



CMP Teaching Plan – *Studio Demo Lesson*

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Aria: *È amore un ladroncello*, from *Così fan tutte* (1790)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Background Information:

Written just a few years before his death, Mozart's opera *Così fan tutte* ("Thus do they all") is an *opera buffa* with the libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte – also Mozart's collaborator for *Don Giovanni* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*. It is believed that Mozart wrote *Così* at the suggestion of Emperor Joseph II, after the latter's court composer, Antonio Salieri, broke off composition of the work because of its *risqué* themes. *Così fan tutte* had its first performance in Vienna on January 26, 1790, and has become a staple of the repertoire in opera houses around the world.

The main theme of the opera is *fiancée-swapping* – an popular plot device then and now. Da Ponte's plot revolves around two sisters – Fiordiligi and Dorabella – and their sweethearts, Guglielmo and Ferrando. The maid, Despina and the Old Philosopher (Don Alfonso) also figure prominently. The scene is Naples in the 18th century. Don Alfonso, claiming that all women are fickle in matters of love (thus the title of the opera), wagers with Ferrando and Guglielmo that within a day's time, he can prove that even their devoted sweethearts might be unfaithful to them. The three devise a plan in which the men will pretend that they have been called off to war, only to return, disguised as Albanians, and attempt to seduce each other's sweetheart. At first the sisters resist the advances of their disguised lovers, but with the encouragement of Despina (who is in cahoots with the men), they soon give in. To make a long and typically involved story short: in the end, the trick is discovered, the women are forgiven, they forgive the men, and everyone lives happily ever after.

È amore un ladroncello, ("Love is a little thief") is sung by Dorabella in Act 2, as she admits to Fiordiligi that she has succumbed to the charms of her "Albanian" suitor -- actually Guglielmo – Fiordiligi's lover. Dorabella has even given him her portrait of Ferrando in exchange for a heart-shaped locket. Fiordiligi does not approve, but soon, she herself is seduced by the other man – her sister's lover, Ferrando. The aria's translation is as follows, with important words in **boldface**:

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|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A | È amore un ladroncello ,
Un serpentello è amor,
ei toglie e dà la pace ,
come gli piace ai cor . | <i>Love is a little thief,
a little serpent is love,
He takes away and gives peace
as he pleases to the heart.</i> |
| B | Per gli occhi al seno appena,
un varco aprir si fa,
che l' anima in catena ,
e toglie libertà . | <i>From the eyes to the breast, soon
a path through he makes
that the soul is enchained,
and freedom taken away.</i> |
| C | Porta dolcezza e gusto ,
se tu lo lasci far,
ma t'empie di disgusto ,
se tenti di pugnar . | <i>He brings sweetness and pleasure
if you let him do,
but he fills you with disgust
if you attempt to fight.</i> |
| D | Se nel tuo petto ei suedem
s'egli ti becca qui ,
fa tutto quel ch'ei chiede
che anch'io farò così. | <i>If in your breast he settles,
if he pecks you here
Do all that he commands,
as also I will do thus.</i> |

(Translation by Sally Mouzon)

Musical Elements

Form

Rondo form: A B A C A D A (partial) + Coda (see translation above for corresponding text). While the A section is a clear 8 bar melody, the B, C and D sections are varied in their length, and some development occurs in them.

Rhythm

In a jaunty 6/8 meter throughout. Short pauses appear at the ends of most stanzas, but the rhythmic momentum is always immediately restored. Melodic rhythms are typical for this meter – uncomplicated and not syncopated. Rhythmic interest is achieved through variation of the accompaniment figures: simple chords on the beat or basic 6/8 accompaniment patterns contrast with agitated 16th note tremolo in the C, D and final A sections. The tempo remains mostly unchanged throughout the aria.

Melody

A playful, arpeggio figure at the opening of the vocal line immediately suggests the youthful, unsophisticated character of Dorabella. This melody relies on alternation between stepwise movement and the arpeggio figure, and much of the melodic material in the rest of the aria is derived from it. Mozart uses appoggiature at predictable places, but otherwise employs little in the way of “color notes.” A notable moment of chromaticism at the end of the B section hints at the complexities of love which Dorabella is experiencing for the first time, but it is quickly followed by a charming melody at the beginning of the C section she sings of love’s charm. A more jagged melody soon intrudes and reminds that love can also be unpleasant if one tries to fight it. In the D section, an even more disjunct melody is evidence of Dorabella’s increasing agitation in the throes of her situation, and the repetition in the coda shows that she has made her decision to follow her heart. Tellingly, the essential feel of the melody does not change through the aria even as the accompaniment changes beneath it – indicating that Dorabella is still a young and innocent girl even as turbulent adult emotions begin to rage within her.

