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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation describes the issues of vocal technique, especially concerning the phonetics of English in opera singing. With the growing popularity of American opera in Poland, I decided to familiarize adepts and singing educators with the basics of English phonetics in American opera, not only as such, but taking into account the place of action of selected works, and thus the specificity of regional dialects. Direct observation and interaction with singers during my education at the Manhattan School of Music in New York inspired me to explore the available materials and provided a wealth of valuable information. Thanks to recordings, sheet music materials, coaching sessions with phonetics specialists and specialists from the United States, and international publications, I was able to create a scheme of activities preceding the vocal interpretation work on the piece.

Also, of relevance here are collaborative pianists, who may also be the beneficiaries of this work, and whose opinion is significant in the process of working on a role, just as vocalists should explore vocal and phonetic techniques to offer advice to their stage partners. At universities in the United States, there is a separate specialization for pianists, focusing strictly on working with vocalists. Theory classes are largely taught to singers and accompanists at the same time.

Giving context to the arias I am describing, I have prepared abbreviated biographies of selected composers and their works. After increased activities related to the recording of a musical work and the creation of the following description, I realized the importance of substantive preparation before proceeding to active activities, i.e. vocal work.

The beginning of my quest was the active participation in the performance of Philip Glass's *The Trial* in January 2019 at the Castle Opera House in Szczecin. This event inspired me to deepen my knowledge of phonetic issues. In the following work, I focused my attention on operas created in the United States of America in the 20th century, with the single exception of a work written in 2006, i.e. *Our Town* by N. Rorem.

I presented the material in four chapters. The first presents selected specialized literature on English phonetics. The second deals with phonetic issues and additional performance problems. The third describes the composers' biographies and their works, particularly considering the operas from which the arias are the subject of my research. The fourth focuses in depth on phonetic analysis of specific works (phonetic transcriptions) and performance issues, it is included in the Polish version of this dissertation.

1. SPECIALIZED LITERATURE AND ITS APPLICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF ENGLISH PHONETICS IN CLASSICAL SINGING

The education system for opera singers in Poland is slowly changing, with an increasing emphasis on language skills and correct pronunciation. Universities offer language courses, but they are often focused strictly on the basics of communication.

In Western music education systems (Anglo-Saxon countries, German-speaking countries), in addition to the typical linguistics classes at vocal faculties, students are required to attend classes devoted to correct stage pronunciation of selected languages.

In the United States and Canada, among others, due to their geographic spread, a one-year course in English phonetics for citizens of these countries is a requirement in music conservatories. This practice dates back to the first half of the 20th century, when Madeleine Marshall, a pioneer in the study of correct English diction, set the standards for soloists at New York's Metropolitan Opera since 1930. As a pianist and tutor, she taught singers, including Frenchwoman Lily Pons, but also American Leontyne Price. For one, it was a foreign language; for the other, it was native, but laden with a strong Southern accent. Working with them cemented Marshall's effectiveness in using phonetic notation. She was also a member of the teaching staff at the Juilliard School of Music from 1935 to 1986. Marshall witnessed an organized push for neutral, standardized English, free of regional accents and thus understandable to the average listener. In her view, this should be the standard, "*the norm on stage and in public use*".¹ However, language is a living thing that changes over the years, and since Marshall's time, the English-language repertoire has also expanded considerably. There has therefore been a growing demand for more information on the diction of American English, but also British English and its accompanying dialects.

Madeleine Marshall's book, *A Singer's Manual of English Diction*, published by Schirmer Books in 1953, remained the standard when it came to interpreting the author's specific dialect, and this was the elite New York speech type of the first half of the 20th century. The dialect closest to this one is today's Mid-Atlantic (Mid-Atlantic), the features of which will be described later in the work. Her textbook is about 200 pages divided into chapters on consonants (chapters 2-28) and then vowels (chapters 29-50). Marshall writes: "*We heard*

¹ Madeleine Marshall, *The Singer's Manual of English Diction*, New York: Schirmer, 1953, page 2

singers whose English could not be understood because they distorted words beyond recognition" and "... these were not words written by a poet"².

The author explains: "This manual is designed to help the singer avoid misunderstanding all meanings of the word". Her concept of neutral language was created, as I mentioned, based on the diction of an elite section of New York society that was heavily influenced by European languages. The claim that there is one neutral standard of English and that it is a non-routine standard (recommended in her textbook) is outdated. The repertoire of the 20th and 21st centuries reveals the need for a diverse English language, which would include an American standard with a common pronunciation of "r"; a standard for the British repertoire, both historical and contemporary; and a standard for English that requires a pronunciation other than British and American - Mid-Atlantic (which according to Madeleine Marshall is neutral).

