character but also foreshadows her tragic fate. The composer interestingly added a pause at the end of the phrase, making part of the melody deeper, leaving a suspension that enhances the listeners' experience, providing them

with endless reflection.

(See Score 9.3)

18
这 一 天 天 (啊) 长 得 永 远 过 不 完 哪, 等 来 了 早
Day---- af-- ter day, Days with no end- ing--- Wait - ing till break of
21
展, 又 熬 到 夜 晚。
day, yearn-ing for-the night- fall.
Fl.
Str.
Cl.
465

Score 9.3

In measures 25-31, the structure is based on two nearly identical melodic phrases (a processed repetition of the motif with intervallic variations). The meter fluctuates between 3/4, 7/4, and 4/4. The color of the melody shifts from dark and depressing to bright and lofty. The piano accompaniment imitates the flute and string instruments, using both staccato and legato. It is also worth noting the parts of the bassoon and horn, which occasionally join the vocal line (measures 25-28). The vocal part begins with a triplet grouping, followed by an octave leap upwards, expressing the emotion that Jinzi can no longer bear her captivity and desires to escape the dark clouds above her head to find light. The next phrase "ah" (啊) lasts for fourteen measures with numerous melismas, representing a lament over Jinzi's prolonged tragic experiences, expressing her despair as her inner world nears collapse. In this passage, I interpret it with greater emotional intensity, and the use of resonance in the vocal cavity makes the sound more penetrating. Measures 29-31 repeat the melody almost unchanged. However, the meter changes three times: from 3/4 to 7/4, and then to 4/4. The rapid passages in both the vocal line and accompaniment fully capture Jinzi's urgent need to escape the

darkness and strive for light.

(See Score 9.4)

25
漫漫的夜啊...
The end-less night

26
Vie. 3
Fg. 3

Detailed description: This system contains measures 25 and 26. The vocal line (top staff) has a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. Measure 25 features a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 26 has a triplet of eighth notes and a fermata over the final note. The piano accompaniment (bottom two staves) includes a violin (Vie.) and flute (Fg.) part with triplets in measure 26.

27
啊...
ah

28
470
闷得像坟墓一样,
op-pres-sive as a grave.

Hn. 7

Detailed description: This system contains measures 27 and 28. Measure 27 has a vocal line with a fermata and a piano accompaniment with a horn (Hn.) part. Measure 28 has a vocal line with a fermata and a piano accompaniment with a horn (Hn.) part. A red box highlights the vocal line in measure 27.

29
多想有那么一天
How I long for a day

30
太阳亮得耀
when the sun shines so

Cl. 3
Hn. 7

Detailed description: This system contains measures 29 and 30. Measure 29 has a vocal line and a piano accompaniment with a clarinet (Cl.) part. Measure 30 has a vocal line and a piano accompaniment with a horn (Hn.) part.

The image shows a musical score for measures 31-33. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics in Chinese and English: '眼! bright.' and '云 Clouds so'. The middle and bottom staves are the piano accompaniment. The harp (Hp.) part is in the right hand, and the horn (Hn.) part is in the left hand. A red box highlights a sextole in the piano right hand, marked '6' and 'Sub. P'. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (p, Sub. P), articulation (accents), and fingerings (6, 3, 3).

Score 9.4

From measure 32 onward, Jinzi realizes her desires through fantasy. In the piano accompaniment, the sextoles played by the right hand imitate the harp in the orchestral score. The rhythmic pattern played by the left hand mimics the violins. The recurring sextoles express Jinzi's fantasy and longing. In the orchestral score, timpani and cymbals are now added. Meanwhile, the horn section plays a rhythm containing a triplet figure and syncopation. These elements simultaneously evoke the vastness of "The clouds are high, the sky is blue" (云高高, 天蓝蓝). Jinzi paints the image of a high sky and rare clouds with her bright, full sound. Performing this phrase requires the lifting of the smile muscles to achieve a pure, melodic, delicate, and charming sound, which provides a clear contrast to the previous dark section. (Measures 38-41) "I transform into a little bird" (我变成一只小鸟) and "I want to fly, fly freely, I want to land, land on the treetop" (想飞, 飞的自在, 想落, 落在树尖) are phrases that further emphasize Jinzi's longing for freedom. In the vocal part, the use of staccato makes the music joyful and lively. In the phrase discussed, three interval jumps (a sixth, fifth, and fourth + descending third) seem to connect fantasy with reality. The singer should use a light, flexible interpretation of colloquial speech to express Jinzi's overwhelming longing for freedom. In her fantasy, she experiences a freedom similar to that of a small bird. The composer highlights the character's mood through continuous variations. The final long note, e1, signals the impending return of Jinzi to reality. (See Score 9.5)

34
高 高, 天
high so high, The

37
sky 蓝 蓝, 我变成一只小鸟。 想飞。
so blue, I will be- come a small bird. Soar- ing,

40
飞的自在, 想落, 落在树尖。 再也听不
freely up high, light- ing on the tree tops. Nev- er a- gain

480

485

Score 9.5

In measures 43-55, the time signature remains variable, adapted to the prosody of the words, with a predominance of regular 4/4. At this point, Jinzi suddenly awakens from her dream to reality, as a recapitulation of complaints and a reversal of mood occur. The return of the motif in a lower register symbolizes the loss of hope. It is accompanied by clusters in the strings, emphasizing the growing anxiety. While singing, I distinctly mark the transition from one section to the next through my breath. Then, in measures 48-52, there is an exaggerated

shift from a soft voice to a "gloomy face" (阴沉沉的脸), accompanied by a triplet and glissando, to express fear of real life. Jinzi cannot help but ask when these oppressive and despair-filled days will end, "When will my dream come true?" (什么时候能如了我的心愿?). When singing this section, it is important to give the phrase an interrogative intonation. (See Score 9.6)

43

到 to hear the sounds of cur-ses

Fl. Cl.

45

声咒骂, in my ears, 再也看不到 Never again to see

Hn.

48

那阴沉沉的脸, that me-lan-cho-ly face. 什么时候能 Oh, when will my dreams come

Vle. Vc. *mp*

51

如了我的心愿, 我的心
true? When will my dreams come

S.
(Cl.) Ah!-----
Ah!

A.
(Hn.) Ah!-----
Ah!

495

Score 9.6

In Part D of the aria (measures 56-85), the tempo changes to allegro (accelerating from 54 beats per minute in Part A to 72 beats per minute). Measures 58-67 begin with the striking of a large gong, followed by gradually intensifying tremolo in the timpani and snare drum. At this point, Jinzi is like a person waking from a nightmare, contemplating the terrifying house, the dreadful curses, as if the nightmare is only just beginning. As the tempo increases, the rhythm in the string section becomes dotted, and the articulation of the tremolo is reinforced. The brass section enters in the same way. This represents Jinzi's terrified imagination, as she uncertainly envisions her unknown future. In the line "I will go, holding a solitary light, accompanied by demons" (又要去守孤灯, 又要去伴着凶神), the two occurrences of "will" (又要) express a heightened sense of tension, unease, and fear, full of the impression of panicked terror. When performing this phrase, special attention should be paid to the use of diaphragm strength to emphasize the tonality and highlight the pressure and tension Jinzi feels at this moment. Such a life distorts the human nature and soul, inevitably deforming them. Jinzi lowers her head in despair and sings with great sadness: "I wake up with my heart shattered into pieces" (醒来时一颗心碎成几瓣). At this moment, all the woodwind and brass instruments are withdrawn. Only the small *Chinese woodblock* (木鱼) and tremolo strings remain, suggesting that it was all just a dream. (See Score 9.7)

54 *Allegro* $\text{♩} = 72$

愿! true? 天又黑了, The sky grows dark, 我的 my

哦! Ah!

哦! Ah!

500

Timp. Str.

58 *f*

心更暗, heart dark-er still, 又要去守着孤灯, Here I am a-gain waiting, 又要去伴着 one lone lantern in

Trp. *f*

51

凶神。梦里黑 dark-ness, an-cient de- mons 发 a-gain at my side. In troubled

505

58

瓣。 two! 不! No! 这难道就是我金子的命? Can this long night more tru-ly be my fate? 我要活下去,活下去, Oh, I will live on, will live on,

510

Score 9.7

In measures 67-86, beautiful dreams and stifled reality create a strong contrast, sharply stimulating Jinzi's restless soul, causing her to no longer submit to the whims of fate. The reinforced accents in the timpani and string section introduce a quasi-recitative fragment ("recitativo accompagnato"): "No! Is this Jinzi's life?" (不, 这难道就是我金子的命?). This question emerges from the depth of Jinzi's soul. The fast, flowing arpeggios express Jinzi's opposition to her fate. When performing this fragment, the word "No!" (不) should be clearly articulated, though with relatively softer dynamics, yet full of meaning. The phrase "Is this Jinzi's life?" (这难道就是我金子的命?) should be sung with a slightly stronger tone, expressing a strong sense of rebellion. I sing this part with a heavier and more forceful tone: "I want to live, live, live!" (我要活下去, 活下去, 活下去!), repeated three times, with the tone of my voice becoming progressively heavier, as emotions intensify. The entire desire and hope of Jinzi erupts, culminating in the final upward octave progression of "I want to live" (活下去), which leads the fragment to its climax. As all instruments join, the flute and harp arpeggios sound like the peaks of waves. The melody in the strings rises and falls, like waves. The brass section introduces a compelling rhythm, symbolizing the turbulent forces of the sea and wind, transforming this key moment into a storm of emotions. "In water and fire, in the sky and on earth. I, Jinzi, will become a bird" (水里火里, 天上人间, 我金子, 总要变成飞鸟). This represents Jinzi's firm belief in living freely and her intense desire for a better life in the future.

It is important to note that the composer uses a large interval leap in this phrase to emphasize the drama. When singing this part, my breath changes into a long sigh, and the mood loosens. I release the tension in my voice, focusing on head resonance, relaxing the tongue, and clear articulation. The final phrase, "One day I will become a bird!" (总要有变成飞鸟的一天!), should be performed with full breath control, transitioning from a strong expression to a softer one, as if emerging from the depths of the heart, whispered, delicate but full of power. At this moment, almost all instruments are withdrawn, leaving enough space for the sadness in the voice. As the music gradually fades, everything returns to a calm state.

Jinzi reveals just a hint of the earlier, fanciful joy—If I only endure, my dreams will eventually become reality. (See Score 9.8)

58

瓣。 不！ 这难道就是我金子的命？ 我要活下去，活下去，
 two! No! Can this long night more tru-ly be my fate? Oh, I will live on, will live on,

510

61

活下去！ 水 里 火里，
 will live on! Through wa - - - - - ter or fire,

S. 哦！ Ah!

A. 哦！ Ah!

515

Picc. Fl.

Trb.

65

v

天 上 人 间, 我 金 子
 in Heav- - - - - en or Earth, Someday I

哦!
 Ah!

哦!
 Ah!

Hp.

6 6 620

69

v

(哪) 总 有 变 成 飞 鸟, 啊 变 成
 will be --- come a bird Ah I-

fp

Hp.

73

(女高)(Ob.)

飞 鸟 的 一 天!
 will be - - - come a bird!

哦
 Ah!

mp

mp

mp

8- - - - - 3

Score 9.8

During the performance of the aria "Oh, it's dark again," I studied the interpretation of the distinguished Chinese soprano Wan Shanhong (万山红).⁹⁹ Her performance not only reveals the inner suffering and conflict of Jinzi but also gives the character a deep, tragic dimension, emphasizing the dramatic development of her emotions. One of the most outstanding aspects of Wan Shanhong's interpretation is her precise breath control and expressive tone color, which allow for the gradual building of dramatic tension. In the lyrical passages, her singing maintains a subtle softness and fluidity of phrasing, while in the dramatic climaxes, her voice gains intensity and striking power, perfectly conveying the character's extreme emotions—from deep despair to inner struggle and longing for freedom. Inspired by Wan Shanhong's performance, I combined her approach with my own understanding of the character of Jinzi, adjusting both the vocal and emotional aspects to suit my vocal capabilities. A particularly significant element for me was skillfully blending bel canto technique with elements of Chinese folk music, which allowed me to give Jinzi's musical portrayal a unique sound and expressiveness. Wan Shanhong's precision in phrasing and her breath control helped me better integrate the music with the character's emotions, accentuating the dramatic essence of the performance. Moreover, her skilled use of body language and facial expressions inspired me to consciously shape my own gestures and gaze on stage, which allowed me to more fully convey Jinzi's inner tension and her longing for freedom. Ultimately, I achieved my goal: a deep understanding of the character, incorporating my own emotions into the interpretation, and finding an individual way to express it.

⁹⁹ Wan Shanhong(万山红), born in December 1959 in Heilongjiang Province, China, is a first-class national soprano and actress. She was a member of the IX and X National Political Consultative Conference and a permanent member of the IX National Youth Committee. She is also a member of the board of the Chinese Musicians Association. In 1988, she won the highest theatrical award in China, the "Plum Blossom Award" (梅花奖), and in 1990, she won first place in the folk singing category at the China Youth Singers Grand Prix. Some of her representative works include *The Savage Land* (原野), *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女), and *Sister Jiang* (江姐).

Wan Shanhong video (8:28-14:30): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4dzjnPFBQ4> 05/03/2025,9:00 am.

3.2.3.2 Jinzi's aria “Ah, my Hu” (Ah, wo de hu zi ge 啊, 我的虎子哥) from the second act of the opera *Savage Land* (Yuanye 原野)

Translation of the libretto:

啊! 我的虎子哥,	Ah! My dear Huzi,
你这野地里的鬼,	You, the ghost in the wild,
这十天的日子胜过一世!	These ten days have been worth a lifetime!
我又活了,	I am alive again,
这活着的滋味啊,	The taste of being alive,
什么也不能比。	Nothing can compare to it.
黑夜变得是那么短,	The night has become so short,
醒来心里阵阵是欢喜。	Waking up, my heart is filled with joy.
这一切啊都是因为有了你,	All of this, ah, is because of you,
我的亲人啊我哪能不疼? 哪能不爱? 哪能丢了你?	My dear, how can I not cherish you? How can I not love you? How can I lose you?

Analysis of the work:

Time of composition: 1987.

Tone: a compilation of Western G \flat - major and modal Chinese zhi pentatonic scale with an admixture of chromatic alterations.

Metre: 4/4

Tempo: *Adantino*

Form: In simplified terms, it can be considered as A B form. In a more accurate description, it is more of a recomposed form, based on the contrast between a lyrical beginning (A) and a dynamic development (B), with smooth transitions between sections.

Part	Intro	A	B	Coda
Bar	1-2	3-17	18-30	31-33
Tone	G \flat - major			

This aria represents Jinzi's confession of love to Chou Hu and is one of the most striking sections of the entire opera. Through an emotionally charged performance, Jinzi's feelings for Chou Hu reach their climax—this fiery love, like a flame, surrounds Chou Hu, enveloping him in her warm embrace, from which he cannot escape. The author of this dissertation, through a comparative analysis, observed that in the orchestral score, the violins play the role of the main melodic line in the accompaniment, while the cellos provide the harmonic foundation. The piano accompaniment utilizes appropriate performance techniques, depending on the markings in the score, to mimic the characteristics of the respective instruments. The texture of the accompaniment changes with the dynamics of the vocal language, which amplifies the dramatic tension.

Introduction (mm. 1-2) begins with the dynamic marking of *sub. p* in the piano accompaniment. The right hand uses a tremolo technique in octaves, imitating the sound of the violins, while the left hand, playing the cello and double bass parts, employs a short,

concise musical language, serving as an “introduction to the singing.” Both parts of the left hand form an octave relationship d--D, and the use of a descending perfect fifth interval expresses the state in which Jinzi’s love reaches the deepest recesses of her heart.

Section A (mm. 3-17). When Qiu Hu irritates Jinzi, she speaks one thing but desires another, telling him to leave. At the moment when Qiu Hu is about to turn and exit, Jinzi stops him and prevents him from leaving, singing “Ah, my Hu” (啊，我的虎子哥). The first note of “Ah” (啊) lasts two and a half beats on g^2 , with a pause between it and the next part of the phrase, which builds dramatic tension and emphasizes the heroine’s moment of hesitation. I sing this line with a piano dynamic, which represents the first vocal difficulty in this piece. It is necessary to open the mouth and nose during the inhalation phase, take a full breath, lift the soft palate high, allow the breath to carry the voice, and focus the voice in the head space. As I sing, I gradually develop my voice to express the strong emotions of Jinzi, related to love that has been lost and found after years. In the phrase “my Hu” (我的虎子哥), singing the name of her beloved, I must convey the internal struggle Jinzi feels in her psyche. The next line “you ghost of the wild” (你这野地里的鬼) begins with a strong note and then falls into a sigh. The tone of the singing intensifies word by word, expressing hidden love and resentment in the form of scolding, with extreme emotions clearly bubbling up. The piano accompaniment in the right hand creates an ascending melody in the form of a broken chord, contrasting with the descending melodic line of the vocal part. The interlude, performed in the form of octave arpeggios in the high register, creates a spatial sound response, reflecting Jinzi’s delicacy and tenderness towards Chou Hu. (See Score 10.1)

金子:
Jin Zi: *p*

1 Andantino $\text{♩} = 66$

呵! 我的虎子哥, 你
Oh! My dear Hu-- Zi, you

Sub. *p*

Sub. *p*

60

5

这野地里的鬼，这十天的日子
spir-----it of this sav-age land, These ten short days

cl.