Harmony

The simplicity of the harmonic structure in Dorabella’s aria also reflects her youth and innocence. It begins and ends in B flat with short diversions to the related keys of F major (Stanza B) and E flat major (Stanza C). One deceptive cadence in the B section opens the door for a repeat of an important line of text. Within sections, the harmony does not stray, save for some development within Stanza C -- not coincidentally, the text here includes some stronger words. The cheerful tonic key of B flat returns in the penultimate A section and is maintained to the end. The repeated IV-V-I cadential figure in the coda suggests that Dorabella has made a decision but still needs to convince herself that it is a good choice.

Timbre

Mozart employs strings, woodwinds and horns in the accompaniment, with the clarinet being particularly prominent. While the strings generally delineate the harmonic rhythm, the woodwinds either double the vocal line in pairs or supply short answering motives at the end of a phrase. The horns provide the rhythmic pulse – punctuating important words in the text. A gradual change in timbre occurs through the aria, more lower strings and bassoon in its lower register enter the mix. At one point, the horn sustains a long pedal tone. This timbral change hints at Dorabella’s inner turmoil in a way that her jaunty melody does not.

Texture

Solo voice over orchestral accompaniment as noted above. The texture, like the timbre, changes as the aria progresses, even as the character of the melody does not. The appearance of more inner voices in mid-range, and of agitated 16th note figures in the lower voices of the accompaniment serve to provide a contrasting subtext to the unchanging melody -- suggesting to the us what Dorabella does not recognize – that she is falling into the trap that the little “thief of love” has set!

Expression

Few dramatic dynamic changes are found in the aria – dynamics mostly follow the shape of the melodic line – Mozart always requires an elegant turn of phrase! Again – this is a great musical illustration of Dorabella’s youthful naiveté. What happens in the accompaniment beneath that melodic line – the more flowing feel while describing the “sweetness” of love, strong *fp* statements in the latter part of the C section, staccato eighth notes punctuating the lines about love “peck-peck-pecking” away until one gives in, and the aforementioned horn pedal tone, which appears at a tense moment – all betray some of the strong feelings which Dorabella as yet does not recognize or perhaps chooses not to acknowledge:

Reasons to Perform this Aria

Mozart’s operas are masterworks of the genre, and every singer should have a Mozart aria or two in their personal repertoire. The music of Mozart and other Classical-era composers, with their elegant melodies, provide the means to cultivate graceful, stylish and artistic singing, while not being so difficult that focus on healthy vocal production is lost.

É amore un ladroncello provides an excellent introduction to the notion of character expression -- not only through the *words* (obvious) but the *music* (less obvious). It is fair to say that Mozart’s use of music to portray characters in this way represented a major change in operatic composition, and it paved the way for future composers such as Wagner and Verdi. This aria serves as a good preface to singing more the challenging operatic repertoire of later composers.

Music Selection

This aria is suitable and recommended for an advanced high school student or a college student who is in the 1st – 3rd year of study. The Italian is not difficult and there is enough repetition to make it suitable for one who is new to the language. A younger singer will easily relate to the emotions Dorabella is experiencing, and will enjoy the opportunity to explore the concept of characterization in performance, which is often a big challenge for young singers.

The Heart Statement

The heart of É amore un ladroncello lies in Mozart’s depiction of Dorabella through the contrast between the innocence of the melody she continues to sing in light of the changing timbre and texture of the accompaniment which depict the adult emotions that have begun to stir within her.

The Lesson Plan

Introducing the Piece

Remember when you were 16? You had that all-important first boyfriend, but there was that OTHER CUTE GUY in French class? Summer came, and the boyfriend went away to camp for 8 weeks. Oh, how you missed him, but you were going to stay true (as he for sure would be!) until his return in August, when you would have a joyful reunion. One day, cute-French-class-guy calls and asks you to a movie. Hmm, what to do? Surely just going to a movie with this guy wouldn't be a problem...or would it? Who would play YOU in this little movie? What would the "sound track" be like? What words would be used? Think about the elements of music -- melody, harmony, form, rhythm, timbre, expression and texture – and in what ways a composer might combine them to musically express those feelings of yours: love, longing, anxiety, frustration, discontent.

Skill Outcome

The student will sing in Italian with supple, free, and open vocal production.