In contrast to *A Singer's Manual of English Diction*, Kathryn LaBouff's 2008 publication, *Singing and Communicating in English: A Singer's Guide to English Diction*³ addresses more than one dialect, focusing on the three basic dialects needed for English lyrical diction: American Standard (AS), a neutral pronunciation used in North American repertoire; Received Pronunciation (RP), historical and contemporary, often used in the repertoire of composers originating in the British Isles; and the Mid-Atlantic (MA) dialect, which is a hybrid of North American vowels and British upper-class non-rhoticism. The latter is often used in European works that are not identified as British or American. LaBouff provides guidance on the rote sounds needed in American repertoire and describes some regionalisms and specialized pronunciations, such as Appalachian (heard in arias from Carlisle Floyd's opera *Susannah*).

The need to update the methodology had been felt for many years, especially since immediately after the publication of Madeleine Marshall's book in 1953, Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land* (1954), Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* (1955) and Douglas Moore's *The Ballad of Baby Doe* (1956) were written, becoming flagship examples of American composers writing operas featuring American characters, where the non-rhotic dialect of Madeleine Marshall's technique would be considered artificial and metropolitan.

LaBouff has prepared and participated in the production of more than 300 English-language productions, including premieres alongside composers and librettists: *An American Tragedy* (Picker/Sheer) at the Metropolitan Opera, *Cold Sassy Tree* (Floyd) at Georgia and

² Ibidem.

³ K. LaBouff, *Singing and Communicating in English: A Singer's Guide to English Diction*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008

New York City Opera, and *Little Women* (Adamo) at Houston Grand Opera. LaBouff collaborates with the publishing house G. Schirmer and participated in the work on the G. Schirmer Opera Anthologies. In addition to the theaters listed above, she has provided language tutoring at Glimmerglass Opera, the Merola Program of San Francisco Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Louis, Lincoln Center Festival, Washington National Opera, Opera Festival of New Jersey. She teaches at the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Metropolitan Opera and is a board member and lecturer at the Dolora Zajick Institute for Young Dramatic Voices. She has worked with the Curtis Institute of Music, Yale University, Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Mannes College of Music. Since 1984 she has been head of the phonetics department at the Manhattan School of Music, and since 1986 she has taught at the Juilliard School of Music in New York.⁴

In addition to her teaching, the author of the textbook is also respected in the community for preparing world-class singers and singers like Renée Fleming, Patricia Racette, Nathan Gunn, Susan Graham for their roles. Renée Fleming wrote the foreword to *Singing and Communicating in English: A Singer's Guide to English Diction*, in which she mentioned the benefits of their collaboration, heard in both English and foreign language performances.

*Kathryn LaBouff has developed an approach to singing in the English language which is wonderfully user-friendly, and which has surely saved much wear and tear on my voice. It is a technique that has empowered me with the knowledge and skills to bring a text to life and to be able to negotiate all of the sounds of the language with the least amount of effort. I have found her clever and extremely creative use of substitute consonants or combinations of consonants in creating clear diction utterly delightful because they are surprising and because they work. These techniques have been equally useful when singing in foreign languages. We sopranos are not usually known to have good diction, particularly in our high range. I found that working with Kathryn improved my ability to be understood by an enormous percentile of the audience with much less vocal fatigue than I would have experienced if left to my own devices. I have often told my colleagues enthusiastically of her interesting solutions to the frustrating problems of diction. I am thrilled that her techniques are now in print for all to benefit from them.*⁵

⁴ <https://www.juilliard.edu/music/faculty/labouff-kathryn> (August 22nd, 2022)

⁵ K. LaBouff, *Singing and Communicating in English: A Singer's Guide to English Diction*, Oxford University Press, Nowy Jork, 2008. page 5

Singing and Communicating in English: A Singer's Guide to English Diction consists of 352 pages, 40 illustrations and 39 musical examples in 15 chapters, with 3 appendices and glossary. Chapters 2-13 address all issues related to English as a whole and apply to all three major dialects discussed by LaBouff: American Standard - AS (American Standard), Received Pronunciation - RP (British Standard) and Mid-Atlantic MA (Mid-Atlantic), used in repertoire that is neither British nor American. Chapter 14 contains information on RP, in both historical and current usage. Chapter 15 is devoted to the Mid-Atlantic dialect of MA. In addition to the printed version of the textbook, LaBouff has prepared materials that are available online. Oxford University Press offers audio files and answers to the exercises in the book. It should be noted that LaBouff's textbook uses the standard international phonetic alphabet, except for a slightly different version of the phonetic symbols for the use of "r" than those in Handbook of the International Phonetic Association: A Guide to Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet.