Score 10.1

In measures 7-10, in the first part of the phrase, the piano accompaniment supports the vocal melody with a rhythmic pattern of triads, which has a strong driving character. Simultaneously, the right hand, in the form of semi-broken chords, collaborates with the repetition of the same notes in the left hand, expressing the emotion when Jinzi's heart beats as she looks at her beloved. In the second part of the phrase, the piano accompaniment accelerates through sixteenth-note groups, leading the vocal part to its climax. At the end of the phrase, the accompaniment returns to triplet figures, and after the chords descend, reaching the lowest point, the vibrato in the left hand blends with the glissando in the right hand, leading to the highest point of the entire piece. At this moment, Jinzi leans against Chou Hu's back, holding him tightly, and sings: "These ten days are better than a lifetime" (这十天的日子，胜过一世). The expression "better than a lifetime" (胜过一世) leaps by a seventh interval, with the voice transitioning from a soft to a strong dynamic, and Jinzi directly expresses her love for Chou Hu. (See Score 10.2)

8

胜 过 一 世！
are worth more than my whole life!

65

tr gliss.

Score 10.2

The second difficulty of the aria lies in the phrase "I" (我) in the sentence "I, again, lived" (我, 又活了), which is sung on the highest note of the entire piece, placed in a high tessitura and sustained on a fermata. This note requires deep breath support and precise control of vocal tension to avoid the loss of tonal stability. Particularly in terms of dynamic control, the emission must be adapted to the pitch of the note – in this section, I use a gradual transition from *p* to *f*, which propels the mood of the entire piece to its highest point. This sentence refers to Qiu Hu – through his reappearance, Jinzi's sleeping heart has come back to life. In the following line (t. 12, 13), "again I lived, lived" (我又活了, 活了), Jinzi sings to herself, a cry from her heart that had long been suppressed, causing Jinzi to feel as though she were dead, but now, through Qiu Hu's love, she is revived. Thus, for this same repeated phrase, I adopted two different approaches to express the emotions. Because the tone of the earlier expression is enthusiastic, the next line, "What a feeling to be alive" (这活着的滋味啊), is a heartfelt sigh from Jinzi, sung in a tone that seems like a whispered, internal dialogue with herself. In the phrase "nothing can compare to this" (什么也不能比), the composer again uses a seventh interval. To add drama to the music, the vocal tone becomes stronger, expressing Jinzi's character, who now has the courage to experience life. (See Score 10.3)

11

我 又活了, 我 又活了, 活了, 这
 I am re-born! I am re--born, This

Hp.

mp

5

7

14

活着的滋味呵 什么也不能比。
feel-ing of be-ing-a- live is worth the world to- me.

70

Score 10.3

Part B (measures 18-30), where the orchestra is enriched by the addition of the woodwind section, enhances the emotional depth of the aria. The interplay between the woodwinds and strings creates a seamless fusion of lyrical, heartfelt expression with subtle internal pulsations. The tonal color of the woodwinds adds a layer of expressiveness to Jinzi's aria, accentuating her delicate, tender side. "The nights have become so short" (黑夜变得是那么短) is the most emotionally entangled line in this aria, full of Jinzi's boundless love and attachment to Chou Hu. Their reunion was a union of body and soul, and these precious ten days made Jinzi feel that life is truly alive. In this section, the piano accompaniment has been simplified to four voices, with the woodwinds – flute (Fl.), oboe (Eh.), and clarinet (Cl.) – playing the key role in presenting the melody. The composer uses the unique color of the flute to herald the ambiguous shift in the tonal color of the minor third in the word "nights." The oboe, providing the middle voice, creates a canonic response to the vocal melody in a four-bar sequence. The clarinet, also part of the middle voice, serves as the main filling section in the interlude, utilizing an ascending melody that links the phrases. This reflects Jinzi's uncontrolled feelings, which continually swell in her heart, giving the vocal line an unlimited strength to express emotion. The composer indicates a dynamic of piano for the singing, and this delicate voice leads the mood into a state of seemingly infinite reflection. While singing the phrase "This is all because of you" (这一切都是因为有了你), the performer should emphasize the accents on the words "this" (一切), "everything" (都), and "you" (有了). In particular, "you" (有了) should be executed with a descending glissando. The performer should express Jinzi's sweet

and tender side, revealed under the joyful day spent with Chou Hu (measures 24-29). The atmosphere shifts from softness to passion. At this moment, Jinzi perceives Qiu Hu not only as her lover but also as a close relative. The word "closest" (亲) in the phrase "Oh, my closest one" (我的亲人啊) should gradually increase in volume to a quasi-scream to express that Jinzi sees Chou Hu not only as a lover but as a beloved relative. The phrase "How can I not feel pain?... How can I lose you?" (我哪能不疼...哪能丢了你) should not be prolonged. The third "How can I" (哪能) is sung with a gradual increase in pitch and volume, and the final "How can I" (哪能) must be controlled dynamically at a high level, sung softly yet with certainty. This is Jinzi's promise to Chou Hu, a defense of their beautiful love. The phrase "lose you" (丢了你) involves a gradual transition from strong to louder dynamics; "lose" (丢了) should be sung softly, and with "you" (你), there should be a gradual crescendo. This performance approach allows the emotions accumulated in the character to be released, highlighting Jinzi's joy from being in love. Chou Hu's love gives Jinzi the courage and strength to break free from the shackles. Jinzi ultimately decides to resist the oppression of feudal bonds, defending her love with all her might. This aria propels the entire opera toward the climactic point of love's expression. (See Score 10.4)

17

黑 夜 变 得 是 那 么 短 ， 醒
 The night, it passes by so quick-ly, I

Fl. *Camp.* *mp* *mp*

20

来 心 里 阵 阵 欢 喜 。 这 一 切 (呵) 都 是 因 为
 wake and my heart is danc-ing. And this feel-ing is all be-cause

mp

23
 有了你, 我的亲人(啊)我哪能不疼, 哪能
 I have you. How could I not so ache for you, dear? Love you

26
 不爱 哪 能 丢了 你?
 always? Nev----- er let you go?

30
 [两人拥抱]
 [The two embrace]

(紧接下曲)
 (Atc.)

Score 10.4

The aria " Ah, my Hu " represents Jinzi's confession of love, serving as the emotional climax of the entire opera and a moment when the heroine experiences her most intense emotional outburst. While performing this aria, I aimed to capture Jinzi's inner feelings—the joy of encountering love, the despair stemming from life's experiences, and the long-suppressed emotions that explode at this moment. The expansive melodic lines gave me the freedom to express these emotions. Before developing my own performance concept, I referred to the interpretations of two Chinese sopranos: Wan Shanhong (万山红) and Zhang Jiayu (张家毓). Their performances provided valuable insights into different approaches to

this role. Wan Shanhong (万山红)¹⁰⁰ combines the technique of Chinese national singing with elements of Western bel canto in her singing. Her phrasing, inspired by the traditional Chinese technique *xingqiang* (行腔)¹⁰¹, is characterized by fluidity and melodiousness, while also relying on the scientific principles of voice production developed in bel canto. Her performance style is marked by great expressiveness—through precise control of dynamics, she can convey the most subtle emotional nuances of the character, giving her a multidimensional quality and a strong dramatic impact. In shaping the dynamics, she aims for the full release of emotions, using clear dynamic contrasts. In terms of language, drawing from the tradition of Chinese national singing, she ensures exceptional clarity of articulation, which allows for the distinct emphasis of the text's meaning. In terms of stage presence, her portrayal of Jinzi is extremely evocative—rich in expressive gestures and dynamic facial expressions. Her use of eye movements is particularly striking, adding psychological depth to the character and helping to highlight the evolution of her emotions.

In contrast to the expressive style of Wan Shanhong, Zhang Jiayu (张家毓)¹⁰² focuses more on the uniformity of voice timbre and the stability of vocal positioning. Her interpretation is more fluid and subtle in terms of dynamics, resembling narrative storytelling rather than a sudden emotional explosion. In terms of language, influenced by the Italian school of singing, she pays attention to uniform articulation, particularly ensuring a smooth transition between the beginning and end phases of the sound. As a result, her articulation is coherent and effective. Zhang Jiayu employs more restrained stage movements, adapting each gesture to the musical and dramatic narrative. Her interpretation highlights the purity and emotional depth of Jinzi, creating an image of a character that is delicate but inwardly strong.

¹⁰⁰ Wan Shanhong (万山红) video: (3:40 - 5:50) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YX5LjEKQGN4> 05/03/2025, 11:25 am

¹⁰¹ A technique for conducting a musical phrase, including how to form sounds, combine syllables in singing, and control breathing and articulation.

¹⁰² Zhang Jiayu (张家毓), a Chinese soprano, is currently affiliated with the Propaganda and Culture Center of the Political Work Department of the People's Liberation Army of China. She also serves as a senior cultural advisor at the Chinese Association for the Promotion of Traditional Culture and as the vice-chairwoman of the Academic Committee of Young Singers. Zhang Jiayu is a laureate of the third prize in the 11th National Vocal Competition of the Ministry of Culture and the bronze medal in the operatic singing category at the 13th edition of the CCTV Young Singers' Competition in Beijing.

Zhang Jiayu video: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1QE411i7b3/> 05/03/2025, 11:27 am.

Ultimately, in my interpretation of this aria, I combined the methods of both sopranos, adapting them to my own understanding of the character Jinzi as well as my individual vocal and emotional conditions. From Wan Shanhong, I drew an approach based on the integration of various vocal techniques. While maintaining a stable vocal position and focusing on tonal excellence, my interpretation took on a more expansive character, with clear dynamic contrasts aimed at fully releasing the emotions. On stage, I was inspired by Zhang Jiayu's natural and economical gestures as well as Wan Shanhong's expressive eye movements. This combination allowed me to create the character of Jinzi as a pure woman full of deep emotions, striving for light and freedom. As a result, my interpretation is a synthesis of two different approaches, while also being an individual reading of the role that takes into account my personal expressive capabilities and vocal skills.

3.3. Shui Honglian from the opera *The Ballad of the Canal* (Yuanhe yao 运河谣).

3.3.1 Creative context

The opera *Ballad of the Canal*, composed by the renowned composer Yin Qing¹⁰³, is written in the tone of an intimate confession, expressing the most direct emotions in a very colloquial form. Structurally, the work is primarily based on the traditional *pentatonic scale*¹⁰⁴. Additionally, the use of semitones enhances the lyricism of the melody (a hexatonic scale created by adding one altered semitone to the pentatonic modal scale), making the structure of

¹⁰³ Yin Qing (印青), born in May 1954, is a well-known contemporary Chinese composer who became famous for his outstanding contributions to opera, musicals, film music and songs. His works feature a variety of styles, combining elements of traditional Chinese music with modern compositional techniques. They are immensely popular with audiences and have won wide recognition both at home and abroad. Among his representative works are: *Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣) and *Songs of the Long March* (长征组歌).

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/印青/10973054> 31/01/2025, 5:40pm.

¹⁰⁴ *The pentatonic scale* (五声调式)-a former traditional musical scale of the Han group consisting of five (instead of seven) notes-was widely used in ancient Chinese folk music, on the basis of which various varieties of Chinese folk styles and a complete system of music theory were developed; Therefore, although the pentatonic scale can be found in the traditional music of many countries and regions, it is still often referred to as “Chinese scale (中国调式)” or “folk scale (民族调式).” The pentatonic scale consists of pure fifths and consists of five tones, is unique to China, and can also be called a folk scale; the names of the five tones are: 宫 gong (do), 商 shang (re), 角 jiao (mi), 徵 zheng (sol) and 羽 yu (la).

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/五声调式/7125915> 31/01/2025, 5:51pm.

the piece more complete and fully demonstrating the musical features of ethnic music, such as purity, fast rhythm, and beautiful, moving, delicate melody. In terms of instrumentation, the combination of Western symphonic instruments with Chinese folk instruments has created a unique musical language that preserves the monumentality and subtlety of Western music while incorporating the subtle mood and emotions characteristic of Chinese music. Traditional instruments like the *guzheng* (古筝)¹⁰⁵ and *bamboo flute dizi* (竹笛), for example, allow the music to penetrate more deeply into the hearts of Chinese audiences, partly through the incorporation of traditional Chinese motifs or melodies composed in the traditional style. Nevertheless, from a compositional perspective, this opera differs significantly from traditional *Chinese opera* (戏曲) and does not utilize the technique of *vocal dragging* (拖腔). The expression of emotions is more direct and simple. The reason for this change is also an adaptation to the development of the modern language, which cannot present a topic too convoluted or with unnecessary elements. The rhythm of the opera is also quick and concise, making it more accessible for the audience to fully understand, without feeling aversion to traditional opera. In terms of musical material, some influences from traditional national operas are included, as well as the possibility of using folk melodies associated with specific communities living along the great canal. The complete and concise music fully conveys the dramatic tension.

3.3.2 Shui Honglian's musical image formation

In this opera, the character of Shui Honglian is portrayed in line with the continuous development of the plot, revealing her difficult life and background, as well as her beautiful face and figure. She is beautiful and strong, impulsive yet delicate; she possesses the boldness and cunning of women from the north, but due to her years of living in Jiangnan, her body emanates the jasper warmth of the southern water towns of Jiangsu. She is a woman who

¹⁰⁵ *Guzheng* (古筝) is one of China's traditional plucked instruments, belonging to the zheng family of instruments. It is a multi-stringed instrument, usually consisting of 21 strings that are plucked with fingers or a plectrum. With its unique sound and expression, the guzheng holds an important place in traditional Chinese music and is widely used in solo performances, ensembles and accompaniment.

boldly chases after her true self and reluctantly accepts the constraints of fate. She has a strong sense of justice and, without hesitation, decides to sacrifice for love when she deems it necessary. The composer uses three different types of vocal structures — *the folk ballad style* (民谣体)¹⁰⁶, *the melody of the five guards* (五更调)¹⁰⁷, and a reference to the phrase characteristic of arias in Western opera — to present the musical portrayal of Shui Honglian.

The entire opera consists of six acts.

During the reign of Emperor Wanli of the Ming Dynasty, the young scholar Qin Xiaosheng (秦啸生) uncovers a case of corruption among officials but is falsely accused of treason by the corrupt authorities and becomes the target of a manhunt. Shui Honglian (水红莲), a folk artist who earns a living through singing and performances, is forced to wander the Grand Canal after refusing to become a concubine. The fates of the protagonists intertwine aboard a ship, where Shui Honglian helps Qin Xiaosheng disguise himself as the sailor Li Xiaoguan (李小管). They then escape, traveling north along the canal on a cargo ship owned by Zhang Shuiyao (张水鹩).

During their journey, the shipowner Zhang Shuiyao, desiring Shui Honglian's beauty, attempts to force her to become his wife. Upon noticing the growing affection between Shui Honglian and Qin Xiaosheng, he decides to destroy their relationship at any cost. When the cargo ship stops in Suzhou, they encounter a blind woman, Guan Yanyan (关砚砚). She was deceived by the sailor Li Xiaoguan, bore his illegitimate child, and after being abandoned, fell into despair and lost her sight. Zhang Shuiyao sees this as a good opportunity to separate Qin Xiaosheng and Shui Honglian, so he tells Guan Yanyan that Qin Xiaosheng is Li Xiaoguan. To conceal his identity as a fugitive, Qin Xiaosheng can only continue pretending to be Li

¹⁰⁶ *Folk ballad style* (民谣体) is a genre of poetry or song characterized by a specific form and structure, usually narrative in nature, telling simple but vivid stories. The ballad form originated in oral tradition, originally transmitted through singing and storytelling, and is widely used in folk literature and music.

¹⁰⁷ *wu geng diao* (五更调) – dosł. „melodia pięciu straży” jedna z tradycyjnych chińskich drobnych form muzycznych (小调, xiao diao), nazywana też *wu geng qu* (五更曲, „piosenka pięciu straży”), *tan wu geng* (叹五更), *wu geng gu* (五更鼓). Tekst zazwyczaj ma pięć zwrotek (叠, die) śpiewanych od pierwszej do piątej straży nocnej. Forma muzyczna powstała dość wcześnie i jest szeroko rozprzestrzeniona.

https://baike.baidu.com/item/五更调?fromModule=lemma_search-box 31/01/2025, 5:54pm

Xiaoguan. At Shui Honglian's urging, Qin Xiaosheng takes Guan Yanyan and her son aboard the ship and cares for their lives.

Soon after, Zhang Shuiyao discovers the true identity of Qin Xiaosheng and uses this to threaten Shui Honglian, forcing her to marry him. Shui Honglian pretends to agree while secretly planning the escape of all three. She knows that Zhang Shuiyao is full of deceit and will surely report Qin Xiaosheng to the authorities. Therefore, she instructs Qin Xiaosheng to take Guan Yanyan and her child and escape first. In order to buy them time for their escape, she stays behind to face the villain.

