Venetian Musical/Rhetorical Clichés 101

(Prepared by Lucas Harris, September 2009)

When trying to shape your delivery of (or BC accompaniment to) recitative style music, ask these questions of each passage or gesture, in this order:

- 1) What do the words mean?
- 2) How did the composer set the words?
- 3) How can my delivery (or accompaniment) make that setting more vivid?

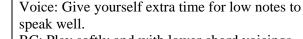
Be on the lookout for some of these rhetorical clichés found frequently in Venetian opera scores:

Clue(s) in the setting

1) Writing in the low register

Emotion / affect / gesture

Supplication, desperation, baseness, weakness, secrets / hiding / disguises, quasispoken exclamations, word painting of 'terra,' 'abysso,' or 'tace' etc.

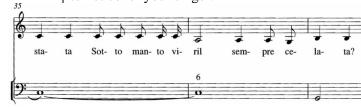


BC: Play softly and with lower chord voicings (or tasto solo) and/or low bass notes. Be careful to not cover your singer.

How to make it more vivid



Melloe: "...don't harm the vanquished, or prisoners"



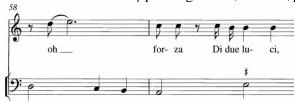
Tigrane: "Is she still disguised as a man?"

2) Writing in the high register

Agitation, anger, triumph/victory, strong emotions, sublime objects or feelings, exclamations such as *o* or *ohimè*, word painting of *ciel*, *sublime*, *paradiso*, etc.

V: Use a stronger delivery

BC: Play louder and with higher/richer chord voicings.

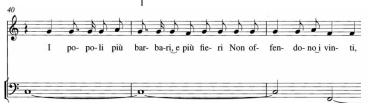


Eurinda: "Oh, the power of those two eyes!"

3) Syllabic writing on faster note values (eights & sixteenths)

Basic narration/description, or fast-paced, patter-like conversation

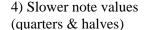
V: Rattle these passages at a good clip, looking for important syllables to use as structural points. BC: 'Rumble,' re-striking chords or bass notes under important syllables.



Melloe: "More barbarous and fierce peoples don't harm . . . "



Tigrane: "Let my downfall weigh down my adulterous wife or the wicked king."



Declamatory, pompous, used for official

declamation.

V: Use a more portentous (strong & slowish)

BC: Strong, compact chords.



Marte: "And he (Giove) decreed it . . ."

Divine characters showing vocal virtuosity, 5) Coloratura word painting of volare, cantare, fulmini, saetta, etc.

V: Use agile, quick articulation.

BC: Track the singer's passagework carefully, pushing forward or allowing extra time where necessary. Make the accompaniment 'sparkle.'

V: Give more urgency to the strongest repetition

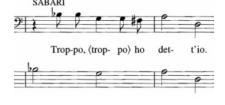


Marte: "Fly quickly among the Scythians . . . "

6) Repeated words or short phrases

Rhetorical emphasis

(which should be higher or longer). Connect the final repetition to the continuation of the phrase. BC: Shape your dynamics to be loudest on the strongest repetition. il fu-ror, (il fu-ror) in s'am-mor-



Sabari: "Too much, too much have I said."

Eurinda: "The fury, the fury . . . subsides in me."

7) Dotted writing

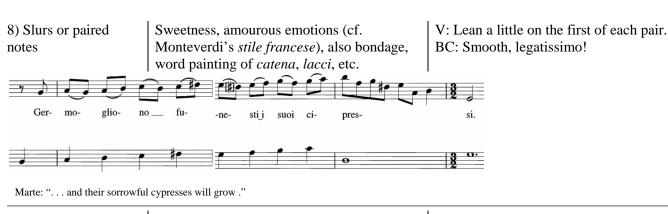
Can be playful & comic, or martial

V: Articulate the dots sharply. BC: Perhaps add some dotted material to your realisation.



