

Chapter V.

COMBINATION OF THE HUMAN VOICE WITH ORCHESTRA. THE STAGE BAND.

Orchestral accompaniment of solo voices.

General remarks.

In accompanying the voice orchestral scoring should be light enough for the singer to make free use of all the dynamic shades of expression without hardness of tone. In overflowing lyrical moments, where full voice is required, the singer should be well supported by the orchestra.

Opera singing may be divided into two general classes, lyric singing and declamation or recitative. The full, round, *legato* aria affords greater facility for tone production than florid music or recitative, and the more movement and rhythmic detail contained in the vocal part, the greater freedom and liberty must there be given to the voice. In such a case the latter should not be doubled by the orchestra, neither should rhythmical figures be written for any instrument corresponding with those in the vocal part. In accompanying the voice the composer should bear these points in mind before turning his attention to the choice of orchestral colour. A confused, heavy accompaniment will overpower the singer; an accompaniment which is too simple in character will lack interest, and one which is too weak will not sustain the voice sufficiently.

In modern opera it is rare that orchestral writing is confined to accompaniment pure and simple. It frequently happens that the principal musical idea, often complex in character, is contained in the orchestra. The voice may then be said to form the accompaniment, exchanging musical for literary interest. It becomes

subordinate to the orchestra, as though it were an extra part, subsequently added as an after-thought. But it is evident that great care must be taken with orchestral writing in such cases. The scoring must not be so heavy or complicated as to drown the voice and prevent the words from being heard, thereby breaking the thread of the text, and leaving the musical imagery unexplained. Certain moments may require great volume of orchestral tone, so great that a voice of even phenomenal power is incapable of being heard. Even if the singer is audible, such unequal struggles between voice and orchestra are most inartistic, and the composer should reserve his orchestral outbursts for the intervals during which the voice is silent, distributing the singer's phrases and pauses in a free and natural manner, according to the sense of the words. If a prolonged *forte* passage occurs in the orchestra it may be used concurrently with action on the stage. All artificial reduction of tone contrary to the true feeling of a passage, the sole object being to allow the voice to come through, should be strictly avoided, as it deprives orchestral writing of its distinctive brilliance. It must also be remembered that too great a disparity in volume of tone between purely orchestral passages and those which accompany the voice create an inartistic comparison. Therefore, when the orchestra is strengthened by the use of wood-wind in three's or four's, and brass in large numbers, the division of tone and colour must be manipulated skillfully and with the greatest care.

In previous sections I have frequently stated that the structure of the orchestra is closely related to the music itself. The scoring of a vocal work proves this relationship in a striking manner, and, indeed, it may be stipulated that *only that which is well written can be well orchestrated.*

Transparence of accompaniment. Harmony.

The group of strings is the most transparent medium and the one least likely to overpower the voice. Then come the wood-wind and the brass, the latter in the following order: horns, trombones, trumpets. A combination of strings, *pizz.*, and the harp forms a setting eminently favourable for the voice. As a general rule a singer is more easily overpowered by long sustained notes than by short detached ones. Strings doubled in the wood-wind

and brass, and brass doubled by wood-wind are combinations liable to drown the singer. This may be done even more easily by *tremolando* in the kettle-drums and other percussion instruments, which, even by themselves are capable of overpowering any other orchestral group of instruments. Doubling of wood-wind and horns, and the use of two clarinets, two oboes or two horns in unison to form one harmonic part is likewise to be avoided, as such combinations will have a similar effect on the voice. The frequent use of long sustained notes in the double basses is another course unfavourable to the singer; these notes in combination with the human voice produce a peculiar throbbing effect.

Juxtaposition of strings and wood-wind which overweights *legato* or declamatory singing may nevertheless be employed if one of the groups forms the harmony in sustained notes and the other executes a melodic design, when, for instance the sustaining instruments are clarinet, and bassoon, or bassoon and horn, and the melodic design is entrusted to violins or violas — or in the opposite case, when the harmony is given to violas and 'cellos *divisi*, and the harmonic figure to the clarinets.