Zhang Shuiyao, along with officials, arrives at the ship to capture Qin Xiaosheng, but unsuccessfully. He decides to tie Shui Honglian on the ship, using her as bait while waiting for Qin Xiaosheng to return and rescue her. In order to prevent Qin Xiaosheng from falling into the villain's trap, Shui Honglian knocks over an oil lamp on the ship, dying along with the cargo ship in the flames. Qin Xiaosheng, upon learning that Shui Honglian died to protect him, is overwhelmed with grief and wishes to follow her by taking his own life. However, Guan Yanyan persuades him, telling him that he must live for Shui Honglian's memory. Both of them go to Beijing, where they expose the villains and corrupt officials.

The first aria of Shui Honglian, "Ballad of the Canal" (Yun he yao 运河谣), appears at the beginning of Act II of the opera and is a love song between Shui Honglian and Qin Xiaosheng, who fall in love with each other. While rowing a boat, Shui Honglian sings with deep emotion, "the canal is a thousand miles long" (一条运河千里长). The piece takes the form of a folk song, with a short structure and gentle melody. The melodic line is based on the key of E \flat 宫 with characteristic folk tonal features. The first part consists of four phrases. The melody is beautiful, lyrical, cohesive, and long, showing the delicate and pure feminine image of Shui Honglian, and through the structure of these parallel phrases, it presents the neatness and harmony of the entire work, illustrating the joyful scenery on both sides of the canal. The scenery expresses Honglian's longing for a better life. When singing, the text should be clearly articulated, with natural breathing, so that the voice is cohesive and natural. It must

have a true, pure, and gentle sound quality, blending national vocal qualities with bel canto technique to make the character appear fuller and stronger.

The second aria of Shui Honglian, "Qin Sheng, Are You Alright?" (秦生啊, 你还好吗?), appears in Act IV of the opera. It details Shui Honglian's inner struggles after parting with Qin Xiaosheng, a separation forced upon her due to the situation with Guan Yanyan's mother and child. Out of concern for their fate and a sense of duty and moral code, Shui Honglian, despite her own suffering, makes the difficult decision to entrust Qin Xiaosheng with the care of Guan Yanyan's family in place of the absent Li Xiaoguan. At this moment, her beloved man is with someone else, and Shui Honglian, as a woman, cannot remain indifferent to the inner turmoil, sadness, grief, and loneliness. Despite this, she does not reveal her feelings but stays on the ship, looking at the moonlight and sinking into silent contemplation. Her internal monologue is full of pain and resignation, but it expresses an even stronger longing for Qin Xiaosheng. The three-part musical structure vividly expresses Shui Honglian's complex emotional state. The first part, combining recitative, uses a free rhythm to show the tangled feelings of love and hatred; in the second part, starting with a change of key and a shift in the texture of the accompaniment, the emotions are more intense than in the first part, and the expression is more strained, rapidly descending the scale, mimicking the tone of a long sigh to depict Shui Honglian's loneliness; in the third part, elements of *the melody of the five guards* (五更调) from ancient Chinese music are creatively incorporated. In this piece, the creation of Shui Honglian's character should highlight her feminine delicacy, yet grounded in her bold nature. She is a self-aware woman with her own opinions, so in interpreting this composition, she should not be portrayed as someone overwhelmed with self-pity and inner conflict. The longing Shui Honglian expresses for Qin Xiaosheng in the piece is not limited to love but also carries goodness and a brave emotional bond.

3.3.3 Analysis of Shui Honglian arias recorded on author's album

3.3.3.1 Shui Honglian's aria “Ballad of the Canal” (Yunhe yao 运河谣) from the second act of the opera *Ballad of the Canal* (Yuanhe yao 运河谣).

Translation of the libretto :

一条运河千里长，运河两岸是故乡，	A canal is a thousand miles long, and both sides of the canal are the hometown.
杨柳桥头依古塔，千村万落耕织忙。	The willow bridge is built on an ancient pagoda, and thousands of villages are busy with farming and weaving.
一条运河千里长，辛苦行得顺风船	A canal is a thousand miles long, and it's hard to get a good wind.
上水京师下杭州，骨肉分离年复年。	Up to the capital and down to Hangzhou, flesh and blood are separated year after year.
一条运河千年久，涛声桨影岁月流	A canal is a thousand years old, the sound of waves and the shadow of pulp flow over the years.
几多英雄从此出，青山夕照水悠悠。	Many heroes have come out from here, and the green hills and sunset water are long.

Analysis of the work:

Time of composition: 2012

Key: Eb宫调式¹⁰⁸ - Chinese traditional pentatonic scale

Metre: 4/4

Tempo: *Adagio*

Form: A B

Part	Preludium	A	B	Coda
Bar	1-2	3-18	19-34	35-39
Tone	Eb宫 - Chinese traditional pentatonic scale and extended pentatonic scale			

This aria was composed based on folk melodies from the Suzhou and Hangzhou regions of China, as well as traditional Chinese pentatonic scales. It features a lyrical and delicate musical style, with a simple structure and a flowing, calm melody. When performing, it should be interpreted according to the character's traits, emphasizing the delicacy, youth, and beauty of Shui Honglian.

"Ballad of the Canal" (运河谣) is a thematic aria performed by Shui Honglian in Act II of the opera. It appears in a scene where Shui Honglian and Qin Xiaosheng have just escaped

¹⁰⁸ The Eb宫 (Eb Gong pentatonic scale) is based on the Es (Eb) sound as the tonic and belongs to one of China's traditional pentatonic systems. This scale consists of five sounds, forming a simple structure in which the relationships between the sounds do not include semitones, leading to a unique sound with an oriental character. The sounds of the gong scale in the key of E-flat major are as follows: Eb - F - G - Bb - C

danger. This is also the moment when they have just met, starting to understand and develop affection for each other, with their feelings becoming more apparent. Shui Honglian expresses her emotions through song as she performs this aria. From an emotional metaphor perspective, this aria can be divided into two parts. The first part describes the beautiful landscapes along the canal's banks, with a flowing and calm melody that conveys the gentle and sweet image of Shui Honglian. The scenes depicted serve to express emotions, and the expression of these emotions aims to reveal the character, showcasing the strength of the metaphor—changes in the melodic line emphasize the emotional expression of the heroine. In the second part, the melody changes, becoming more dynamic, with a wider range of notes and a slightly higher register, reflecting the historical depth and spirit of the Grand Canal. The melodic line expresses Shui Honglian's emotions, symbolizing the historical spirit of the Grand Canal.

Looking at the score from the perspective of Western music, the entire orchestration in this piece seems to draw heavily from the aesthetic principles of Impressionistic music, giving the symphonic music painterly qualities. The harp plays a significant role in the structure, characterized by its soft, poetic sound, which can be both tender and mysterious. In the works of Impressionist composers, who placed great emphasis on the coloristic background, the harp was widely used to depict the beauty of nature. "Ballad of the Canal" (运河谣) follows this typical Impressionist orchestral technique, combining it with the color of Chinese music. The harp's arpeggios paint the rippling reflections of water, creating picturesque images of the canal. The composer's decorative approach to shaping the musical structure means that melody, harmony, and rhythm play key roles in conveying the musical color and shaping the musical image. In some parts of the orchestration, the composer introduces folk instruments that harmoniously blend with the sound of Western instruments. The inclusion of bamboo flute and *guzheng* (古筝) strengthens the national character of the orchestra, giving the music purity and subtlety, which enhances the emotional atmosphere of the lyrical scenes.

"Ballad of the Canal" (运河谣) is an aria in the style of a folk ballad that describes the cultural landscape and the beauty of the Grand Canal. It is the main musical theme of the entire opera and also a love song between Shui Honglian and Qin Xiaosheng.

The entire aria is in 4/4 time, with a tempo of *Adagio*, set at 76 beats per minute. In the introduction (measures 1–2), the piano accompaniment creates an octave relationship between the melody in the right hand and the vocal part. The left hand plays an accompaniment based on broken chords, interacting with the right hand to introduce the theme. These elements work together, setting the stage for the emotional entrance of the soloist, serving as a guide to the mood that will be expressed in the later part of the piece.

Section A (measures 3–18) is thematic and characterized by a calm, balanced rhythm. The left-hand accompaniment utilizes a technique of combining the bass with broken chords, which slows down the harmonic rhythm, giving the accompaniment fluidity and a singing quality, emphasizing the lyrical nature of the piece. The rhythmic structure of the theme is based primarily on even rhythmic values and dotted rhythms, ensuring the melody's stability and providing a flowing and linear structure to the piece. This section describes the beautiful scenery of nature on both sides of the canal and should be sung narratively. The melody should be as cohesive as possible, giving the impression of a continuous melodic line. Tension and relaxation should be calm, with the grace of water flowing through the canal, evoking a sense of daydreaming caused by the surrounding scenery. The vocal range of section A spans only one and a half octaves, with the highest note reaching only g^2 , which is not technically difficult for a soprano. The charm of the piece lies in its broad melody containing many long notes, making it challenging to fully express its qualities. Breathing during the performance must be smooth and calm, and care should be taken to ensure that the long notes are sustained properly. It is important to enhance the resonance in the head, singing with a pure, light voice to express the beautiful poetic imagery, capturing the playful charm of young Shui Honglian and her love and admiration for the beauty of the canal's landscape. In

measures 3–10, the traditional technique of *the Thirteen Main Rhymes* (十三道大辙)¹⁰⁹ is clearly utilized, specifically *the Yangjiang rhyme* (阳江辙)¹¹⁰. The "Thirteen Main Rhymes" is a rhyme system commonly used in traditional Chinese opera and folk art, especially in songwriting and singing. It is based on the phonetic characteristics of the Chinese language, grouping the finals of Chinese characters into thirteen main categories, each called a "rhyme" (辙). These categories assist creators in selecting appropriate rhymes when writing lyrics, making the texts melodic, easy to pronounce, and sing. The Yangjiang rhyme, a category in this system, is characterized by the "ang" ending, which also includes "iang" and "uang." This rhyme has a resonant and broad sound, often used to express emotions such as heroism, enthusiasm, or grandeur. As a result, the text in the first part of the aria becomes more melodic and easier to sing, maintaining a regular structure in its pronunciation. Special attention should be paid to the articulation of the three characters ending in –ang (长 *chang*, 乡 *xiang*, 忙 *mang*), ensuring they are pronounced clearly and rounded.

This musical passage expresses the feelings of Shui Honglian after being saved, as she meets Qin Xiaosheng. At this moment, the young woman's heart is filled with relief, like a solitary boat that has drifted for a long time along the Canal, finally finding a safe harbor. Having been without a permanent home since childhood, Shui Honglian finds stability and certainty in Qin Xiaosheng. Her inner state is one of fulfillment and peace. From a performance perspective, it is crucial to emphasize the atmosphere of this moment. The sound should be delicate and flowing, with moderate dynamics. The performer should adopt a style resembling a monologue, conveying the subtlety of emotions through natural phrasing and narrative delivery. (See Score 11.1)

¹⁰⁹ *Thirteen major rhymes* (十三道大辙) is a system of rhymes commonly used in traditional Chinese opera and folk art, mainly in songwriting and singing. It is based on the phonetic characteristics of the Chinese language, grouping the final syllables of Chinese characters into thirteen major categories, each of which is called a "rhyme" (辙). These rhyme categories help writers choose appropriate rhymes when writing lyrics, making lyrics melodious, easy to pronounce and sing.

¹¹⁰ *Yangjiang rhyme* (阳江辙) is a category of rhyme in the traditional Chinese opera system of "thirteen major rhymes" (十三道大辙), belonging to the phonetic system of the Chinese language. It is characterized by the stem ending "ang," which also includes "iang" and "uang." Yangjiang rhyme has a loud and wide sound, often used to express emotions such as heroism, enthusiasm or sublimity.

中速 民族风

一条运河千里长,

5
运河两岸是故乡, 杨柳桥头依古塔, 啊,

9
千村万落耕织忙, 一条运河千里长,

Score 11.1

Measures 11–18 serve as a transitional passage, utilizing a rhyme based on "an" (船 *chuan*, 年 *nian*), which is a typical example of *the Yanqian rhyme* (言前辙).¹¹¹ In terms of content, these measures describe how, beneath the visible wealth along the banks of the canal, there lie scenes of sadness and joy, separations and reunions. Every departure of a boat from the port signifies a separation, illustrating an unseen suffering. When performing the phrase "Separated families, year after year, still longing for each other" (骨肉分离年复年), a feeling of sadness and helplessness dominates. Shui Honglian reflects on her life and past, and a note

¹¹¹ The *Yanqian rhyme* is a category in the traditional Chinese operatic system of "Thirteen Main Rhymes" (十三道大辙), and it is characterized by the "an" ending, which also includes "ian," "uan," and "üan." This rhyme has a distinct and soft sound, often used to express subtle, lyrical, or narrative emotions.

of resignation enters her heart. She knows that on both banks of the Canal, numerous families experience separations and farewells daily in their struggle for survival – year after year, day after day. These words carry both praise for the role of the Canal and a bitter understanding of the fates of the people it connects and separates. Interpretively, the emotions in this passage should be subdued. In contrast to the earlier lyrical flow, the performance here should convey a sense of sympathy and gentle sorrow. The singing should express the melancholy and helplessness embedded in the text, creating a subtle and poignant atmosphere.

(See Score 11.2)

13
辛苦行得顺风船, 上水京师下杭州啊,

17
骨肉分离年复年, 一条运河千年久,

Score 11.2

Measures 19–34 (Part B) feature a piano accompaniment in which the left hand employs broken chords while the right hand plays block chords with long rhythmic values. The combination of these two elements creates music with a calm, narrative character. The chord progression alternates between chords from the Chinese pentatonic system: VI - 羽 (*yu*) and I - 宫 (*gong*), which emphasizes the gentle and melodic style characteristic of folk songs from the Jiangnan region. In Part B, the melody is composed using the technique of shifting to a higher register, yet the overall contour remains faithful to the original shape. This reflects

the musical material's consistency between Part B and Part A and underscores the unity in the development of the musical ideas.

Part B represents the emotional climax of the entire aria. This section praises the Canal, which has stood as a living witness to history for a thousand years, continuously flowing and resonating with the voices of people. The words "The canal has lasted for a thousand years, the sound of waves echoing through the ages" (一条运河千年久，涛声浆影岁月流) and "How many heroes have emerged over the years, green hills and water stretching endlessly at sunset" (几多英雄从此出，青山夕照水悠悠) reflect the longevity of the Canal, its ongoing development, and its historical significance. The text highlights both the historical endurance and dynamic nature of this place, where the fates of many generations converge. In terms of the text, special attention should be paid to the euphony of syllables ending in -ou (久 *jiu*, 流 *liu*, 悠 *you*), which is a typical example of *the Youqiu rhyme* (油求辙).¹¹² During the performance of this section, it is important to maintain the sense of "scenery before the eyes," as if the images described in the text are right in front of us. Emotionally, the content should be interpreted with a sense of excitement and pride, and the volume of the singing can be slightly greater compared to the earlier sections. (See Score 11.3)

21

涛声浆影岁月流, 几多英雄从此出,

¹¹² *Youqiu rhyme* (油求辙) is a category in the traditional Chinese operatic "Thirteen Main Rhymes" (十三道大辙) system and is characterized by the "ou" ending, which also includes "iou" (iu). This rhyme has a rounded and soft sound, often used to express deep, lyrical, or slightly melancholic emotions.

Score 11.3

The Coda (measures 35–39) forms the final section of this musical work. During the performance of the conclusion, it is essential to maintain fluidity and meticulously convey the characteristic style of *pingtan* (评弹)¹¹³. As noted in the text, at this point, the piece becomes more stable, and the word "ah" (啊) enhances the sense of finality, giving the entire piece a more satisfying and complete ending. When singing the phrase "water as old as time" (水悠悠), the lowest note, c^1 , should be supported by an appropriate breath and then gradually decrease in volume as the phrase concludes. The voice should resemble the waves on the water, which slowly recede, creating a sense of gradual fading. At this moment, the piano accompaniment perfectly aligns with the vocal line, using mordents and chords to depict the gentle ripples of the canal. In the final measure, the right hand plays a complete tonic chord, E^b major (宫), which underscores Shui Honglian's calm state of mind and symbolizes the conclusion of the musical piece in a tranquil tone. (See Score 11.4)

¹¹³ *pingtan* (评弹) is a traditional form of Chinese folk theater, originating in the Suzhou region, combining storytelling and singing with the playing of stringed instruments. It originated during the Ming Dynasty, and its popularity peaked during the Qing Dynasty, being still widely performed today in the Jiangnan region (especially in Suzhou and Shanghai).