Marte: "You will fight, you will wound . . . "

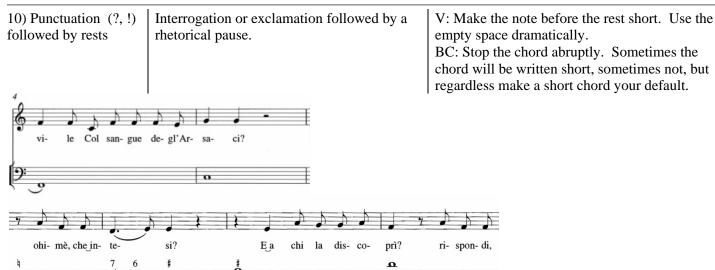
La Discordia: "I'll sow seeds of war . . . "



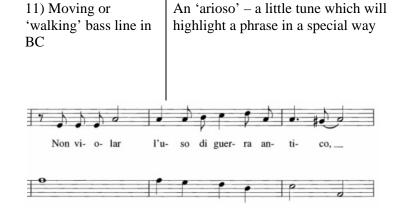


Eurinda: "Wrath, wrath inflames my heart!"

Tigrane: "Blind fury, I give in to you!"



Eurinda: "... with the blood of Arsacians?" Tigrane: "Alas, what have I heard? And to whom was she revealed?"

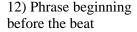


V: Make a clear separation between the arioso and the recit by taking a clear, confident tempo. Be aware of the direction coming from the bass. BC: Use more articulation in the bass to create a more aria-like feeling (long-short is a good starting place).



Melloe: "Don't violate the ancient rules of warfare."

Sabari: "... with Artabanus a beloved lover."



Urgent, syncopated, unsettled, supplicating

V: Shape the anticipated note with a clear direction and mood. If you know where the chord should come, it will probably come there! BC: Look up for a cue from the section leader.



Doriclea: "Ah, if I were in front of him . . . "

13) Phrase beginning after the beat

BC chord launches the colour/dynamic of the phrase with an 'impulse' chord (usually an unarpeggiated/compact which serves as a launch for the singer's phrase). V: Wait for the chord, allowing its weight and timing to be a part of your delivery.

BC: Give the 'impulse' chord with the weight & timing the singer needs.



Eurinda: "Oh, how beautiful he is."

Melloe: "And you, who loosen your inflamed tongue . . . "

14) Phrase beginning on the beat

Stability, control, intentional placement, official or polite discourse



V: Breathe and begin the phrase with the BC. BC: Breathe with the singer and place the bass note precisely, letting the consonant(s) come

BC: Breathe with the singer and place the base note precisely, letting the consonant(s) come before the beat.



Sabari: "It is you, Sire? She lives . . . "

15) Dissonances (2nds, 4ths, 7ths between V & bc, also 'illegal' augmented or

Jarring, bitter, wrenching, painful sadness or melancholy. Can sometimes be wrenching in a pleasing way (kisses, etc.). V: Use an unvibrated tone to allow the dissonance to grind more strongly against the bass.

BC: Play the bass strongly, and bring out/double pitches in the chord that increase the dissonance.



Eurinda: "You, you recklessly dared to exalt . . ."



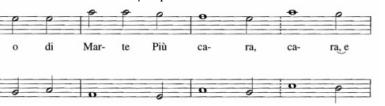
Sabari: "Every misfortune falls upon the miserable."



Unisons, 5^{ths} and octaves tend to be more declamatory/stable while 3^{rds} & 6^{ths} are more expressive

V: Try for perfect intonation.

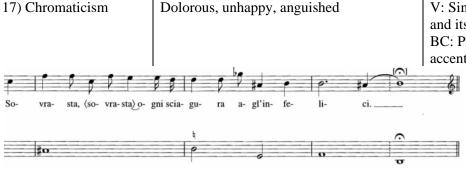
BC: Try for perfect ensemble.



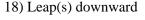
Marte: "... of Mars the most beloved ..."

V: Sing softly, sometimes sliding between a note and its chromatic alteration.

BC: Play as smooth as possible, with few accents.



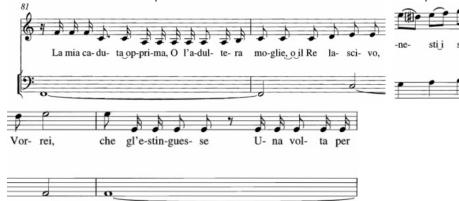
Sabari: "Every misfortune falls upon the miserable."



Something becoming unravelled, undone, defeated

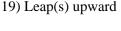
V: Slide between the pitches of the large intervals.