Sustained harmony in the register of the second octave to the middle of the third does not overpower women's voices, as these develop *outside* this range; neither is it too heavy for men's voices, which although opening out *within* the range itself sound an octave higher, as in the case of the tenor voice. As a rule women's voices suffer more than men's when they come in contact with harmony in a register similar to their own. Taken separately, and used in moderation, each group of orchestral instruments may be considered favourable to each type of voice. But the combination of two or three groups cannot be so considered unless they each play an independent part and are not united together at full strength. Incessant four-part harmony is to be deprecated. Satisfactory results will be obtained when the number of harmonic parts is gradually decreased, with some of them sustaining pedal notes, and when the harmony, interspersed with necessary pauses is confined to the limits of one octave, distributed over several octaves, or duplicated in the higher register.

These manipulations allow the composer to come to the singer's aid; in voice-modulations, when the singer passes from the *can-*

tabile to the declamatory style, the composer may reduce or eliminate some harmony which is found to be too heavy as the vocal tone diminishes, and conversely, support the voice by a fuller orchestral tone in broad phrases and climaxes.

Ornamental writing and polyphonic accompaniment should never be too intricate in character, entailing the use of an unnecessary number of instruments. Some complicated figures are better partially entrusted to *pizz.* strings and harp, as this combination has little chance of overpowering the voice. Some examples of accompanying an *aria* are given below.

Examples:

The Tsar's Bride, Lykow's supplementary *Aria* (Act III).

" " " 16—19 — Griasnov's *Aria*.

No. 277. *Snegourotchka* 45.

* *Snegourotchka* 187—188, 212—213 the two *Cavatinas* of Tsar Berendey (cf. extracts, Ex. 102, 225).

No. 278. *Sadko* 143.

" 204—206 — The Venetian's Song.

* *Legend of Kitesh* 39—41, 222—223 (cf. Ex. 31).

* *The Golden Cockerel* 153—157, 163.

Florid singing which limits volume of tone requires a light accompaniment, simple in outline and colour, involving no duplication of instruments.

Examples:

No. 279. *Snegourotchka* 42—48 — *Snegourotchka's Aria* (Prologue), Fragment.

* *Sadko* 195—197 — Hindoo Song (cf. Ex. 122).

* *The Christmas Night* 45—50 — Oxana's *Aria*.

* *The Golden Cockerel* 131—136 — *Aria* of Queen Shémakhâ.

Doubling voices in the orchestra.

Melodic doubling of voices by orchestral instruments (in unison or octaves) is of frequent occurrence, but incessant duplication for an extended period of time should be avoided; it is only permissible in isolated phrases. The most natural duplication in

unison of womens' voices is performed by violins, violas, clarinets and oboes; that of mens' voices by violas, 'cellos, bassoons and horns. Doubling in octaves is usually done in the upper register. Trombones and trumpets overpower the voice and cannot be used for this purpose. Uninterrupted or too frequent duplication should be avoided, not only because the operation deprives the singer of full freedom of expression, but also because it replaces by a mixed timbre the rare characteristic qualities of the human voice. Doubling, when limited to a few special phrases supports the voice and endows it with beauty and colour. It is only suitable *in tempo*; to apply it, in unison or octaves to a passage *ad. lib.* is both ineffective and dangerous.

Examples:

Snegourotchka [50—52] — Snegourotchka's Arietta (cf. Ex. 41).

Sadko [309—311] — Volkhova's Cradle-song (cf. Ex. 81).

Besides the question of doubling the voice for the object of colour there are instances when the singer executes only part of a phrase, allotted in its entirety to an orchestral instrument.

Example:

Vera Scheloga [30], [36] (cf. Ex. 49).

Lyrical climaxes, *a piena voce*, or dramatic passages for the voice situated outside its normal range should be supported melodically and harmonically by the orchestra, in the register in which the voice is placed. The culminating point in such passages often coincides with the entry or sudden attack of the trombones or other brass instruments, or by a rush of strings. Strengthening the accompaniment in this manner will soften the tone of the voice.

Examples:

No. 280. *The Tsar's Bride* [206].

Servilia [126—127].

„ [232].

No. 281. *Sadko* [314].