33
青山夕照水悠悠，
悠，
啊，

37 渐慢
水悠悠。

Score 11.4

Before performing this aria, I watched Wang Lida's interpretation (王丽达)¹¹⁴, who became a source of inspiration for me. Her creation of the character of Shui Honglian was based on a clear and luminous sound, subtle emotional expression and solid vocal technique based on Chinese traditional music. As a result, she was able to create a female character in which strength and delicacy coexist harmoniously. Wang Lida's vocal style is based on Chinese national singing technique, preserving the distinctive features of *xing qiang* (行腔), which gives the melodic line both traditional color and conformity to the modern demands of operatic aesthetics. Her interpretation is not limited to the elements of national singing - in performance she skillfully combines *belcanto* technique, using breath control, handling of resonances and a variety of sound colors. As a result, her voice takes on a fuller sound, and the expression of the role becomes more lyrical and dramatic. Wang Lida's stage

¹¹⁴ Wang Lida (王丽达) (born 1978) Graduated from the Chinese Conservatory of Music. She is a well-known Chinese soprano, a professor of vocal performance at the Central Conservatory of Music and a tutor of master's students. She has distinguished herself with excellent performances in Chinese opera, art songs and folk music. She has played leading roles in many classical operas, such as *The Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣) and *The White-haired Girl* (白毛女). Her singing is characterized by sincere emotion and proficient technique. Wang Lida (王丽达) video: <https://b23.tv/fJ8YrgX> 05/03/2025, 1:20 pm.

interpretation is characterized by naturalness and dynamic expression, making Shui Honglian's character gain depth and multidimensionality.

In developing my own interpretative concept of this aria, I applied a similar approach, but enriched and modified it according to my understanding of the character, her emotions, and references to the native cultural model. During the performance, I relied on *belcanto* technique, but employed soft articulation and delicate tone production. The voice position was placed forward, and the phrasing maintained a light and natural character. I combined these elements with the lyrical and subtle sound of the folk melody from the Suzhou and Hangzhou regions, present in the accompaniment. As a result, I was able to create a musical image of Shui Honglian as a character full of delicacy, youthful freshness, and exceptional beauty.

3.3.3.2 Aria Shui Honglian “Qin sheng, are you okay?” (Qin sheng a, ni hai hao ma? 秦生啊，你还好吗?) from the fourth act of the opera *The Ballad of the Canal* (Yuanhe yao 运河谣).

Translation of the libretto :

秦生啊你还好吗?	Qin Sheng, are you well?
我真的恨你	I truly hate you.
怎能守着她一刻不离	How could you stay by her side without leaving for a moment
不! 我不恨	No! I do not hate you.
你一刻不离她才有一线生机	It is only by staying with her that she has a glimmer of hope.
可是我魂魄无依啊	But my soul has no refuge
像柳絮随风舞	Like willow catkins dancing in the wind,

不知要飘向哪里	Not knowing where to drift.
睁开眼睛想着你	I open my eyes and think of you,
闭上眼睛梦见你	I close my eyes and dream of you,
梦见你长守在她身边	Dreaming of you staying by her side forever.
泪汪汪一声，长叹息	With tears welling up, I let out a long sigh.
秦生啊你还好吗？	Qin Sheng, are you well?
初更熬药汤不要烫着你	At the first watch, I boil the medicine, be careful not to burn yourself.
二更寒风起你要多穿衣	At the second watch, the cold wind rises, you should wear more clothes.
三更星斗移你要歇一口气	At the third watch, the stars shift, you should take a rest.
四更孩子哭给他喂点浆米	At the fourth watch, the child cries, feed him some rice gruel.
五更拂晓唱雄鸡	At the fifth watch, dawn breaks, the rooster crows.
我一夜站在露水里	I stand in the dew all night,
你抽一点空把我想起	If you find a moment, remember me,
让我得一点爱惜一点爱惜	Let me receive a little care, a little care.

Analysis of the work:

Time of composition: 2012 r.

Key: B \flat 徵(zhi) ¹¹⁵Chinese traditional pentatonic scale.

A \flat 商(shang) with 变宫 (bian gong)¹¹⁶, a traditional Chinese six-note scale.

E \flat 宫(gong) Chinese traditional pentatonic scale.

Metre: 4/4 2/4 3/4

Tempo: *Adagio Andante Larghetto Andante moderato*

Form: A B C

Part	Preludium	A	B	C
Bar	1-5	6-16	17-30	31-44
Tone	B \flat 徵(zhi)		A \flat 商(shang) - 加 变宫 (bian gong)	E \flat 宫(gong)

¹¹⁵ The B \flat 徵 mode is a scale based on the traditional Chinese pentatonic scale, in which the B \flat serves as the sound 徵(zhǐ), characterized by a soft and smooth sound. It is widely used in traditional Chinese music, ideal for expressing lyrical, tender or slightly melancholic emotions. It is an important tool in shaping musical atmosphere and emotional expression. The order of sounds in the scale is: B \flat (Zhi) - C (Yu) - E \flat (Gong) - F (Shang) - G (Jue). Tonal notation in the Western key system of E \flat major is used.

¹¹⁶ A six-note modal scale is a scale formed by adding one altered sound to a five-note modal scale. Specifically, a six-note modal scale can be created by adding the sound “qingjiao” (清角) or “biangong” (变宫) to a pentatonic scale. The “qingjiao” (清角) sound is the sound a small second above the “jue” (角) sound, while the “biangong” (变宫) sound is the sound a small second below the “gong” (宫) sound.

The aria " Qin Sheng, are you okay?" comes from the fourth act of the opera *Ballada o kanale* (运河谣). From night to dawn, Shui Honglian stands on the deck, her clothes soaked by the cold dew, silently enduring the pain of parting from her beloved. Although her tone carries a sense of sorrow and injustice, deep within her heart lies a profound longing and concern for Qin Xiaosheng.

This aria plays a crucial role in the development of the opera's plot, serving as a bridge between previous and upcoming events. It emphasizes Shui Honglian's helplessness and delicacy as a woman, while also revealing other aspects of her character, such as her ability to sacrifice personal happiness for the good of others and her readiness to dedicate herself to love. This section of the aria intensifies the emotional conflicts within the story, deepening the characterization of the protagonist and contributing to the dynamic progression of the action. In the structure of this piece, the composer utilizes elements of both recitative and the aria form typical of European opera. In the condensed section, consisting of 44 measures, the composer captures the expression of three distinct emotional states of Shui Honglian.

Prelude (measures 1-5): In the piano accompaniment, the right hand develops the melody around the note B \flat 徵 (Zhi) as the tonic. The left hand plays broken chords, maintaining a steady tempo based on the structure of tonic and dominant chords, which slows down the harmonic progression. This gives the accompaniment a fluid and lyrical quality, highlighting the lyrical nature of the piece and evoking the atmosphere of the dark, quiet night on the cargo ship. The use of the tonic chord emphasizes the monumentality of the canal, while the III and II chords create a melancholic mood. After the five-measure introduction, the thematic part A follows.

Part A (measures 6-16) shows the relationship between Shui Honglian and Qin Xiaosheng, where love intertwines with hatred. This section is recitativo in style. Shui Honglian walks back and forth on the deck, and although her beloved is near, it feels as though they are separated by thousands of miles. Through contrasting musical phrases, the composer expresses the conflicting and complex emotions of Shui Honglian. The main

melody of this section is based on undulating melodic lines that rise and fall, with the rhythm changing from slow to fast. The left-hand accompaniment uses broken chords in a harmonic arrangement with whole notes, maintaining a tempo of 68 beats per minute, which gives the music the character of the question: "Qin Sheng, are you okay?" (秦生啊, 你还好吗?). In the interpretation, the voice should be gently and carefully anchored on the breath. The tone should not be too full, but rather emphasize the questioning intonation and express concern and emotional involvement. This section is not technically difficult. To express love through singing, I use a soft tone. (measures 11-16) The phrase expresses Shui Honglian's complaint full of sadness and inner turmoil, with helpless intonation further reflecting the character's complex emotions, blending love and hatred. While singing such complex emotions, I focus on following the notation (see Score 12-1 – red marking). The three uses of the word "hate" in the fragment "I really hate you" (我真的恨你) and "No, I don't hate you, I don't hate you" (不, 我不恨你, 我不恨你) convey entirely different emotions, reflecting Shui Honglian's internal transformation — from her personal struggles to her understanding of Qin Xiaosheng's situation. During the performance of the first "hate" (恨), I employed a dark and low tone to express the resentment arising from the disappointment of unfulfilled love when Qin Xiaosheng could not be by her side. In the case of the second and third "hate" (恨), the singing becomes more explosive and emotionally tense. Particularly in the third "hate" (恨), I applied the *runqiang* (润腔)¹¹⁷ technique from Chinese opera to convey Shui Honglian's painful struggles. She longed to be with Qin Xiaosheng, but compared to Guan Yanyan, the latter was more deserving of sympathy. Through this interpretation, I aimed to convey Shui Honglian's complex inner landscape and her noble character, as well as the sorrow stemming from the impossibility of being with her beloved. (see Score 12.1).

¹¹⁷ *Run qiang* (润腔) is an expressive technique characteristic of traditional Chinese music, analogous to the European coloratura technique. It is widely used in *Chinese opera* (戏曲), *folk theatre* (曲艺), *folk songs* (民歌), and other musical forms. In Chinese opera, *run qiang* is extensively employed in singing to enrich and embellish vocal lines, enhancing their expressive power and ornamental quality. This technique encompasses various forms of expression, including tonal variations, rhythmic modifications, and the introduction of embellishments.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The tempo is marked as ♩=68. The key signature has two flats. The lyrics are written in Chinese characters below the vocal line. In the second and third systems, certain words in the lyrics are highlighted with colored boxes: '恨' (red), '你' (green), '离' (green), '不' (red), '恨' (red), '你' (green), '离' (green), '生' (green), and '机' (green).

Score 12.1

In Section B (mm. 17-30), the tonality shifts to the Chinese six-tone modal system—A \flat 商 (Shang) with the addition of 变宫 (Bian Gong), while the tempo changes to 78 beats per minute. Between measures 17-21, three textual phrases appear, following a rhythmic pattern of sixteenth note – quarter note – eighth note – half note. The composer employs these rhythmic variations to express an unstable and turbulent musical atmosphere in this passage. In the piano accompaniment, the sequentially ascending melody and tremolo passages, which evoke a sense of unease, further reinforce the emotional intensity of the vocal line. This effectively portrays Shui Honglian’s distress, helplessness, and loss of control. In performance, the singer should convey Shui Honglian’s melancholy and solitude. Between

measures 22-25, the composer intensifies the dramatic tension through repetitions and melodic variations combined with a driving dotted eighth-note rhythm, leading to the climactic moment of the entire piece. When performing the phrase "I open my eyes and think of you, I close them and dream of you" (睁开眼睛想着你, 闭上眼睛梦见你), special attention should be given to tempo fluctuations—starting at 78 beats per minute and gradually accelerating. Additionally, the singer should emphasize the intonation of the words "think" (想) and "dream" (梦). During the phrase "In my dreams, you are always by her side" (梦见你长守在她身边), a gradual *ritardando* should be applied before returning to the original 78 beats per minute. The singer must deepen breath support in preparation for the phrase "by her side" (身边), which occurs in the upper vocal register. The emotional interpretation should express Shui Honglian's intensifying and overwhelming love for Qin Xiaosheng. Between measures 26-30, the tempo slows to 60 beats per minute. While performing the phrase "A tearful voice, a long sigh" (泪汪汪一声, 长叹息), I employed a dynamic transition from *forte* (*f*) to *piano* (*p*). The contrast between strong and weak dynamics conveys Shui Honglian's helplessness and bitterness. Additionally, I incorporated the *ku qiang* (哭腔)¹¹⁸ vocal technique, a distinctive expressive method in traditional Chinese opera and folk singing. By applying this technique, I enhanced the dramatic expressiveness of this passage, effectively capturing Shui Honglian's situation—like a boat adrift on a canal, aimless and without support. (See Score 12.2).

17 $\text{♩} = 78$
可是我魂魄无依啊 像柳絮随风舞 不知要飘向哪里

¹¹⁸ *Ku qiang* (哭腔): A specialized vocal technique used in traditional Chinese opera and folk singing to express sorrow, suffering, or lamentation. By imitating the timbre and inflection of weeping, this technique enhances the emotional depth and expressiveness of the singing. The weeping tone is not merely a vocal technique but also a crucial tool for conveying emotional intensity.

2
22 渐快 rit. ♩=78
睁开眼睛想着你 闭上眼睛梦见你 梦见你长守在她身边

26 ♩=60 rit.
泪汪汪一声长叹息

Score 12.2

Section C (mm. 31-52)

The tonality shifts to the traditional Chinese pentatonic scale—E \flat 宫 (gong), with a tempo of 70 beats per minute. This section portrays Shui Honglian's kindness and her longing for love. In this passage, the composer employs *the melody of the five guards* (五更调) compositional technique, a structure derived from traditional Chinese folk songs, which follows the progression of the "Five Watches of the Night." Beginning with the First Watch, the piece gradually depicts the protagonist's emotional states, tracing the development of the narrative and the transformation of emotions up to the Fifth Watch. The composer utilizes distinct melodies to correspond with the lyrics that express different emotional nuances. The simplicity of the lyrics aligns closely with Shui Honglian's character. From the First to the Fourth Watch, the layered progression gradually unveils Shui Honglian's deepening love for Qin Xiaosheng. In the phrase "Boiling herbal soup on the first night, don't burn yourself" (初夜熬药汤, 不要烫着你), special emphasis should be placed on the word "burn" (烫). Similarly, in "Dress warmly" (多穿衣), the word "warmly" (多) should be highlighted, and in "Take a breath" (歇一口气), the word "breath" (歇) should be stressed. Each of these

emphasized characters aligns with the strong beats of their respective measures. The phrase "At dawn during the Fifth Watch, the rooster crows, and I have stood in the dew all night" (五更拂晓唱雄鸡，我一夜站在露水里) marks the climactic moment of the section. When singing this phrase, deep breath support should be maintained, and the vocal line should be broad and continuous, effectively expressing Shui Honglian's longing for love, as well as her inherent kindness and self-sacrificial devotion. Finally, Shui Honglian sings in a prayerful tone: "Spare a moment to think of me, and grant me a little love" (你抽一点空把我想起，让我得一点爱惜). This phrase serves as a recapitulation of her previously expressed emotions, encapsulating her yearning and vulnerability. (See Score 12.3).

31 略自由 $\text{♩}=70$



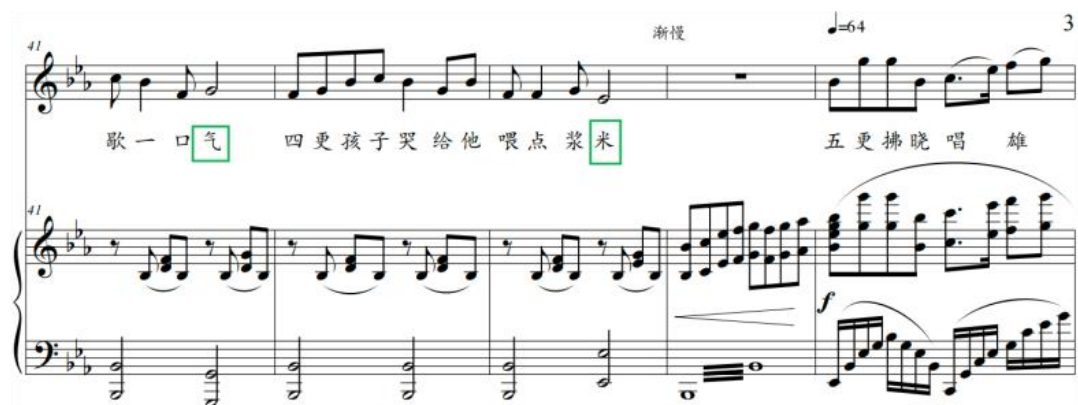
秦生啊你还好吗 秦生啊 你还好吗 初更熬药汤 不要

37



烫着[你] 二更寒风起 你要多穿[衣] 三更星斗移 你要

41 渐慢 $\text{♩}=64$ 3



歇一口[气] 四更孩子哭给他喂点浆[米] 五更拂晓唱 雄

Score 12.3

In this aria, the final syllable of each textual phrase follows the "yi qi zhe" (一七辙)¹¹⁹ rhyme scheme from traditional Chinese opera (see all green markings in the score example). This pattern is characterized by the dominance of the vowel sound "i". When singing, special attention should be paid to the final articulation and closure of the sound—the tip of the tongue should gently touch the back of the lower teeth, while the surface of the tongue should remain slightly flattened to maintain sufficient space in the oral cavity. Additionally, head

¹¹⁹ *Yī qī zhé* (一七辙) is one of the rhyme categories in the "Thirteen Principal Rhymes" system of traditional Chinese opera and folk performing arts. It is part of the classification of rhyme endings in the phonological system of the Chinese language. This rhyme scheme is characterized by the presence of the vowel sounds "i," "ü," or "-i" (lingual vowels) as the core of the rhyme. The pronunciation of *yī qī zhé* is subtle and gentle, often used to convey delicate, lyrical, or slightly melancholic emotions.

resonance should be increased, and the onset of the syllable should be articulated softly. This approach not only enhances clarity of pronunciation but also ensures that the vocal timbre remains pure and bright.