Strategies

- 1) Before singing, loosen up the body with some gentle stretches while breathing deeply and easily.
- 2) Using some of the vowel sounds unique to the Italian language: the dropped jaw /o/ and /a/ vowels; the open and closed /e/ and /o/; the vowel-like glide ("piace", "toglie") begin to vocalize a simple triad. Focus on likely locations of tension: neck, jaw and tongue, and feel a release of tension in those areas.
- 3) Continuing to use Italian vowel sounds, work through the middle-head voice transition with a descending 5-note scale, moving the arms and upper body to express the free release of breath/sound through the *passaggio*.
- 4) Vocalize the opening melodic motive of the aria on a single vowel, and then on the vowels only of the text. Maintain a supple and free tone even as the pitches and vowels change. Do the same with the first bars of the melody of the Stanza C. Observe the difference in the freedom and flow of the sound between these 2 places.

Assessment

- 1) The student demonstrates a body position that is balanced, relaxed, free, and ready to sing after gently stretching and breathing.
- 2) The student sings freely and without tension through the *passaggio*.
- 3) The student accurately sings Italian vowel and glide sounds in an open and relaxed way.
- 4) The student sings melodic lines in the aria with smooth, connected and free sound.
- 5) The instructor assesses student's vocal production in every phase of this exercise, and makes adjustments as needed.

Knowledge Outcome

The student will recognize the ways in which the accompaniment for an aria can suggest "subtext" -- thoughts and feelings that may not be evident in the melodic line or text.

Strategies

- 1) Talk about Dorabella – who is she? What is her situation? What decision is she trying to make? To whom is she singing in this aria? What do you think she *really* wants to do?
- 2) Work through the aria translation from beginning to end and identify one emotion for each stanza.
- 3) Create a working definition of terms *melody*, *timbre*, and *texture*. Consider ways in which a composer might manipulate these elements through the course of a piece of music.
- 4) Be the conductor! Listen to a recording of the aria while looking at a full orchestral score. As you listen, be aware of changes in *melody*, *timbre*, and *texture* from beginning to the end. See how these are represented in the score.

- 5) Alongside your aria translation, jot some notes about the changes you hear in the melody, and in the timbre and texture of the accompaniment.
- 6) Discover that the accompaniment can provide clues about the character's thoughts and feelings that might not be recognizable on the surface -- the melodic line.

Assessment

- 1) The student creates a written character portrait of Dorabella, and uses it to introduce a performance of the aria.
- 2) The student can "connect the dots" – verbally describing Dorabella's changing emotions and making judgments about the ways in which they are or aren't represented by the melody and accompaniment.
- 3) Using the full score, the student can visually identify the melodic line and can describe and point out specific instances of timbre and texture changes in the accompaniment.
- 4) In a *different* aria (such as Handel's *Va godendo*), the student can create a similar "character portrait" by observing and listening to the melodic line and the use of elements of music in the the accompaniment.

Affective Outcome

The student will feel the satisfaction of a *complete* character portrayal in performance, and its powerful effect on an audience.

Strategies

- 1) While singing the piece, experiment with changing *physical* position. Use the whole space! Consider what works, and what doesn't. How does movement affect your singing? Record your "staging" and responses in your lesson notebook.
- 2) Play "Charades" – student draws an emotion word from a hat, and using facial expression and gesture, expresses this emotion to the teacher, who attempts to identify it. Then switch roles!
- 3) Connect some of the "Charade" emotions to Dorabella, and try to evoke them as you sing some of the phrases of the aria.
- 4) Describe the effect of connecting to and portraying these emotions on your singing.
- 5) Imagine the other characters in the scene – who are they? Use a chair or other item to represent them in the room. Sing the aria, experimenting with moving around them and singing to them. Make a video recording for teacher-student review.
- 6) Perform the aria for an audience without explaining Dorabella or her situation. Ask your audience to tell YOU the story that they get from your expressions, movements, and gestures.

Assessment

- 1) Student and teacher discuss the *non-verbal* "Charades" game. Talk about the emotions that were easy to portray, and identify the ones that were more challenging to communicate. Identify things that might hold you back from a complete character portrayal.
- 2) Student considers how it feels to *sing* with an increased level of emotional understanding and connection, and records this in the lesson notebook.
- 3) The student performs the aria in the master class (singers and non-singers), and asks for verbal feedback about the effectiveness of that performance. Do movement and gestures enhance the performance for your audience? For you?
- 4) The student and teacher view other performances of the scene that includes this aria on You Tube or other video. The student is able to differentiate a meaningful performance from one that is less so, recognizing what it takes to get the character across to the audience.
- 5) Inviting other students to join in, the singer can effectively "stage" the scene – giving directions to the other performers and thus demonstrating a complete understanding of Dorabella and her reactions to those around her as she sings.