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Music in Vienna

Assignment 1

Porgi Amor—the Story of an Almost Lost Love

Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* contains many subplots and details that can be lost if the audience is not paying full attention. One of these subplots is displayed in the Countess’s first aria, ‘Porgi Amor’. At this point in the opera, the Countess is distraught because she believes the Count does not love her anymore. The Countess is alone in her bedroom at the time of her aria, which brings an even more sorrowful reaction from the viewer. During this section of the opera, the Countess laments over her husband’s believed infidelity. Act two opens with this tender scene that sets the mood for the following pieces.

The libretto of the Countess’s aria points to her concern when she worriedly sings: “Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro, al mio duolo, a’ miei sospir! O mi rendi il mio tesoro, o mi lascia almen morir!” The translation for this aria is “Grant, love some relief to my sorrow, to my sighing. Give me back my treasure, or at least let me die.” The libretto gives the listener a peak into the Countess’s emotions and how truly distraught she is over losing the Count’s love to her maid Susanna.

The musical score supports the characterization of the Countess as an upset woman who has just lost the love of her husband, the Count. By beginning the act with the tempo of *Larghetto*, Mozart wanted the music to reflect her emotions. The slow tedious tempo must reflect her sadness and unwillingness to confront her husband about the possible infidelity. She is characterized as over emotional in the libretto by saying “Give me back my treasure, or at least let me die.” But this drama is also backed up by the musical accompaniment. Before the Countess begins her aria, there is a long musical opening to act two. There are orchestral dynamic changes, but not drastic enough to change the mood of the upcoming aria. The music preceding her aria has a longing nature to it, due to the violin parts. The notes in the violin are stylistically smoother (tied notes, a lot of vibrato), which creates a very sweet yet longing sound.

The melody the Countess sings is a simple one with not very many words, leaving a lot of room for emotion. Her main show-off section is the scalar pattern that ends with a fermata on an A flat. The libretto here is when she declares her love for the Count and says she would rather die if she cannot have him back. The music and libretto work wonderfully here to create the drama and emotion-filled scene that perfectly characterizes the Countess.

The two performances of “Porgi Amor” presented very different acting and staging which made them interesting to watch. One performance is set in a much more modern time period than the traditional Figaro. The modern version of Figaro is set around the 1940s-1950s, making it a little more difficult to understand what is happening. The problems that arise in the scene of “Porgi Amor” are more modern marriage issues than the traditional scene. The traditional scene allows the actress to be more emotional and portray exactly what is going on, therefore making it more effective. The actress in the traditional version entered the room and instantly brought drama with her. By taking off her wedding ring, it was clear to the audience what was happening. The modern version is effective in displaying modern problems (the actress was more restrained, showing very little outward emotion). It would be important to know the synopsis prior to watching the modern version. The traditional version is easier to understand, possibly because that is how Mozart and de Ponte envisioned the dramatic performance of their famous opera.

“Porgi Amor” is an incredibly dramatic scene given by the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Mozart and de Ponte wrote a score and libretto that is filled with drama and emotion making it a widely popular opera. The Countess’s character and first aria are perfect examples of the combination of Mozart and de Ponte’s work. Her first aria combines de Ponte’s powerful libretto and Mozart’s sweet longing accompaniment into the work “Porgi Amor”.