BC: Decrescendo & run out of steam.





Tigrane: "Let my downfall weigh down my adulterous wife or the wicked king." Marte: "... their sorrowful cypresses." Doriclea: "I want it to be extinguished ..."



Something being born, growing, rising, coming into power

V: Use confident, supported delivery.

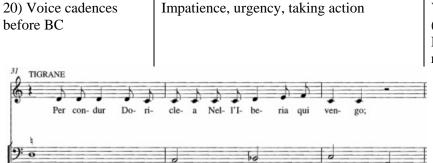
BC: Crescendo with the leap to the 'top'.





Sabari: " \ldots of that which is born from a rejected love."

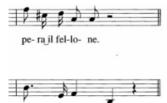
Eurinda: "The fury, the fury . . . subsides in me."



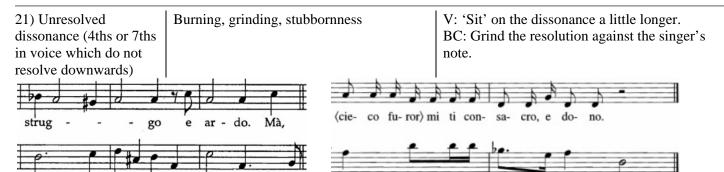
Tigrane: "I've come to rescue Doriclea and bring her into Iberia."

V: Use fast pacing through the end of the phrase (not even a hint of rallentando!).

BC: Play rhythmically 'straight', i.e., cadence as normal.

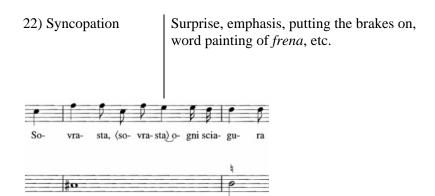


Eurinda: "Let this offender die!"



Strozzi cantata: "I struggle and burn."

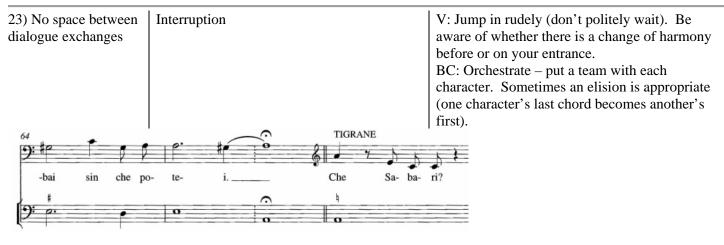
Tigrane: "Blind fury, I give in to you!"



V: Put a good 'spin' on the syncopation. You must feel exactly where the beat is in order to sing against it.

BC: Create a stable rhythmic foundation for the syncopation to set itself against.

Sabari: "Every misfortune brings down the miserable."



Sabari: "... as long as I could." Tigrane: "What, Sabari!?"



Sudden change in emotion or affect or delivery style; catches the listener's attention

V: Sing the 'ma' short and accompany it with a stage gesture.

BC: Be ready for new affect/colour.



Sabari: "It is you, Sire? She lives . . . but what opposing God constrains you to be here in enemy territory?"

25) Phrase ending with lengthened note values

Switch from a more 'spoken' to a more 'sung' delivery and pacing; or the composer takes time to put a special colour on a certain word or phrase, or simple texture/pacing contrast.

V: Exaggerate the contrast in pacing: accelerate the pacing just before the slow bit so the broadening seems more dramatic.

BC: Expand the support with richer arpeggios.



Sabari: "Every misfortune brings down the miserable."

26) BC 'marches' towards a cadence in half notes

The declamation takes on a new sense of movement or direction; a decision is made.

V: 'Feel' the momentum of the marching bass and go with it towards the cadence.

BC: Play more legato, with a sense of line moving towards the cadence.



Sabari: "I want to avenge myself now that the opportunity has been given to me."

27) Short cadence

Urgent declamation, decisive

V: Keep the pacing fast and the final syllable short.

BC: Weight your chords according the syllables (i.e., usually strong-weak).



Eurinda: "Since you so wish to die, I'll fulfill your desires!"

V: Do a cadential ornament which matches the colour of the word.

BC: Same!



Sabari: "... with Artabanus a beloved lover."