When I performed the aria "Qin Sheng, are you okay?" (秦生啊, 你还好吗?), I referred to the rendition by the renowned singer Lei Jia (雷佳)¹²⁰. Her singing is a fusion of Chinese folk singing, bel canto, and the aesthetic qualities of *Chinese opera* (戏曲), which greatly inspired me artistically. In terms of breath control, Lei Jia employs a method of combined chest and abdominal breathing, inhaling simultaneously through both the mouth and nose. She adheres to the principles of "the voice stops, but the breath of singing continues" (声断气不断) and "the music pauses, but the musical mood remains" (音断意相连), delicately integrating breath with vocal expression. This approach enhances the questioning tone and conveys Shui Honglian's deep concern. Regarding diction, her articulation is clear, precise, and cohesive. In the use of *runqiang* (润腔), she skillfully employs techniques such as glissando and trills, incorporating various ornamental elements that enrich the expressiveness of Shui Honglian's inner jealousy and melancholy. These inspirations allowed me to successfully portray a delicate, kind, and compassionate Shui Honglian in my performance.

In Chinese opera, female characters from the lower social strata assume different roles and characteristics at each stage of history. By analyzing Chinese opera from a historical perspective and using a century as the timeframe for this study, it is possible to observe the evolution of such female characters over time.

The author has selected three representative operatic works from different historical periods in the development of Chinese opera: *The White-Haired Girl*, *The Wilderness*, and *Ballad of the Canal*. Through a comparative historical analysis of female characters from the

¹²⁰ Lei Jia (雷佳), born on October 19, 1979 in Hunan Province, Yiyang City, is a Chinese soprano and first-grade actress. She graduated successively from the Chinese Academy of Music and the People's Army Academy of Arts. She is considered "one of the representative figures of Chinese national vocalism." She won a gold medal in the China Golden Bell Award vocal competition and a gold medal in the folk singing category in the professional group of the CCTV Young Singers Television Grand Prix competition. She has participated in operas such as *The Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣), *The White-haired Girl* (白毛女), *The Void* (原野) and *The Song of Mulan* (木兰诗篇).
Lei Jia video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPzV2HAApck> 01/02/2025, 6:26pm.

lowest tiers of Chinese society, it becomes evident that when such women serve as the protagonists, their primary mode of expression is through tragic beauty. This phenomenon reflects an invisible cultural inertia. Thousands of years of decadent ideologies in the feudal Chinese society completely constrained and bound women, leading to their persistently low social status, long-term oppression, and suffering. This, in turn, inevitably fostered female resistance as well as elicited sympathy and pity from other social classes. Regardless of whether it is Xi'er, Jin Zi, or Shui Honglian—although they live in different eras, possess different personalities, belong to different social groups, and experience different fates—the essence of their tragic destiny remains the same. This truth, expressed across centuries and refined through art, has given rise to the aesthetic and artistic beauty of tragic female characters, making it one of the defining symbols of Chinese opera.

However, in recent years, a different trend has emerged: female characters in opera have evolved into images of dynamic women, capable of shaping their own destinies while maintaining a strong orientation toward family, humanistic values, and existential concerns. They now face challenges with their heads held high. A profound reflection on the dynamics of these transformations reshapes thematic concerns and redefines the portrayal of contemporary women. Nevertheless, classical operatic performances, which reenact China's historical narratives, still allow audiences to perceive the hidden beauty of women who lived for centuries under oppression. In describing the process of social transformation and the struggle for equal status among Asian women, it is important to note that while Western music and culture developed along different trajectories, social transformation processes unfolded in remarkably similar ways. Suffragists were needed both in the East and the West, and in both spheres, they fulfilled their mission.

Chapter IV: Comparative analysis of Mozart and Chinese opera works

4.1 Comparison of the main musical material

Chinese opera music and Mozart's operatic music both rely on the concept of a "basic musical material." This means that the entire composition or performance is based on the presentation, development, and transformation of one or more main motifs. In the case of Chinese opera analyzed in this chapter, the study focuses on the traditional repertoire, whereas in Mozart's operas, the analysis addresses works from the Classical period, which adhere to the typical tonal frameworks of that era.¹²¹ Despite the similarities in how basic musical material is utilized, the core of both traditions—both in terms of characteristics and methods of development—is fundamentally different. In Mozart's operatic works, the development of motifs follows classical compositional principles, where themes are presented, developed, and return in different dramatic contexts. However, unlike traditional Chinese opera, which often relies on a single main motif or melody, Mozart's works feature greater musical diversity. Within a single scene or act, Mozart is able to introduce multiple themes, each corresponding to specific characters or dramatic events. This allows his operas to not only comply with classical formal principles but also to be highly flexible in terms of dramaturgy.

Mozart's operatic music is therefore exceptional in its ability to combine formal motif development with profound emotional and narrative expression. The composer tailored his themes to the emotions and personalities of the characters, as seen in *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte*, where changes in relationships between characters are reflected in the music.¹²² This dynamic flexibility distinguishes Mozart's operas from traditional Chinese operatic works.

¹²¹ Zhang Rui, *A Comparative Study of Chinese Opera and Western Opera Music Styles* (中国歌剧与西方歌剧音乐风格比较研究) [J], *Journal of Pu'er College* (普洱学院学报), 2021(5).

¹²² Steptoe Andrew. *The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas: The Cultural and Musical Background to Le Nozze di Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Così fan tutte* [M]. Clarendon Press, 1988.

Traditional Chinese opera typically relies on fixed melodic and rhythmic frameworks. The music of the entire opera often centers around a single, dominant melodic motif, which is repeated and developed throughout the performance. The musical development of Chinese opera is based on the technique of changing plates, which is used to create large sets of singing for the main characters to reveal their rich emotional worlds, express their complex psychological conflicts and enhance the drama of the musical development. For example, in the development of the musical theme in the opera *The White-Haired Girl* (Bai mao nü 白毛女), the opera draws its melodic motif from the old Hebei folk song *Cabbage* (Xiao 小白菜), and the entire musical structure is designed and developed around this musical motif.¹²³

These differences arise from distinct cultural, historical, and artistic contexts. Both Chinese and European operas reflect the specific values and aesthetics of their cultures. As a result, they present different approaches to building musical narrative and dramaturgy, showcasing contrasting ways of expressing emotions and shaping the relationship between music and text.¹²⁴

4.2 Comparison of creative concepts

The creative approach to Chinese opera and Mozart's operas reveals both similarities and significant differences, arising from distinct cultural, aesthetic, and historical traditions. Chinese national opera, drawing from centuries-old tradition, is deeply rooted in Chinese cultural heritage. At its core are traditional musical forms, such as the banqiang style, which give the opera a strong regional character and emphasize its connection to cultural tradition. In contrast, Mozart's works, representing the classical period of European opera, are based on clarity of form, harmony, and dramaturgical logic, reflecting the principles of Classicism.

The fundamental difference between the two traditions lies in the way creators approach the relationship between music and narrative. In Chinese opera, music primarily serves to

¹²³ Meng Yuan. *Studies on the Opera The White-Haired Girl* (论歌剧《白毛女》的研究) [D]. Renmin University of China (中国人民大学), 2005.

¹²⁴ Jiang Jing. *The Integration and Mutual Development of Chinese and Western Operas* (中西方歌剧的融合与相互发展) [J], *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music* (中央音乐学院学报), 1990(4).

emphasize the emotions and character of the scenes, often remaining closely tied to traditional melodic and rhythmic patterns. In Mozart's operas, music, on the other hand, is an integral element of dramaturgy, building tension, developing character traits, and shaping the narrative. This difference highlights the distinct functions of music in both traditions: in Chinese opera, it serves a symbolic and atmospheric role, while in Mozart's operas, its function is more narrative and structural.¹²⁵

At the same time, both traditions share high artistic value and depth of expression. To define this more precisely, both traditions, though formally different, aim to represent complex emotions and universal themes such as love, loyalty, and sacrifice. Both Chinese and European operas strive to create works that reflect the aesthetic ideas of their times, while remaining in dialogue with tradition. In both cases, composers had to find a balance between innovation and fidelity to cultural roots, making their works timeless.

4.2.1 Polyphonic thinking in Mozart's operatic works

Polyphonic thinking is one of the key elements of Mozart's operatic composition, distinguishing his works from those of other composers of the Classical period. Polyphony, or the use of multiple voices, in Mozart's operas is not merely a compositional technique, but also a dramaturgical tool. In his works such as *Don Giovanni*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and *Così fan tutte*, the art of counterpoint allows for the simultaneous portrayal of multiple narrative and emotional layers, creating a rich dramatic and psychological picture. Mozart masterfully combined various melodic lines in a way that reflected the interactions between characters. In the finales of acts, for example, the diverse voices of the characters intertwine into complex musical structures, reflecting their individual emotions while building dramatic tension. This

¹²⁵ Liu Xiaolei. *A Study of the Differences between the Chinese and Western Opera* (中西方歌剧差异探究) [J], *Voice of the Yellow River* (黄河之声), 2019.

technique, characteristic of polyphonic thinking, enables a multidimensional representation of human relationships, which lie at the heart of Mozart's operas.¹²⁶

In Mozart's operas, polyphony is also a means of expressing conflict and harmony, both on the narrative and musical levels. For example, in the final scenes of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, the tension arising from intrigues and misunderstandings between the characters is portrayed through contrasting melodic lines, which ultimately merge into a triumphant harmony, reflecting reconciliation and social order. This polyphony not only enriches the music but also imbues it with deep symbolic meaning.¹²⁷

Mozart's polyphonic thinking, although rooted in the traditions of Baroque masters such as Johann Sebastian Bach, was developed by him in a unique way, adapted to the demands of Classical opera. His polyphony is not purely formal; it is always subordinated to narrative and emotion, which makes it exceptional among other composers of the Classical period.¹²⁸

4.2.2 Linear thinking in Chinese opera music

Chinese opera music is based on linear-melodic thinking, which significantly differs from the polyphony found in European operas. The dominance of a single melodic line, developing gradually and smoothly, is the essence of this style. This compositional approach, characteristic of traditional Chinese music, highlights the emotional message and narrative quality of the work.

A particular example of linear thinking is the *san ban* (散板) style, which plays a crucial role in the structure of Chinese opera. This style is characterized by a free tempo and flexible rhythm, allowing the performer to shape the expression of the melody. In *san ban*, emphasis is placed on deep emotionality and a direct connection to the text, which allows for a more intimate delivery. This contrasts with the strictly organized and multilayered forms of

¹²⁶ Heartz Daniel. *Mozart's Operas* [M]. University of California Press, 1990.

¹²⁷ Rosen Charles. *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* [M]. Norton, 1972.

¹²⁸ Boyd Malcolm (ed.). *Mozart and the Enlightenment: Truth, Virtue and Beauty in Mozart's Opera* [M]. W.W. Norton & Company, 1992.

polyphony found in Mozart's operas. Within this style, the performer can enrich the melody with ornaments and subtle dynamic changes, adding individuality to each performance.¹²⁹

The *san ban* style often serves as an emotional calming device or an introduction to more dynamic sections of the opera. Its narrative quality is based on simplicity and clarity of expression, allowing the listener to fully focus on the emotions and message of the text. In contrast to the more rhythmically and tonally organized *banqiang* (板腔体) style, *san ban* offers greater interpretive freedom, making it a key element of Chinese linear thinking.¹³⁰

Linear thinking in Chinese opera, embodied by styles such as *san ban*, emphasizes the importance of melody and its ability to directly convey emotions. This formal simplicity, enriched by ornamentation and virtuosic performance, is not only characteristic of Chinese opera but also determines its unique place in the history of theatrical music.

4.3 Comparison of musical structure

4.3.1 Struktura muzyczna oper Mozarta *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*

Tutte

The development of the musical structure in Mozart's operas reflects the evolution of dramatic and musical forms, which reached the peak of their maturity in the 18th century. In his operas, Mozart masterfully mastered classical musical forms, such as the aria (咏叹调, yǒngtàndiào), duet (二重唱, èrchóngchàng), trio (三重唱, sānchóngchàng), quartet (四重唱, sìchóngchàng), and ensemble finale (终场合唱, zhōngchǎng héchàng). Each of these forms plays a crucial role in building the narrative and drama, allowing not only for the development of the plot but also for the detailed representation of the psychology of the characters and their relationships.

¹²⁹ Wichmann-Walczak Elizabeth, *Traditional Chinese Theater: A Guide to Its Form and Performance* [M]. University of Hawaii Press, 1991.

¹³⁰ Wong Isabel K.F., *Sound and Structure in Chinese Music* [M]. University of Michigan Press, 1985.

Mozart was a master at integrating these various forms within a single opera, which allowed him to achieve exceptional dramatic and emotional coherence. His operas can be classified as early cyclical forms, where recurring musical motifs serve as connectors between the various parts of the work. This structural concept is particularly evident in operas such as *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte*, often referred to as the "Da Ponte trilogy" due to Mozart's collaboration with the librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte.

These operas can be seen as examples of early cyclical form, where recurring motifs and themes unite the different sections of the work into a single narrative whole. Recurring themes, both in arias and ensemble scenes, enhance the dramatic and narrative coherence while simultaneously building a multidimensional psychological portrait of the characters. For example, in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Mozart frequently returns to musical motifs associated with Susanna, which reflect her character, emotions, and key role in the development of the plot. In *Don Giovanni*, the musical structure is particularly crucial in building tension and dynamics between the characters. The finale of the first act, where the voices of the characters intertwine into an elaborate polyphony, is one example of the masterful use of counterpoint to create dramatic tension. At the same time, each aria in the opera functions as an autonomous musical form, expressing the individuality and emotions of the respective character, such as Don Giovanni's aria "Fin ch'han dal vino," which reflects his hedonistic nature.

In *Così fan tutte*, Mozart achieves a remarkable balance between the lightness of comedy and deep emotional analysis. The musical structure of this opera is based on the precise combination of duets and ensemble scenes, which develop the relationships between the characters while reflecting subtle changes in their emotions. A particularly characteristic example is Fiordiligi's aria "Come scoglio," in which the music emphasizes the conflict between declared fidelity and the character's inner doubts.

The musical structure in these three Mozart operas not only serves the narrative but also enriches the psychology of the characters and builds dramatic coherence. Through the skillful

use of recurring motifs, complex ensemble forms, and classical harmonic principles, Mozart created works that continue to captivate with their formal excellence and emotional impact.

4.3.2 Musical structure of Chinese operas *The White-haired Girl* (白毛女), *The Savage Land* (原野), *The Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣).

Contemporary Chinese operas, such as *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女, Bái Máo Nǚ), *The Savage Land* (原野, Yuán Yě), and *Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣, Yùn Hé Yáo), are the result of the evolution of Chinese musical tradition under the influence of the social and political changes of the 20th century.¹³¹ The creators of these operas, drawing from traditional melodic principles, integrated new narrative and aesthetic elements to better express the drama and emotional complexity of contemporary stories. At the same time, their musical structure reveals a specific approach to linearity and symbolic sound, characteristic of Chinese operatic aesthetics.

The basis of musical composition in these operas is the integration of traditional forms, such as banqiang style, and elements of folk melodies with more narratively elaborate structures. The use of techniques such as melodic ornamentation and rhythmic flexibility help to emphasize the emotion and drama of the performance. These operas also innovate in the way musical motifs are used, allowing for a deeper connection between the music and the stage narrative.¹³²

The White-Haired Girl, the musical structure is strongly linked to the traditional forms of Chinese opera, but its character is enriched by the narrative use of folk motifs. An example is a scene in which the main musical theme transforms according to the emotional development of characters such as Xi'er. The repetition of motifs in this opera highlights the

¹³¹ Li Xiaobing, *China's Cultural Revolution* [M], Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

¹³² Mackerras Colin, *Chinese Theatre: From Its Origins to the Present Day* [M], University of Hawaii Press, 1983.

tensions and contrasts between oppression and hope, making the work emotionally intense and deeply symbolic."¹³³

The Savage Land, the creators focused on building atmosphere through the use of minimalist melodic structures and subtle tonal shifts. The musical themes unfold linearly, reflecting the isolation and harshness of the landscape depicted. A key element is the use of long melodic phrases that symbolize both the inner tensions of the characters and the boundlessness of the titular wilderness.¹³⁴

The Ballad of the Canal combines folk melodies with a more dynamic narrative structure, which sets it apart from traditional Chinese operas. A recurring musical theme, inspired by the songs of canal workers, forms the structural foundation of the opera. The transformation of this theme at various points in the work reflects the changes in the characters' emotions and the dynamics of the plot. This structure achieves both dramatic tension and harmony, which is characteristic of modern Chinese operas.¹³⁵

In all three operas, musical structure serves the narrative, but its implementation varies depending on the plot and emotional context. The common element, however, remains linear thinking, which integrates tradition with modernity, giving the works a universal character, yet deeply rooted in Chinese cultural heritage.

4.4 Comparative analysis of opera genres

4.4.1 Genre classification of Mozart's operas *Le Nozzee di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così Fan Tutte*

Fan Tutte

Mozart's operas *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte* are the cornerstones of the classical opera repertoire, and their genre classification reflects both their dramatic

¹³³ Jones Stephen, *Folk Music of China: Living Instrumental Traditions* [M], Oxford University Press, 1995.