Vera Scheloga [41].

If the culminating point is soft in colour and outline it is better left unsupported in the orchestra, but sometimes the wood-wind, sustaining such passages with light transparent melody or harmony may produce an entrancing effect.

Examples:

- Snegourotchka* [188].
 „ [318] (cf. Ex. 119).
 No. 282. *The Tsar's Bride* [214].

It is a common practice to support voices in concerted numbers by harmony and duplication; this operation makes for accuracy and brilliance when applied to duets, trios, quartets etc.

Examples:

- Snegourotchka* [292—293] — Duet (cf. Ex. 118).
Sadko [99—101] — Duet (cf. Ex. 289 and 290).
 No. 283. *The Tsar's Bride* [169] — sextet.
 „ „ „ [117] quartet.
Legend of Kitesh [341] — quartet and sextet (cf. Ex. 305).

The beautiful effect produced by a solo instrument accompanying a *cantabile aria* cannot be denied. In such cases the instruments used are generally the violin, viola, and 'cello, or the flute, oboe, Eng. horn, clar., bass clar., bassoon, horn and harp. The accompaniment is often contrapuntal or composed of polyphonic designs. The solo instrument either plays alone or as the leading melodic voice in the *ensemble*. In combination with the voice, or associated with some action on the stage, a solo instrument is a powerful expedient for musical characterisation. Instances of this description are numerous.

Examples:

- Snegourotchka* [50] — Soprano and oboe (cf. Ex. 41).
 „ [97] — Contralto and Eng. horn.
 „ [243], [246] — Baritone and bass clar. (cf. Ex. 47—48).
 No. 284. *The Tsar's Bride* [108] — Soprano, 'cello and oboe.
 * *The Golden Cockerel* [163] — Soprano and viola (cf. Ex. 226).

It is comparatively rare for percussion instruments to take part in accompanying the voice. The triangle is occasionally used, the cymbals less frequently. An accompaniment may be formed by a figure or a *tremolo* on the kettle-drums.

Examples:

Snegourotchka [97], [224], [247] (Lell's 1st and 3rd songs).

Tsar Saltan, before [5].

* No 285. *The Golden Cockerel* [135]; cf. also [161], [197].

The following are examples of powerful and expressive orchestral passages, the voice *tacet*:

No. 286. *The Tsar's Bride* [81].

* *Legend of Kitesh* [282], [298].

* *Servilia* [130].

Recitative and declamation.

The accompaniment of recitative and melodic declamatory phrases should be light enough to allow the voice to come through without strain, and the words to be heard distinctly. The most convenient method is to employ sustained chords and *tremolo* on the strings or wood-wind, giving free latitude to the voice from a rhythmic point of view (*a piacere*).

Another excellent plan is to write short chords in the strings combined with wood-wind in different ways. Sustained chords and those entailing change of position should occur preferably when the voice is silent, thus permitting both conductor and orchestra to keep a closer watch over the singer's irregularities of rhythm in *a piacere* recitatives. If the accompaniment is more complex in character, melodic, polyphonic or ornamental in design, the recitative must be sung *in tempo*. Any phrase which it is necessary to emphasise in accordance with the sense of the words assumes a more *cantabile* character, and must be re-inforced by the orchestra. Opera, today, besides demanding much greater care in the treatment of the text than in the past, abounds in constant transition from declamation to *cantabile*, or in the fusion of the two. The orchestra offers more variety of texture and must be

handled with greater regard to its relationship to the words, and the action on the stage. This class of orchestration can only be studied from lengthy examples. I refer the reader to operatic full scores and content myself with giving one or short instances:

Examples:

No. 287. *Snegourotchka* [16].

No. 288. *The Tsar's Bride* [124—125].

The following double examples, similar from a musical point of view, show different methods of handling an orchestra from the standpoint of accompaniment to the voice, and the *tutti* form.

Examples:

No. 289—291. *Sadko* [99—101] and [305—307] (compare also Ex. 75).

Vera Scheloga [3—7] and [28].

Care should be taken not to score too heavily when accompanying singers in the wings.

Examples:

* No. 292. *Sadko* [316], [318], [320].

