

10 Simple Truths About Singing Mozart

Summary of Arlene Shrut's "Must Have Mozart" Master Class

1. Mozart arias, songs and ensembles are beautiful and expressive both vocally and dramatically, having been created with extraordinary proportions. It is our job as performers to discover, understand and portray all aspects of the music and drama in relation to the gesture and shape of the phrase, and also through the harmony and language scansion.
2. There is at least one Mozart aria that will align with each voice. The match depends on the tessitura comfort, the weight and range of the voice, in addition to physical type, temperament and age.
3. Once you find a "right" Mozart aria for you, you won't have to under-sing or over-sing. You will use your best resonance and legato, and stay true to the composer's markings while singing melodiously and informed by the harmonic energy. Understanding the arc of the phrase and the use of dissonances, especially at cadence points, are key. Two note slurs (accent/ unaccent) are the building blocks of all of classical period music.
4. Mozart, born in Salzburg and living in Vienna, spoke German. Whether his libretti were German singspiel as in Die Zauberflöte by Manuel Schikaneder, Die Entführung aus dem Serail by Gottlieb Stephanie or operas in Italian by DaPonte such as Così fan tutte, Le Nozze di Figaro and Don Giovanni, the way he structured his phrases was under the influence of the German language, where the verb ended the sentence. Therefore the direction of the musical phrases also pointed to the end of the phrase, whether using feminine or masculine endings. (feminine: stressed syllable is followed by unstressed as with an appoggiatura; or masculine: strong syllable ending on an strong beat, harmonically and rhythmically) The aim and goal of the phrase is to the END. This often leads to finessing high notes in the middle of a phrase rather than blossoming or creating an apex. Also, upward phrases may require a decrescendo and downward phrases a crescendo towards the end of the phrase.
5. There is always a tempo relationship, i.e. a mathematical equivalency between sections of a Mozart aria or ensemble. This is called "unity of tempo". Therefore, tempo must be chosen to keep the tempo relation intact:

Good examples are: (see handout Ex. 5A)

- 'Batti, batti' (Don Giovanni)
- 'Ruhe sanft' (Zaide)
- 'Dove sono' (Le Nozze di Figaro)

Sometimes Mozart indicates changes beyond tempo relation: (see handout Ex. 5B)

- 'Parto' (La Clemenza di Tito)

6. The SCORE itself.

Editions: It is best to consult the Baerenreiter score and orchestral scores for correct notes, rhythms, words and orchestration. For playability use Schirmer reductions for audition pianists.

Dynamics and other expression markings: It is essential to understand the “shorthand”, i.e. what they mean. Dynamics are written in the orchestra part, not the vocal line. The Singer must not either force the voice or come off the voice to match these dynamics, but simply take them into account vocally. Subito pianos, subito fortes or sforzandi in the orchestra should be mirrored by the singer. Fermati traditionally are anticipated by a ½ bar ritardando. Fermati in important junctures of the arias often ornamented.

Keys: It is important to know the “meaning” of keys at this time, i.e.:

- G minor is often used to reflect death: Pamina’s aria.
- Vacillation between good and evil: d minor and D major as the key of Don Giovanni.
- Key of E flat major (marriage, fidelity, perfect union, the trinity) is also the key of Die Zauberflöte in general and ‘Bei Männern’ duet in specific.
- D major for military/martial i.e. Così fan tutte March, Act 1
- It is also good to know how far you are from home key. Example: the middle A flat section of Cherubino’s second aria from Le Nozze di Figaro is very far away from the rest of the aria in B flat.

7. Instrumental associations are also important in understanding the dramatic situation. Good examples:

- Clarinets in thirds representing love: The sister’s duet from Così fan tutte and ‘Porgi amor’ from Le Nozze di Figaro.
- Mozart often uses the bassoon for sarcasm or irony such as Don Alfonso in the trio from Così fan tutte and Fiordiligi’s aria ‘Come scoglio’
- The horn call is a symbol for cuckolding: Figaro’s aria in Act 4 Le Nozze di Figaro

8. Understanding and delivering recitative: *secco and accompagnato*

It is important to be able to recognize both types of recitatives from how they look on the page, understanding their relative importance as guides to singing and pacing.

- *Secco* recitatives have sparse chords, figured bass and often indicate “continuo” in the score, which in Mozart’s time was usually played by harpsichord and gamba, and more recently by fortepiano and cello.
- *Accompagnato* recitatives were written for members of the nobility. When servants’ set pieces had accompanied recitatives, Mozart was making a revolutionary statement (such as in “Deh vieni non tardar”, Suzanna’s aria from Le Nozze di Figaro, which is doubly amazing since it is a serenade. Serenades were traditionally written for men only and noblemen at that!!!) In the same way, coloratura passages traditionally reserved for nobility were used more universally by Mozart, breaking the bounds of class distinction.

In learning both types of recitatives, it often helps to bar sixteenth notes together to see the larger rhythmic pattern. Short rhythms lead to the next longer note value. Rests can often be left out or, at least, the breath suspended in these places. Sometimes breaths can be added too for dramatic emphasis.

- *Secco*: (see handout for 8A). This type of recitative often moves the action forward. The longer any chord lasts, the quicker the delivery underneath it. Since harmonic motion changes more quickly in secco recitative, this pacing “brakes” the voice and slows the flow of energy. Within that, each character has his or her own basic rhythm and energy, and modulates or adjusts depending on the placement of the piece in the context of the drama. Delivery is speech-like and free rhythmically to go along with the spoken language flow.
 - *Accompagnato*: (See handout for 8B). These types of recitatives are usually found connected to a noble person’s substantial aria or in a “plot shift” piece in an opera. Although more sung than the secco type, they are still free rhythmically with note proportions observed, (i.e., with quarter notes being the “long” values in recitatives, eight notes are about twice as fast with sixteenth notes leading to the next long note value). In *accompagnato* recitatives, often the recitative and aria express the same emotion, (i.e., the Count’s aria, Figaro’s “Se vuol ballare” and Susanna’s “Deh vieni” from Le Nozze di Figaro and Dorabella’s “Smanie” from Don Giovanni).
9. Mozart likes to shape his phrases in groups of 3. The place where the chords change helps us decide if it is 1 plus 2 leads to 3 or 1 leads to 2 and 3 combined. In both recitatives and arias this may indicate whether to breathe or not, depending on the idea and emotion expressed. When there is no punctuation, but too long a time to suspend your breath, you might want to do an NEB (non-evident breath) creating an “intensity continuation” from the end of the note before the NEB, to the beginning of the new note; “tongue-in groove or interlocking puzzle pieces.” This type of subtle phrasing creates spontaneity and reflects how we form our thoughts to speak out loud in real time.
 10. In interludes the orchestra is either finishing your idea or introducing a new idea. Know which it is and incorporate this into your physical and facial expression.