¹³⁴ Thrasher, Alan R. *Chinese Musical Instruments* [M], Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹³⁵ Stock Jonathan P.J, *Huju: Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai* [M], Oxford University Press, 2003.

richness and the evolution of genres in the 18th century. All three works were the result of Mozart's collaboration with librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte and are often referred to as "trilogia Da Ponte." Although they formally belong to *the opera buffa* (comic opera) genre, each of these operas has unique characteristics that transcend genre boundaries.¹³⁶

In *Le nozze di Figaro*, Mozart reinterpreted the traditional opera buffa scheme, introducing psychological depth and multidimensionality to the characters. The elements of intrigue and situational comedy typical of comic opera were enriched with subtle emotional portraits of the characters. For example, Susanna, Figaro and Countess Almaviva not only participate in the intricate intrigue, but also present a full range of emotions, from joy to melancholy, which gives the work a more universal appeal.¹³⁷

Don Giovanni, while also formally classified as an opera buffa, is a unique example of the genre mix often referred to as *dramma giocoso* (merry drama). The opera combines comic elements with deep drama and dark symbolism. The character of Don Giovanni, who is both a comic crook and a tragic hero, goes beyond the traditional opera *buffa* framework. The complexity of the relationships between the characters, such as Don Giovanni and the Commodore, and the dramatic finales give the work its unique character.¹³⁸

Così fan tutte, on the other hand, returns to the lighter opera buffa form, but here too Mozart does not shy away from deeper reflections on human nature. This opera, while full of comic situations and lightheartedness, explores themes such as loyalty, love and betrayal. The psychological portraits of the characters, such as Fiordiligi and Ferrando, give the work a depth that makes it more than a typical comedy. Mozart masterfully balances humor and introspection to create a work of timeless character.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Steptoe Andrew, *he Mozart-Da Ponte Operas: The Cultural and Musical Background to Le Nozze di Figaro, Don Giovanni and Così fan tutte* [M]. Clarendon Press, 1988.

¹³⁷ Hunter Mary, *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna: A Poetics of Entertainment* [M], Princeton University Press, 1999]

¹³⁸ Chailley Jacques, *Don Giovanni: Mozart's Opera of Operas* [M], Gollancz, 1966.

¹³⁹ Boyd Malcolm (ed.), *op.cit.*

All three operas, although formally classified as *opera buffa*, demonstrate Mozart's ability to redefine genres. By integrating comedy with drama and emotional depth with entertainment, these works transcend the limitations of their genre to become universal operatic masterpieces.

4.4.2 Genre classification of Chinese operas *White-haired Girl*, *Savage Land*, *Ballad of the Canal*

Chinese contemporary operas such as *White-Haired Girl* (白毛女, Bái Máo Nǚ), *Savage Land* (原野, Yuán Yě) and *Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣, Yùn Hé Yáo) are difficult to clearly classify into genres, as they combine elements of traditional Chinese opera with modern narrative and musical techniques. They are the result of cultural and aesthetic changes that took place in the 20th century, especially in the period after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. In these works, traditional Chinese theatrical forms have been transformed into a vehicle for expressing contemporary social and political themes.

The White-haired Girl is often classified as a *national revolutionary opera* (革命歌剧, Gémìng Gējù), a genre developed in China in the mid-20th century. This opera tells the story of Xi'er, a girl persecuted by a landowner, who finds refuge in the mountains and becomes a symbol of resistance against feudalism. Elements of traditional Chinese opera, such as folk melodies and vocal techniques, are combined here with Western orchestral and narrative forms. As a result, *The White-haired Girl* has acquired the status of a national work of profound social significance.¹⁴⁰

The Savage Land combines elements of traditional opera with Western music influences to create a unique genre of contemporary dramatic opera. The story of loneliness, revenge and love is told through minimalist musical forms and expressive stage narration. The opera differs from traditional Chinese opera works through the use of modern harmonic techniques

¹⁴⁰ Wichmann-Walczak Elizabeth. op.cit.

and greater freedom in vocal interpretation, giving it a character similar to European dramatic operas.¹⁴¹

The Ballad of the Canal is an example of a *modern folk opera* (现代民歌剧, Xiàndài Míngējù) that combines folk songs with modern narrative and stage techniques. The story of the lives of workers building water canals in China emphasizes their heroism and solidarity, and the opera's music is inspired by workers' and folk songs, giving it authenticity. This opera exemplifies a successful fusion of tradition and modernity, while fitting into the aesthetics of national artistic propaganda.¹⁴²

In terms of genre classification, Chinese contemporary operas can be described as hybrids that combine elements of traditional Chinese theatrical forms, such as *jingju* (京剧, jīngjù), with Western musical and stage techniques. As a result, these works not only serve an artistic function, but also serve as a tool for shaping national identity and transmitting social values.

4.5 Comparative analysis of singing style in Mozart and Chinese opera works

4.5.1 Singing styles of roles of lower class women in Mozart's operas

The singing styles of female roles from the lower social class in Mozart's operas, with examples of characters such as Susanna from *Le nozze di Figaro*, Zerlina from *Don Giovanni* and Despina from *Così fan tutte*, reflect their social position, character and relationships with other characters. Mozart, with his extraordinary dramatic and musical sensitivity, was able to give these characters a depth that makes them as relevant as heroines from the upper classes.

Mozart's operas, although formally belonging to the *opera buffa* genre, contain elements of more complex forms such as opera seria.¹⁴³ In this context, characters from the lower social classes are often portrayed in contrast to aristocratic women, both in terms of vocal and

¹⁴¹ Lau Frederick, *Music in China: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* [M], Oxford University Press, 2008.

¹⁴² Jones Stephen, op.cit.

¹⁴³ Hunter Mary, op.cit.

dramatic characteristics. The styles of singing, the choice of soprano voices and the way the melodies are led play a key role in building these contrasts.

In the case of Susanna, Countess Almaviva's maid in *Le nozze di Figaro*, the singing style is full of lightness and grace, highlighting her cleverness, intelligence and sense of humor. Her part is usually entrusted to a lyric soprano, which is different from other types of soprano voice, such as coloratura or dramatic soprano. The lyric soprano, with its slightly broader scale and more expressive sound, is ideal for conveying the emotional depth of characters such as Susanna, who combines simplicity with multidimensionality. The sound of a lyric soprano can sometimes be more mature than that of a light lyric soprano, further enhancing the impression of the character's maturity and authenticity.¹⁴⁴

Zerlina, the peasant woman in *Don Giovanni*, is another character whose singing style reflects her social affiliation. In arias such as “Batti, batti, o bel Masetto,” Mozart employs a simplicity and lyricism that conveys her innocence and personal charm, yet emphasizes the dynamism of her character. The melody, based on folk inspirations, harmoniously combines elements of humor and warmth, making it easily recognizable to the audience.¹⁴⁵

Despina, the maid from *Così fan tutte*, demonstrates the lightness, flexibility and natural singing style of the subrette and lyric soprano. Mozart's simple, leaping, flowing rhythm, witty and lively phrases perfectly demonstrate Despina's lively and intelligent personality and wise inner world, combined with Despina's beautiful tone as a lyric soprano, the image of the quirky maid appears in three dimensions, with distinctive features and a high degree of recognition.

The above analyses show that the roles of women from the lower social classes in Mozart's operas are usually performed by lyric sopranos. Using the singing style of a lyric soprano not only fits the social context, but also helps create the dramatic effect of the opera. The singing style of characters such as Susanna, Zerlina and Despina, based on simplicity,

¹⁴⁴ Halliwell Ruth, *The Mozart Family: Four Lives in a Social Context* [M]. Oxford University Press, 1998

¹⁴⁵ Hertz Daniel, op.cit.

melody and authenticity, plays a key role in the narrative of Mozart's operas. Through this musical characterization, Mozart gives these characters not only psychological depth, but also a universal appeal that attracts audiences regardless of their social background.

4.5.2 Singing styles of roles of lower class women in Chinese opera

In Chinese opera, melodies, vocal technique and voice timbre are consciously chosen to emphasize both the social background and psychological characteristics of the characters. In the case of female roles from the lower social classes, such as the character X'er from *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女, Bái Máo Nǚ), singing styles based on simplicity and melodiousness are used, which emphasize the sincerity and authenticity of these characters. The melodies in the vocal parts are often derived from *traditional folk songs* (民歌, mǐn gē), which gives them local color and emotional immediacy.¹⁴⁶ Xi'er, as a figure representing simple folk, sings in a style reminiscent of *folk laments* (哭调, kū diào), which express suffering and longing while emphasizing her strength and hope.¹⁴⁷

In operas such as *The Savage Land* (原野, Yuán Yě), female roles from the lower social classes are characterized by singing of limited ornamentation, which contrasts with the rich ornamentation attributed to heroines of higher social status. Vocal expression here is focused on expressing emotions in a direct manner, often using dynamic variables and subtle tonal shifts that enhance the dramatic effect. This style, known as *ping tan* (评弹, píng tán), is derived from traditional forms of storytelling and singing, which enriches its narrative character.¹⁴⁸

Similarly, in the *Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣, Yùn Hé Yáo), female roles from the lower classes sing in a style inspired by *the songs of the workers* (劳动歌, láo dòng gē), which are characterized by repetitive motifs and rhythmic simplicity. Deeply rooted in Chinese folk

¹⁴⁶ Wong Isabel K.F, op.cit.

¹⁴⁷ Stock Jonathan P.J, *Musical Creativity in Twentieth-Century China: Abing, His Music, and Its Changing Meanings* [M]. University of Rochester Press, 1996.

¹⁴⁸ Wichmann Walczak Elizabeth, op.cit.

culture, these songs convey both the hardship of daily life and the optimism associated with solidarity and collective effort. The singing here is melodic but uncomplicated, reflecting a naturalness and closeness to the audience.¹⁴⁹

4.6 Comparative analysis of the introduction of lower-class female characters

4.6.1 The necessity of creating roles for lower-class women in Mozart's operas

Social criticism and Enlightenment ideas

Most roles for lower-class women are low status, but in Mozart's operas these characters are not defined solely by their social position. On the contrary, they show their rejection of feudalism, their desire for equality and freedom, and their pursuit of love and reason. These qualities they show are the pursuit of freedom, equality and fraternity, ideas with which Mozart identified. Characters such as Susanna from *Le nozze di Figaro*, Zerlina from *Don Giovanni* and Despina from *Così fan tutte* reflect the influence of Enlightenment ideas on Mozart's work. These characters were created as a response to the hierarchical society of that era and show that wisdom, honesty and virtue are not reserved exclusively for the aristocracy. Susanna, with her cleverness and resourcefulness, seems to be intellectually superior to Count Almaviva, which is a subtle critique of social and patriarchal norms. Through these roles, Mozart brings an egalitarian overtone to his operas, characteristic of the Enlightenment. By choosing female characters from the lower social class, Mozart was able to explore class differences, power relations and the complexity of human nature in his works.¹⁵⁰

A study of love and human nature

These characters, despite coming from the lower social classes, are portrayed as individuals capable of experiencing love, passions and dilemmas as profoundly as aristocratic heroines. Zerlina's aria "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto" from *Don Giovanni* is an excellent

¹⁴⁹ Thrasher Alan R, *Chinese Musical Instruments* [M]. Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹⁵⁰ Hunter, Mary, op.cit.

example of showing the complicated relationship between love and the need for forgiveness. Similarly, Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*, through the arias “Venite inginocchiatevi” and “Deh vieni, non tardar,” expresses emotions that combine romanticism with a gentle sense of humor. Despina in *Così fan tutte* is a witty and energetic maid who expresses her openness to the issue of shaping male-female relations, not hesitating to give a lecture to her somewhat confused Employees. Mozart shows that love and emotion are universal, regardless of social standing, which gives his operas a timeless appeal.¹⁵¹

Accessibility of the characters

Characters such as Susanna, Zelina and Despina, who come from the lower social strata, are close to the audience because of their naturalness and approachability. Their everyday concerns, cleverness and simplicity make them characters that are easy to identify with. Mozart deliberately equips them with qualities that make them very loyal to their masters despite their low status, able to overcome their masters' sadness by being able to do their jobs well, and resourceful and intelligent enough to be able to improvise and solve difficult problems in the face of a difficult situation, making the story and behavior more believable and more connected to the viewer's life experience. As a result, Mozart's operas appealed not only to aristocratic listeners, but also to audiences from the lower classes, which contributed significantly to their popularity.¹⁵²

Dramaturgy and comedy

Female roles from the lower classes bring elements of comedy and dramatic dynamics to Mozart's operas. Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* often takes control of the situation, surpassing other characters in cleverness, which gives the opera a lightness and humor. Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, on the other hand, provides both lyrical and humorous elements. Despina in *Così fan tutte* is witty, mischievous and intriguing, and her seemingly debauched views on love are actually an ironic commentary on some real-life phenomena. Her presence gives the whole

¹⁵¹ Cairns David, *Mozart and His Operas* [M]. Penguin Books, 2006.

¹⁵² Hertz Daniel, op.cit.

intrigue a strong comic touch. With such characters, Mozart is able to balance comedy and drama perfectly, which enriched the narrative and increased the appeal of his operas.¹⁵³

4.6.2 The necessity of creating roles for lower-class women in Chinese operas

Reflection of Social Reality

Due to the particular political system and cultural environment of China, the main ideological theme in literary and artistic works is the praise of the proletariat, representing workers, farmers, and others at the lowest levels of the social ladder. Therefore, Chinese opera has created various styles of female characters from lower classes throughout different historical periods. For example, Xi'er from *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女, Bái Máo Nǚ) is the daughter of a farmer and an object of oppression in feudal society. Her fate reflects the historical and social circumstances in which the peasant class suffered, corresponding with the context of the forthcoming new era, the shift in the main social contradictions, and the transformation of the peasant layer. Jinzi from *The Savage Land* (原野, Yuán Yè), longing for a new life of freedom and happiness, represents not only the aspirations of women of that era but also the ideal of an entire nation wishing to break free from the prison of repression. Shui Honglian from *Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣, Yùn Hé Yáo), depicted as kind, courageous, resourceful, and ready to sacrifice her life for justice, reflects the weakening of women's restrictions and the improvement of their status in the new era of social transformation in China. Such characters introduce a profound realistic dimension to opera, which connects art with the experiences of the audience.¹⁵⁴

Awakening of Women

In Chinese operas, female roles from lower social classes, such as Xi'er, serve an educational and awakening function. These characters are often portrayed as individuals

¹⁵³ Till Nicholas, *Mozart and the Enlightenment* [M]. Norton, 1995

¹⁵⁴ Lau Frederick, op. cit.

fighting for their rights and independence, which is meant to inspire the audience, especially women, to take action to change their fate. In the case of Xi'er from *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女, Bái Máo Nǚ), we see a woman who has experienced humiliation and harm due to the old social order but has embraced the enlightenment of new social thought, thus freeing herself from the chains of the old feudal ethics. This liberation is both physical and psychological. Her transformation from a persecuted girl into a symbol of resistance serves not only a dramatic role but also becomes a manifesto for the emancipation of women in Chinese society. On the other hand, characters like Jinzi from *The Savage Land* (原野, Yuán Yě) and Shui Honglian from *Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣, Yùn Hé Yáo) are no longer revolutionary heroines, but ordinary women with feelings and private desires, capable of sacrificing everything for love and an independent life. They represent the awakened self-awareness of most Chinese women, further illustrating that with the progress of social relations, the status of women continues to rise. ¹⁵⁵

Aesthetic Aspirations

The creators of Chinese operas make female characters the subject of their works, conducting multifaceted analysis and reflection on them. Their works are not only a tribute to female beauty but also an expression of the desire to incorporate traditional Chinese culture into operatic art by depicting female characters as bearers of China's cultural heritage and aesthetic values. In Chinese operas dominated by female perspectives, various musical elements express different types of female characters.