* *Legend of Kitesh* [286—289], [304—305].

Orchestral accompaniment of the chorus.

The chorus, possessing much greater unity and power than the solo voice, does not demand such careful handling in the accompaniment. On the contrary, too great a refinement of orchestral treatment will prove harmful to the resonance of the chorus. As a general rule orchestration of choral works follows the rules laid down for purely instrumental scoring. It is obvious that dynamic marks of expression must correspond in both bodies, but doubling one orchestral group with another and coupling instruments of the same kind in unison (2 Ob., 2 Cl., 4 Horns, 3 Trombones etc.) are both possible operations, if performed according to the requirements of the musical context. Doubling choral parts by instruments is generally a good plan. In *cantabile* passages such

duplication may be melodic in character, and the design more ornamental in the orchestra than in the chorus.

Examples:

Ivan the Terrible, Act II [3—6]; Act III [66—69].

The May Night, Act I [X—Y]; Act III [L—Ee], [Ddd—Fff].

Snegourotchka [61—73], [147—153], [323—328].

Mlada, Act II [22—31], [45—63]; Act IV [31—36].

The Christmas Night [59—61], [115—123].

Sadko [37—39], [50—53], [79—86], [173], [177], [187], [189],
[218—221], [233], [270—273].

The Tsar's Bride [29—30], [40—42], [50—59], [141].

Tsar Saltan [67—71], [91—93], [133—145], [207—208].

Legend of Kitesh [167], [177—178].

The Golden Cockerel [237—238], [262—264].

The reader will find instances of choral accompaniment in many examples relating to other sections of the work.

In the case of solitary exclamations or phrases in recitative, melodic doubling is not always suitable. It is better to support the voice simply by harmonic duplication.

The repetition of notes—required by declamation—forming no fundamental part of the rhythmical structure of a phrase or chord should not be reproduced in the orchestra; the melodic or harmonic basis alone should be doubled. Sometimes the rhythmical structure of a choral phrase is simplified in comparison with its orchestral duplication.

Examples:

No. 293. *The Tsar's Bride* [96].

No. 294. *Ivan the Terrible*, Act I, before [75].

Choral passages, the musical context of which is complete in itself, forming a chorus *a capella* often remain undoubled by the orchestra, accompanied solely by sustained notes or an independent polyphonic figure.

Examples:

No. 295. *Sadko* [219].

* *Tsar Saltan* [207].

* *Legend of Kitesh* [167] (cf. Ex. 116).

* *The Golden Cockerel* [236].

Heavier scoring is required for a mixed chorus; for a male voice chorus the orchestration should be lighter; still more so for women's voices alone. In scoring a certain passage the composer should not lose sight of the number of choristers he is employing, for scenic conditions may necessitate a reduction of that figure. The approximate number should be marked in the full score as a basis upon which to work.

Examples:

No. 296. *Ivan the Terrible*, Act II [37].

* *Sadko* [17], [20].

* *Legend of Kitesh* [61] (cf. Ex. 198).

Note. It must also be remembered that a *ff* passage on an enlarged orchestra, comprising wood-wind in fours, and numerous brass (sometimes in three's), is capable of overpowering a large mixed chorus.

A chorus in the wings requires as light an accompaniment as that employed for a solo singer on the stage.

Examples:

* *Ivan the Terrible*, Act I [25—26], [90]; Act III [13—14].

* *The May Night*, Act I, before [X]; Act III [Bbb—Ccc].

* No. 297. *Sadko* [102].

* *Legend of Kitesh* [54—56] (cf. Ex. 196 and 197).

Solo voice with chorus.

When an *aria* or recitative is coupled with the chorus great care must be taken in the choral writing. A woman's solo voice stands out well against a male voice chorus, likewise a solo male voice against a women's chorus, for in both cases, the timbre of the solo voice differs from the rest. But the combination of solo

voice and chorus, of the same timbre, or mixed chorus, creates a certain amount of difficulty. In such cases the soloist should sing in a higher register than the chorus, the former *a piena voce*, the latter *piano*. The soloist should stand as near to the footlights as possible; the chorus up-stage. The orchestration should be adapted to the soloist, not to the chorus.