In Chinese opera, most roles of women from lower social classes are presented in the context of pathos, with the beauty of tragedy used to emphasize the artistic charm of the performance. An aria of such a tragic character (let's call it a "tragic aria") not only gathers the most important musical material of the entire opera but also becomes the core of the musical theme. It also expresses the artistic image and ideological character of the characters in various aspects and personality traits. More importantly, the tragic aria has developed a

¹⁵⁵ Stock Jonathan P.J, op.cit.

distinctive aesthetic element in the presentation of female themes in Chinese operas, creating a specific pattern of tragic beauty. Their vocal parts, inspired by folk songs, are characterized by simplicity and melody, reflecting both the social background of the characters and their emotional sincerity, giving the opera a unique musical color. As a result, these characters contribute a distinctive musical quality to the opera.¹⁵⁶

The reference and integration of the traditional Chinese dramatic element of *banqiang* (板腔体) not only makes the tragic aesthetic color of female characters more moving but also creates the basic features of the style of Chinese opera. For example, Xi'er from *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女, Bái Máo Nǚ) in her tragic aria "Hatred like a Mountain, Sorrow like the Sea" (恨似高山仇似海, *Hen si gaoshan chou si hai*) shows her tragic aesthetic of righteousness and compassion. Jinzi in *The Savage Land* reflects a rebellious character, created by the contradiction between her longing for love and freedom and the objective environment, with her singing full of elements of Chinese folk songs and simple traditional melodies, expressing the traditional beauty of Chinese women. Shui Honglian in *Ballad of the Canal* sings in the Chinese folk singing style, and her simple, beautiful melody expresses the feelings of a humble person living at the bottom of society. In the end, her love transcended ordinary love between children and rose to the tragic beauty of human love.¹⁵⁷

4.7 Similarities Between Female Roles from Lower Social Classes in Mozart's Operas and Chinese Operas

4.7.1 Independence of Female Characters

Both Mozart's operas and Chinese operas feature female characters from lower social classes who are marked by significant independence, resourcefulness, and courage. These characters are active participants in the events around them, influencing their development

¹⁵⁶ Zhao Shilan, Shi Mengqian, Guo Jianmin. "Tragic Complex" of Female Roles in Chinese Opera—Aesthetic and Cultural Significance (中国歌剧女性角色 '悲剧情节'—美学与文化意义) [J]. *Modern Music* (现代音乐), 2017(4).

¹⁵⁷ Wong Isabel K.F, op. cit.

through their actions. In *The Marriage of Figaro*, Susanna is a dynamic and proactive character who frequently uses her intelligence to manipulate situations and achieve the desired outcome. Zerlina from *Don Giovanni*, upon discovering she has been deceived by the titular character, wisely exposes his true nature and boldly admits her mistake, which was made due to her own vanity, thereby reclaiming her true love. Despina from *Così fan tutte* is resourceful, intelligent, and cunning. Her dialogue with the two noble ladies reveals Despina's unique ideological connotation. Although she is a servant of lower social status, she possesses an independent personality and an open mind.¹⁵⁸

Similarly, Xi'er from *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女, Bái Máo Nǚ), although initially a victim of the feudal system, later becomes a symbol of resistance and hope. Jinzi from *The Savage Land* (原野, Yuán Yě) is not a submissive woman living under the yoke of feudalism. She is brave, determined, and full of passion. In this regard, she is very similar to Despina. Both have complex and diverse personalities; they are wise, witty, and have the courage to love, to harbor hatred, and to yearn for freedom. Shui Honglian from *Ballad of the Canal* (运河谣, Yùn Hé Yáo) represents traditional Chinese ideals of femininity: intelligence, wisdom, and loyalty. However, her steadfastness in love and her refusal to submit to evil indicate a breaking away from feudal patterns of obedience, highlighting women's pursuit of happiness on their own terms.¹⁵⁹

From this analysis, it is clear that the female characters from lower social classes in both Mozart's operas and Chinese operas not only demonstrate the ability to adapt to difficult social conditions but also actively influence the course of events, shaping their destinies based on their own decisions and actions.

¹⁵⁸ Steptoe Andrew, op. cit.

¹⁵⁹ Mackerras Colin, *The Performing Arts in Contemporary China* [M], Routledge, 1981.

4.7.2 Love and implications

The theme of love, though presented in different ways, plays a crucial role in the characterization of female characters in both Mozart's operas and Chinese operas. In Mozart's operas, love often serves as the driving force behind the actions of the heroines. Susanna, through her relationship with Figaro, expresses a wide range of emotions — from joy to melancholy — which underscores the complexity of her feelings and interpersonal relationships. Zerlina from *Don Giovanni*, initially filled with extravagant hope to enter the aristocratic world, upon discovering the deceit by *Don Giovanni*, reveals her internal material desires and aspiration for a higher social status. Her story shows that she is a multidimensional character, far from being the naive and innocent girl. Despina from *Così fan tutte* plays the role of a commentator on love, expressing her open and skeptical approach to feelings, and by offering advice to the two noble ladies, she moves the dramatic action forward. Mozart uses the theme of love to depict the moral corruption hidden beneath the surface of European aristocratic splendor. Love in his operas becomes a tool for social critique, emphasizing dissatisfaction with feudal ethics, the desire for equality and freedom, and the striving of women from lower classes for self-determination.¹⁶⁰

In Chinese operas, love serves a more symbolic function, showing the connection between personal feelings and the broader social context. Xi'er's love in *The White-Haired Girl* symbolizes the resistance of poor farmers against the feudal system, as well as their longing for a better life. Jinzi's love in *The Savage Land* reflects the desire for freedom and happiness, highlighting the difficult situation of women and their determination to fight for dignity. Although her love story is tragic, it also showcases her inner strength and resolve. Shui Honglian's love in *Ballad of the Canal* takes on an even more elevated dimension. It symbolizes the noble feeling of sacrifice for others and the transcendence of personal desires. Her behavior — full of courage and unwavering in the face of adversity — emphasizes the spirit of mutual help and selflessness among people from lower social strata. This type of love

¹⁶⁰ Boyd Malcolm (ed.), op. cit.

goes beyond individual feelings, becoming a symbol of altruism and sacrifice for the community.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Clark Paul, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* [M]. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Rozdział V. The analysis of the perception of female roles in Chinese opera and strategies for the future development and communication of Chinese operatic art.

5.1. Practical analysis of performing female roles in Chinese opera.

Contemporary Chinese opera has been developing new directions since the beginning of the 21st century, combining national characteristics with the spirit of the era. This is understood as the effort to integrate traditional vocal techniques with modern stage techniques, as well as the cosmopolitan aspect of Chinese culture, which is reflected in collaborations with foreign artists. Operatic works in the new era reflect the evolution of themes, creative techniques, expressive styles, and aesthetics, an example being the opera *Sister Jiang* (江姐), which blends traditional Chinese melodies with Western narrative forms. A key challenge is finding ways to fully utilize the potential of female roles in opera, both in terms of creation, performance, and teaching. This involves considering the specificity of Chinese vocal techniques and the social contexts of female roles. These efforts aim not only to preserve the rich cultural heritage but also to respond to the aesthetic demands of contemporary audiences through innovative approaches to interpreting female roles and adapting to the international development of opera.

5.1.1 Grasping the rules and reasoning rationally

The national character of Chinese opera is the result of combining traditional elements of Chinese music with techniques drawn from European opera. This combination allows artists to respond to the needs of modern audiences while maintaining cultural authenticity. As Xi Jinping noted in a report at the 19th CPC National Congress, cultural development should be based on Chinese characteristics and contemporary realities.¹⁶² In the case of opera, this means shaping the aesthetic tastes of audiences while taking into account current trends.

¹⁶² Xi Jinping, *Report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China* [M](中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会报告), People's Publishing House (人民出版社). 2017

Creators should take special care to select content that hits the emotional needs of the audience may be stories related to national history, existential problems of today or escapist entertainment motifs (as in the operas *The White-Haired Girl* or *Red Lantern*). At the same time, the music should remain melodious and clear, which is conducive to building an emotional bond with the audience. Harmony and integration of diverse regional singing styles and distinctive elements of Chinese opera (e.g., such as Kunqu, Yueju, and Beijing Jingju styles) are key to creating works that conform to both contemporary and traditional aesthetic values.¹⁶³

5.1.2 Reinterpretation of roles and redefinition of competencies

Opera art requires a close connection between stage practice and the interpretation of the musical text. Female roles in opera, which differ significantly from male roles, are not only expressions of aesthetics but also of social expectations and cultural differences (e.g., Sister Jiang (江姐) or *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女)). Creating and performing these roles requires a deep understanding of the creator's intentions and the ability to adapt the character to contemporary audience expectations, such as greater psychological complexity and the emphasis on the emotional depth of the role.

Due to social, cultural, and aesthetic differences, there are, and will certainly continue to be, significant differences in the artistic form and content of Chinese and Western operas. This requires Chinese performers to possess a variety of singing techniques to interpret both Chinese and Western opera works. Especially when interpreting Chinese operatic works, we must actively explore the integration of Chinese national singing methods with Western bel canto techniques and use new singing styles to interpret roles.¹⁶⁴ Contemporary artists should reinterpret roles from a modern perspective, creating new ways of understanding and presenting classical characters that will be appealing to contemporary audiences. In light of

¹⁶³ Yi Pingce, *Characteristics of Chinese Aesthetic Culture* (中国审美文化的特点) [J], *Ideological front*. 1997(02).

¹⁶⁴ Wang Shuo, *Interpretation of the Second Creation of Opera Performance* (歌剧表演的二度创作) [J], *Northern Music*(北方音乐), 2020.

the dynamics of the processes of cross-fertilization, mutual influence, and the integration of Western and Eastern aesthetics, the above pertains to both creators and performers.

5.1.3 Application of technology and stage setting

The quality of performing female roles depends both on stage practice and advancements in educational methods. In the era of rapid technological development, advanced tools for technological analysis can be incorporated into teaching to effectively cultivate artistic talents, such as visualization platforms (e.g., Vmus.net)¹⁶⁵, which enable objective assessment of performance elements, including articulation precision, voice strength, breath control, and tone color. By using such technologies, performers can better understand their strengths and areas for improvement, allowing teachers to more effectively adjust the curriculum, for example, through analysis of audio and video recordings during individual lessons.

The combination of classroom learning and stage practice is crucial for the development of future artists. Organizing opera rehearsals as part of the curriculum allows students to gain a deeper understanding of the role and its connection to the music. This approach fosters the development of new talents who will be able to continue advancing Chinese opera in the spirit of innovation and tradition. Practical analysis of the performance of female roles in Chinese opera shows that both creative techniques and the way they are taught and implemented on stage are of paramount importance. Reinterpreting classic characters in a modern way and integrating traditional and contemporary methods can significantly contribute to the further development of this unique art form.

¹⁶⁵ Vmus.net: Professor Yang Jian and his team from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in China developed a platform for visual analysis of musical performances; quantitative analysis of music visualization is conducted using recordings, revealing issues of speed, intensity, and other performance styles in musical performances.
<https://xueshu.baidu.com/scholarID/CN-BU74HOXJ> 31/01/2025, 5:56pm

5.2. Strategies for future development and communication of China's opera arts

5.2.1 The reality of opera development and dissemination in modern China

With the growing demand for recognition of the arts, opera, as an elegant art form, has gradually gained more attention and affection, and the increased cultural demand has provided a broad social foundation for the development of Chinese opera in the new era. The process is overseen by the China National Arts Fund (CNAF). This institution supports the development of Chinese opera through funding artistic projects, training new talents, and promoting Chinese opera culture internationally.

The China National Arts Fund (CNAF) was established in December 2013 to foster artistic creation, create and promote outstanding repertoires, cultivate artistic talents, and promote the healthy development of national artistic careers. Funded projects are expected to be targeted, representative, and exemplary, aiming to reflect the national standard of art.¹⁶⁶ CNAF's policy supports the development and prosperity of Chinese culture and art, reflecting a focus on both the present and the future.¹⁶⁷

CNAF supports the creation and implementation of opera projects, and these grants cover not only the production costs of the opera but also the costs of promotion and distribution, ensuring strong support for the widespread dissemination of opera. Data shows that since its establishment, the National Arts Fund has selected a total of 7,919 projects for funding, including 157 opera projects, which account for approximately 1.98%.

¹⁶⁶ National Arts Fund Management Center: China National Arts Fund (CNAF)
http://www.cnaf.cn/single_detail 31/01/2025, 5:57pm

¹⁶⁷ Ge Wu, *Opinions and Suggestions on the Analysis of the National Arts Fund's Support for Dramatic Projects in Recent Years* (关于近年来国家艺术基金支持戏剧项目分析的意见和建议) [J], *Qilu Yiyuan* (齐鲁艺苑), 2023(6).

5.2.1.1 Quantitative analysis of opera compositions

The annual number of opera productions is relatively stable, unfortunately quite low compared to other artistic disciplines.

According to the data in the “Status Report on the Processing of Applications for National Fund for the Arts Projects” (2022-2024), the total number of applications for stage productions over the past three years was respectively: 10,978 in 2022, 9,017 in 2023 and 9,135 in 2024. Opera projects accounted for 3.0%, 4.0% and 3.0% of the total applications, while dance dramas accounted for 7.0%, 6.0% and 7.0%, respectively. Drama-related projects reached a higher share: 12.0%, 12.0% and 12.6% by year.¹⁶⁸

5.2.1.2 Analysis of categories of funded projects

Among the 157 opera projects funded by CNAF, there were 100 projects for new opera productions, 31 opera projects created under the banner of promoting communication and exchange, 14 opera projects aimed at training artistic talents, and 12 projects aimed at finding and supporting young artistic talents. From the above data, it is clear that both policy direction and opera practitioners are focusing more on artistic creation in the field of artistic practice, and CNAF is encouraging artists to explore a variety of forms, such as contemporary opera, experimental opera and other innovative stage approaches. The second largest category in terms of number of projects is projects that promote cultural communication and exchange, enabling a wider audience to understand and appreciate the art of opera. Such activities include concert tours, visits to schools and events aimed at local communities. The National Endowment for the Arts also emphasizes the development of operatic talent by funding training projects, supporting young artists and investing in the development of opera theaters and educational institutions. This distribution of funding makes it possible to support both the

¹⁶⁸ List of funded projects for 2022 https://www.cnaf.cn/project_detail/2362.html 31/01/2025, 5:58pm
List of funded projects for 2023 https://www.cnaf.cn/project_detail/3165.html 31/01/2025, 5:59pm
List of funded projects for 2024 https://www.cnaf.cn/fund_work_detail/3984.html 31/01/2025, 6:00pm]

development of artistic creativity and the education of future generations of artists, contributing to the empowerment of Chinese opera.¹⁶⁹

5.2.1.3 Analysis of the project unit

These 157 opera projects are mainly distributed in 28 provinces (cities and regions), including 40 in Beijing, 13 in Shanghai and fewer than 10 in other provinces and cities. These projects were carried out by 88 entities, of which the Chinese National Opera and Dance Theater received funding from 12 projects, the Central Conservatory of Music received funding from 7 projects, and the remaining entities received funding from 5 projects or less.

The vast majority of entities are professional opera theaters and art colleges and universities under the direct management of China's Ministry of Culture or adequate institutions in the provinces. From the above data, it is clear that the balance of geographic development of Chinese opera needs to be strengthened, as a sizable portion of the art theaters directly managed by China's Ministry of Culture are located in Beijing. Meanwhile, there are many more professional art colleges and universities in the country. The other center of intensive development of opera art besides Beijing is Shanghai. The Shanghai Opera and Conservatory of Music has a strong professional presence, which translates into a significant number of opera projects. Other regions with the number of performances between 5 and 10 are, one might say, the third region of opera development in China. Hubei province and Zhejiang province are good examples. I would categorize regions with the number of opera productions below 5 per year as the fourth development area.

The development of Chinese opera is a cultural and artistic endeavor that requires huge capital investment, and the geographic distribution of opera projects from CNAF shows that there is consistency between the level of economic development and the level of development of local opera. A high level of economic development is a guarantee of adequate financial investment both at the stage of artist training and later at the stage of operation of artistic

¹⁶⁹ Han Yeting, *CNAF Looking at Changes in the Arts Ecosystem* (国家艺术基金生态系统的变化) [J], *Guangming Daily*(光明日报), 2023(9).

institutions. Professional analyses prove that today's development of Chinese opera is mainly driven by professional art ensembles and colleges and universities.¹⁷⁰

5.2.1.4 Analysis of the awarded projects

Spiritual Civilization Construction “Five One Project Award” (五个一工程奖)¹⁷¹, and “Wenhua Award” (文华奖)¹⁷² are two of China's highest awards in culture and the arts. These awards are given for special artistic achievements and contributions to Chinese culture, highlighting their prestige. CNAF-funded operas *The Legend of Patriot* (2013, created by ShanXi Song and Dance Theatre) and *YiMeng Mountain* (2018, created by ShanDong Song and Dance Theatre) received these two awards. These awards underscore their exceptional character in both artistic and content terms, making them model examples of contemporary Chinese opera. In order to intensify efforts to promote outstanding Chinese operas, these two operas in turn became funding projects for the dissemination, exchange and promotion of the National Art Fund in 2017 and 2023, respectively. CNAF's activities in this regard included organizing tours, promotional events, and international screenings, which increased their reach and influenced the popularization of Chinese opera on the world stage.

¹⁷⁰ Wang Mingliang, Spring Breeze Turns to Gentle Rain, Ten Years of Fruit--Support from the National Art Fund for the Co-Creation of Universities (春风化雨, 十年硕果累累--国家艺术基金支持高校联合创作) [J], Arts Education(艺术教育), 2023(3).

¹⁷¹ This is the highest award for the construction of China's spiritual civilization organized by the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China (CCP) Central Committee, enjoying authority and wide influence, and has been selected seventeen times until 2024. The establishment of the “Five One Project Awards” declares that the government attaches great importance to the spiritual and cultural life of the people, comprehensively creates literary and artistic masterpieces, encourages artistic innovation, improves artistic quality and satisfies the public to the greatest extent possible.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/精神文明建设五个一工程奖/62970427> 31/01/2025, 6:01pm.

¹⁷² “Wenhua Award” (文华奖), It is the highest government award for professional theater arts sponsored by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China and was established in 1991. The purpose of the Wenhua Prize is to implement the direction of serving the people and socialism in literature and art and the policy of flourishing a hundred flowers and competing a hundred schools of thought; to continue the main theme and promote diversification; to encourage the arts to pay attention to reality and artistic innovation; to promote the creation of outstanding plays and programs and the development of artistic talents through the evaluation of the prize based on the principles of fairness, authoritativeness and orientation; to promote market-oriented and audience-oriented works of theatrical art; and to promote the successful development of the creation and performance of professional theatrical art. The award will promote the production of outstanding theatrical programs and the development of artistic talents; promote the market- and audience-oriented orientation of works of theatrical art; and promote the prosperity of the professional creation and performance of theatrical art.

https://baike.baidu.com/item/文华奖?fromModule=lemma_search-box 31/01/2025, 6:02pm.

5.2.2 The Characteristics of the Dissemination and Development of Chinese Opera in Contemporary Times

Based on a statistical analysis of data regarding the funding of opera projects by CNAF, it can be observed that the development and dissemination of Chinese opera currently have the following characteristics.

5.2.2.1 Ethnicity and Cyclicity

Chinese opera is deeply rooted in the cultural soil of the Chinese nation for thousands of years, both in terms of themes and artistic form. Many operas are based on stories that embody the spirit and culture of the nation, providing a wealth of national material for creating operas. In particular, traditional melodies and distinctive stage postures play a key role in preserving this uniqueness. In terms of artistic expression, elements of traditional culture, such as singing and operatic stances, are absorbed, making Chinese original operas more authentically Chinese in performance style. The connection to operatic culture not only enriches the artistic expression of the opera but also strengthens national characteristics.

At the same time, contemporary Chinese opera keeps pace with the times in its creation, with operatic works paying greater attention to real life in terms of themes. Reinterpretations of classical stories, as well as entirely new narratives, respond to the changing expectations of modern audiences. With the development of science and technology, Chinese opera has also introduced many innovations in stage performances, musical compositions, and other aspects, continuously absorbing new artistic elements and methods of expression. An example of this is the use of multimedia projections and sound technologies, which enrich the audience's experience and highlight the modern character of the performances.

5.2.2.2 Diversity of Development as a Necessity

In the cultural context of the new era, Chinese opera, as an important medium for the fusion of traditional culture and modern art, is becoming increasingly distinctive in its diversity. From a creative conceptual perspective, contemporary Chinese opera has widely absorbed modern theatrical elements and Western methods of operatic expression, creating a unique style that combines tradition and modernity, the nation and the world. Opera creators delve into the connotations of Chinese national culture, focusing on reflecting contemporary social life and are more diversified in their choice of themes. One significant aspect of this development is the integration of traditional melodies with elements of modern stage dramaturgy. In terms of expression, they fully utilize modern stage technology to provide the audience with impressive visual and auditory effects that enrich the sensory experience. The combination of traditional operatic performances and modern musical elements creates a stage presentation that blends national heritage with modern aesthetic interests, emphasizing the universality of Chinese opera's message. An example of diversity and innovation in Chinese opera is *The Legend of Patriot* (2013), a large-scale historical drama with a unique theme, concise plot, and a well-structured narrative. The opera carries the atmosphere of ancient Greek drama, with monumental staging, as well as a true and moving story, along with a strong national temperament. In terms of expression, it successfully integrates contemporary art, folk art, and Western classical art, while organically combining Qinqiang, American voice, modern dance, symphony, and Chinese folk music.¹⁷³ This work, with its multidisciplinary structure, represents a model realization of the fusion of tradition and modernity in Chinese opera.

5.2.2.3 Praktyka operowa a badania teoretyczne

In contemporary operatic practice, creators pay greater attention to the exploration of both content and form. They are no longer satisfied with traditional repertoires and

¹⁷³ <https://www.cnaf.cn/dhsw.html> 31/01/2025, 6:03pm

performance methods but actively explore new themes, diverse musical styles, and innovative means of stage presentation to create works with a stronger sense of the spirit of the times and a powerful artistic impact. At the same time, theoretical research has closely followed these developments, providing solid academic support for the creation and rehearsal of operas. From the perspectives of aesthetics, musicology, theatre, and other disciplines, scholars have conducted in-depth analyses of the creation and rehearsal processes of operas, investigating their artistic principles, cultural connotations, and social values. The results of these studies have not only enriched the theoretical system of opera but also provided valuable references and guidance for creators, promoting the continuous development and refinement of the operatic art¹⁷⁴The interdisciplinary research approach combines artistic analysis with practical application, facilitating a better adaptation of opera to contemporary audience expectations.

5.2.3 Contemporary Dissemination Strategies and Development Perspective

Currently, Chinese opera is continually developing in the realms of modernity, scholarly research, national character, and diversity. Despite numerous successes, such as the release of many classical operatic works, Chinese opera still faces challenges that hinder its development, including difficulties in attracting younger audiences and limited funding for innovative projects. The author believes that operatic art should adapt to the evolution of the times and introduce innovations in form, technology, themes, and marketing. An example of such efforts is the adaptation of opera to new media, such as streaming platforms, which allow it to reach a wider audience. Thanks to such innovations, operatic art gains new vitality and becomes a multifunctional carrier of culture. Opera can contribute to the promotion of cultural exchange, enrich public experiences, and foster economic development, particularly through cultural tourism and internationally renowned artistic events.

¹⁷⁴ Ping Lihua, Yao Jie, *Practical Path of the Development of National Opera Art in the New Era* (新时代民族歌剧艺术传承的实践发展路径) [J], *Theatre House* (戏剧院), 2024(3).

5.2.3.1 Diverse Formal Innovations

According to research, the primary consumers of performances on the Chinese market are young people aged 18 to 39, who make up more than 70 percent of the total audience. One of the main challenges for classical music, such as opera, is the aging of the audience, with young viewers showing relatively low interest in opera.¹⁷⁵ One of the main reasons for this is the perception of opera as an elitist art form and the insufficient availability of modern adaptations that could better meet the expectations of a younger audience.

Reinterpretation of classic operas through new visual design, modern stage technology, and innovative directorial concepts can result in a new cultural experience. For example, changing traditional costumes and sets to modern styles or incorporating multimedia technology into performances can breathe new life into classic works. Attempting to combine operatic performances with natural landscapes and historical landmarks can bring new attractions to local tourism. A good example to follow is the European Festival d'Avignon in Avignon, which places operatic performances in ancient castles, amphitheaters, and riverside parks. Audiences not only enjoy magnificent opera performances but also experience the unique geographical and cultural environment, enhancing the sense of participation for tourists and making opera no longer limited to the theater but also a form of activity closely integrated with local cultural and tourist resources.¹⁷⁶ In China, there is potential for realizing such projects in locations like the Forbidden City in Beijing or the landscapes of Zhangjiajie.¹⁷⁷ These could become stages for outdoor opera performances.

Opera could also collaborate with pop music, fashion, and video games. For example, incorporating excerpts or elements of classical operas into the concerts of contemporary

¹⁷⁵ Xu Yuwei, *Original National Opera Production and Audience Cultivation in the New Era* (新时期民族歌剧原创制作与观众培育) [J], *Art Review* (艺术评论), 2023(9).

¹⁷⁶ The Festival d'Avignon is an annual arts festival held in the French city of Avignon every July, primarily in the courtyard of the Palais des Papes, as well as in other locations throughout the city. Founded in 1947 by Jean Vilar, it is the oldest existing festival in France.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Festival_d%27Avignon 31/01/2025, 6:04pm

¹⁷⁷ Zhangjiajie National Park, the first national park in China, which was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1992.

artists or creating opera adaptations based on popular media themes could attract young people interested in pop culture, thus breaking the perception of opera as an inaccessible art form. To truly create an immersive operatic experience for the audience, the boundary between the audience and performers should also be blurred. For example, the globally popular immersive theater *Sleep No More*¹⁷⁸ takes Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as its script and places both the audience and actors in a shared space, where they experience a sense of equality in using the stages and props. The audience's viewing becomes a more autonomous exploration, which significantly enhances their sense of immersion in the theatrical work.¹⁷⁹ Chinese opera could adapt a similar format for works such as *Peony Pavilion*, which, with its rich visual imagery and poetic narrative, would be perfectly suited for immersive adaptations.

Although immersive opera experiences are not yet popular in China, their potential for development is significant. On one hand, popular works such as *Carmen*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *La Traviata*, *Die Zauberflöte*, and *Rigoletto* feature rich scenes, complex storylines, and high recognition. On the other hand, these works could resonate with the psychology of the Chinese audience, which is eager to explore exotic flavors and European culture. Their adaptations could serve as a bridge between Western operatic tradition and Chinese audiences, enriching the local artistic market.

5.2.3.2 The Application of Modern Technologies

Traditional opera performances are often less open to digital technology and online communication, typically not fully utilizing modern technologies to enrich the art form. An example of innovative approaches is the Miami Classical Music Festival in the USA, a pioneer in projects that use projection mapping technology combined with traditional stage art. On July 16, 2022, under the direction of Michael Rossi, founder and artistic director of the

¹⁷⁸ The adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Sleep No More*, tells the tragic story of Macbeth, whose ambition is stirred by three witches' prophecies. His regicide and usurpation, encouraged by Lady Macbeth, lead to his hanging. <https://baike.baidu.com/item/不眠之夜/20115946> 31/01/2025, 6:06pm

¹⁷⁹ Zhangjiajie National Park, the first national park in China, was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1992. https://baike.baidu.com/item/张家界国家公园?fromModule=lemma_search-box 31/01/2025, 6:05pm

Miami Music Festival (MMF), a sound and visually stunning production of *Das Rheingold*, the first part of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* tetralogy, was presented. For the first time in an opera production, 360-degree projection mapping technology was used, involving the overlay of moving or static projections onto a specific spatial structure. Projection mapping transforms building facades, roads, temporary stages, etc., into interactive displays. This allows any surface to become part of the set design, creating mesmerizing light and shadow effects through graphic projections that take advantage of the shapes and textures of physical surfaces. The technology breaks traditional stage constraints and can be applied in both indoor and outdoor spaces. This innovation breaks the stereotype of the original theater stage and allows practically any space to be adapted for performance needs. The video content is integrated with the orchestra, cast, and audience, providing an unparalleled immersive experience. This new operatic experience brought the Miami Music Festival critical acclaim and serves as a reference for the rediscovery and revitalization of traditional operatic art.

¹⁸⁰Given China's rich cultural heritage and diverse stage spaces, Chinese opera could harness similar technologies in locations like the Forbidden City or the Great Wall of China to enhance the artistic experience and attract a new generation of audiences.

5.2.3.3 Innowacje w operacjach i promocji

Perfectly presenting an opera requires significant investments in human and material resources, including singers, orchestras, casts, set design, costume production, and more. High production costs, combined with daily expenses for maintaining opera theaters, present a serious economic challenge. In the face of insufficient support from audiences and commercial sponsors, national funding alone is not enough to sustain the operation of many opera houses. One innovative approach could be the use of cultural tourism, allowing opera to step beyond the traditional stage and integrate with tourism offerings. For example, combining opera with art festivals, cultural heritage events, or food festivals could attract a

¹⁸⁰ Miami Beach Classical Music Festival
<https://www.miamimusicfestival.com/immersive-opera-experiences> 31/01/2025, 6:08pm.

younger audience and tourists. Regions such as Beijing or Suzhou, known for their historical attractions, could become centers for such activities. Incorporating Chinese elements into universal narratives can help Chinese opera gain international recognition, attracting audiences interested in East Asian culture. A successful example could be *Turandot*, which, although created by a Western composer, draws from Chinese cultural heritage.

It is widely known that social media and streaming platforms play a key role in reaching younger audiences today. Campaigns on platforms like WeChat, Weibo, or Bilibili can include promotional videos, live streams from rehearsals, and interactive Q&A sessions with artists. Collaboration with international platforms, such as Medici.tv, could increase the global visibility of Chinese opera. Promoting artists as ambassadors of Chinese culture, following the success of Lang Lang, could also spark more interest in opera. Organizing masterclasses and meet-and-greet sessions would build lasting relationships between artists and audiences. Regular thematic events, such as Classic Opera Review and New Opera Promotion Day, should not only include the chance to observe rehearsals but also interactive educational workshops for children and teenagers to help build the future audience of Chinese opera.

Exclusive offers for opera lovers represent another area for exploration. As it is well known, opera houses organize their repertoire for a year or a specific period, offering annual tickets or organizing opera and music seasons. Planning performances in advance not only facilitates media coverage but also increases public attention, leading to better cultural consumption. Derivative opera IP products, such as toys, food, household items, music, art, books, and other physical or digital cultural communication products, can also be sold to diversify income.

In summary, implementing innovations in the production and promotion of opera performances creates the potential to expand the audience base. This is an opportunity to increase economic profits and strengthen opera's position as a contemporary cultural medium.

5.2.3.4 Kontynuacja wzmacniania talentów operowych

The above analysis shows that Chinese opera carries a dual mission of inheritance and innovation. However, Chinese operatic talents currently face many challenges, such as the outflow of specialists, limited capacity for innovation, and difficulties in integrating traditional techniques with modern aesthetics. Over the past 11 years, 1,032 projects funded by the National Art Fund in the category of artistic talent education have been implemented, of which only 16 were opera-related projects. Of the 2,208 projects aimed at supporting young talents, only 12 were associated with opera, indicating the need to increase investment in the development of young artists in this field. Based on the current development trends, it seems necessary to focus on and strengthen the following areas of action:

Firstly, higher art schools and university art departments should offer specializations and courses for opera composers and performers. Institutions such as the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing should develop comprehensive educational programs that include vocal techniques, stage skills, and an interdisciplinary approach integrating theater, music, and technology.

Secondly, opera theaters must also consciously invest in the training of young artists, both creators and performers. This can be achieved through collaboration with world-renowned opera houses or famous singers. For example, the world-renowned singer Maestro Plácido Domingo and the NCPA signed the NCPA-Domingo Young Artist Training Programme, under which both parties aim to train young Chinese singers, enhance their vocal and performance skills, and promote them on the global opera stage.¹⁸¹

The government should continue to increase incentives for young artists. For instance, the "Overseas Training Program for High-Class Artistic Talents" of the National Art Fund is a program that collaborates with foreign institutions and art schools to conduct training

¹⁸¹ Cheng Li. Domingo Cultivation Program - first cooperation with the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA). https://www.sohu.com/a/221605740_161623 31/01/2025, 6:10 pm.

activities, as well as selects and supports outstanding artistic talents to study and practice in foreign artistic and business organizations, in order to enhance their professional skills and improve their promotional, communication, and business management abilities.¹⁸²

In summary, cultivating operatic talents should be based on three pillars: inheriting tradition, exploring new means of artistic expression, and strengthening international cooperation. Interdisciplinary collaboration, combining opera art with technology and science, as well as promoting Chinese artists on the international stage, will help Chinese opera gain greater recognition and enrich the global cultural heritage.

¹⁸² National Art Fund 2025 Guidelines for Talent Training Program Funding Application
<https://www.ccom.edu.cn/info/10901/231961.htm> 31/01/2025, 6:11 pm.

Summary

Female characters from lower social classes play a key role both in Mozart's operas and in Chinese opera. In both artistic traditions, composers use these roles to express the aesthetic and cultural values of their time. The natural beauty and emotional depth of these characters gain recognition from audiences worldwide, and their portrayal reflects both humanistic ideas and cultural differences.

In both Chinese and Western operas, female characters often symbolize the struggle against adversity, while simultaneously embodying the aesthetic ideals of their cultures. Hegel pointed out that the suffering of individuals with rich inner lives and noble qualities evokes compassion and deeply moves the audience—especially when it concerns women who are beautiful and full of goodness. In this context, both Mozart and Chinese opera composers drew inspiration from female characters to highlight their beauty, strength, and emotional complexity. Characters such as Susanna, Despina, and Xi'er are both objects of aesthetic admiration and carriers of cultural values.

Despite differences in approach, Chinese and Western opera share a common idea of presenting the fates of women in a way that transcends temporal and cultural boundaries. Both composers and opera performers aimed to portray female characters as beings with deep inner lives, capable of experiencing intense emotions. Through universal musical and dramaturgical elements such as tonal changes, harmony, and narrative structure, creators from both traditions effectively convey the complexity of these characters.

At the same time, female characters in opera provide a field for artistic experimentation, enriching the operatic tradition and allowing for a creative dialogue between cultures. Sopranos who take on these roles have a special opportunity to extract their emotional depth through singing technique, vocal color, and stage interpretation. Both Céline and Despina in Mozart's operas, as well as Xi'er and Jinzi in Chinese works, present characters full of life and

dramatic tension, engaging the audience and creating an aesthetic unity between music and narrative.

The analysis and interpretation of these characters reveal that their fates and conflicts are not only a reflection of social reality but also carriers of deeper artistic values. Thanks to such characters, both Chinese and Western opera continue their evolution, combining tradition with modernity and showcasing the beauty and significance of the female world in art.

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