Examples :

No. 298. *Snegourotchka* [143].

Ivan the Terrible. Act II [37] (cf. Ex. 296).

When the chorus sings in the wings the soloist is always heard distinctly.

Examples :

Ivan the Terrible, Act I [25—26].

* *The May Night*, Act III [Ccc].

* *Sadko* [102], [111].

Instruments on the stage and in the wings.

The use of instruments on the stage or in the wings dates from distant times (Mozart, *Don Giovanni*, string orchestra in Act I, *finale*). In the middle of last century orchestras of brass instruments, or brass and wood-wind combined, made their appearance on the stage (Glinka, Meyerbeer, Gounod and others). More modern composers have abandoned this clumsy practice, not only unfortunate from the spectators' point of view, but also detrimental to the mediaeval or legendary setting of the majority of operas. Only those stage instruments are now used which suit the scene and surroundings in which the opera is laid. As regards instruments in the wings, invisible to the audience, the question is simple. Nevertheless, for the musician of today the choice of these instruments must be regulated by aesthetic considerations of greater importance than those governing the selection of a military band. The instruments are played in the wings, those visible on the stage are only for ornament. Sometimes stage-instruments may be replicas of those common to the period which the opera represents, (the sacred horns in *Mlada*, for example). The orchestral accompaniment

must vary in power according to the characteristics of the instruments played in the wings. It is impossible to illustrate the use of all the instruments mentioned below, and to outline suitable accompaniments. I can only give a few examples and refer the reader once again to the passages in the full scores.

a) Trumpets:

Servilia [12], [25].

* *Legend of Kitesh* [53], [55]. [60].

* *Tsar Saltan* [139] and further on.

b) Horns, in the form of hunting horns:

Pan Voyevoda [38—39].

c) Trombones, leaving the orchestra to go on the stage:

Pan Voyevoda [191].

d) Cornets:

Ivan the Terrible, Act III [3], [7].

e) Sacred horns (natural brass instruments in various keys):

Mlada, Act II, pp. 179 onwards.

f) Small clarinets and piccolos:

No. 299—300. *Mlada*, Act III [37], [39].

g) Pipes of Pan: instruments, specially made, with many holes which are passed over the lips. These particular pipes produce a special enharmonic scale (*B* flat, *C*, *D* flat, *E* flat, *E*, *F* sharp, *G*, *A*), which has the effect of a *glissando*:

Mlada, Act III [39], [43] (cf. Ex. 300).

h) Harp, reproducing the effect of an aeolian harp:

Kashtchei the Immortal [32] and further on (cf. Ex. 268, 269).

i) Lyres. Instruments specially made and tuned so as to be able to perform a *glissando* chord of the diminished seventh:

Mlada, Act III [39], [43] (cf. Ex. 300).

k) Pianoforte, grand or upright:

Mozart and Salieri [22—23].

l) Gong, imitating a church bell:

Ivan the Terrible, Act I [57] and further on.

m) Bass Drum (without cymbals) to imitate the sound of cannon:

Tsar Saltan [139] and later.

n) Small kettle-drum, in *D* flat (3rd octave):

Mlada, Act III [41] and later (cf. Ex. 60).

o) Bells in various keys:

Sadko [128] and [139].

No. 301. *Legend of Kitesh* [181] and further on. See also [241], [323] and later.

* *Tsar Saltan* [139] and further on.

p) Organ:

No. 302. *Sadko* [299—300].

Wood-wind and strings are comparatively seldom used on the stage or in the wings. In Russian opera the strings are employed in this way by Rubinstein (*Gorioucha*), and in a splendidly characteristic manner by Serov (*Hostile Power*): in the latter opera the *E* flat clarinet is used to imitate the fife in the Carnival procession. (1)

(1) Mention should be made of the happy use of a small orchestra in the wings (2 picc., 2 cl., 2 horns, 1 trombone, tambourine, 4 Vns., 2 violas, 1 D-bass) in *The May Night*, Act II, Sc. I. [M-P]. (Editor's note.)