The book also includes information on specialized dialects. Appendix 3 describes four American dialects and five dialects from the British Isles and Ireland. General Southern, a Southern dialect (GS), covers many regions in the United States that were settled by English speakers from the West Midlands and West Country. Although all of the above dialects were originally non-royal, currently the only areas that do not use /r/ are the regions of: Savannah, New Orleans, Mobile and Norfolk. The New Orleans dialect is specified and should be used in operas where the exact place of the action is specified, such as Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Heggi's *Dead Man Walking*. The dialect of the Appalachian region is used in Floyd's *Susannah*. LaBouff warns that the use of dialects must be applied with common sense, as there is a danger of exaggerating and turning their characteristics into caricatures. Watching the author at work, which I had the opportunity to do while studying at the Manhattan School of Music, one can hear about adding a "*pinch of flavor*"⁶

LaBouff encourages students and instructors to read the first introductory chapter and then move on to chapters that discuss in detail the international phonetic alphabet in the dialect most similar to their native language. Singers from North America and those trained in American English are directed to the chapter on American Standard, those from

⁶ Transcription of the February 2021 online consultation with Kathryn LaBouff.

Britain, Ireland, the Commonwealth and those from countries trained in British English are directed to the chapter on the symbols used in Received Pronunciation.

In Poland, the trend is changing, slowly moving away from the British dialect, there are more American schools, so those interested should at their own discretion choose the suggested chapter.

The choice of a particular dialect depends on the nationality of the composer and librettist, the realization team, the place where the work was staged or where the action took place. The author writes:

Generally, the nationality of the composer and the poet determine the pronunciation to which it is transcribed. If, for example, the composer and the poet are North American, then the text is transcribed in AS. If the composer and the poet are from the British Isles, then the text is transcribed in RP. If the poet is British and the composer is North American, then the text has been transcribed in both AS and RP. Many of the texts are also transcribed in Mid-Atlantic, MA; a hybrid of British and American often used as a default dialect. This dialect is very useful for texts or works that are not specifically North American or British. The ultimate dialect choice for a performance rests with the performer or the production team and should be based upon such things as the venue and the ability of the audience to comprehend different dialects, and so on. The important thing is that the use of the dialect be consistent, clear, and expressive.⁷

The material in LaBouff's workbook is sufficient for a year-long course in college, undergraduate and graduate courses for professionally trained artists, but is also suitable for semester-long training in diction, teaching the basics and providing a solid foundation for further work already on stage. LaBouff's workplaces English on the same level of priority as learning about Italian, German and French diction.

Approaching the analysis of the selected works, an indispensable tool will be the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) mentioned above, which can be found in *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association: A Guide to Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet*.

⁷https://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/fdscontent/uscompanion/us/pdf/9780195311389/labouffex_guide.pdf, page 2 (March 10th 2021)

The Association was founded in 1886 in Europe, and the first international phonetic alphabet was in use as early as 1888⁸. In 1927 the alphabet was accepted by linguists and language instructors in the United States, as evidenced by John Kenyon's article in *American Speech* in 1929:

At a meeting of the Modern Language Society (December 1927), the Society's Practical Phonetics Group unanimously adopted a resolution approving and recommending for educational purposes in America the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association (IPA) "in its latest approved forms".⁹

The goal of the International Phonetic Association is to promote the science of phonetics and its various applications. The association has developed its alphabet as a universally accepted system of notation for the sounds of languages. The alphabet consists of symbols; each symbol represents a sound. The alphabet uses many characters of the Latin alphabet and also some Greek letters and additional symbols. Most phonemes are letters and limited diacritical marks.

⁸ C. L. Smith, *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association: A Guide to the Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1999, page 3.

⁹ J. S. Kenyon, "The International Phonetic Alphabet" w *American Speech*, nr. 4, April, 1929, page 324.

2. INTRODUCTION TO PHONETIC ASPECTS WITH DISTINCTION OF INDIVIDUAL DIALECTS

2.1 American Standard - general principles

In lyrical diction (in the sense of sung) in performance practice, precision in the production of voicings is important, since sounds sound out much longer than during speech. They must be absolutely correctly executed to ensure clarity of the message and avoid unnecessary tension in the vocal apparatus. Many singers find singing in English very vocally demanding. This is often the fault of transferring improper pronunciation to singing. In addition to the accents discussed further, it is worth mentioning Received Pronunciation or RP, which is neutral English in the United Kingdom.

Neutral English in North America is called American Standard or AS for short. This is the pronunciation of North American English that is most recognizable and understandable to most North Americans.

Phonetic rules

Consonants and their symbols identical to the letters of the American (Roman) alphabet: [b], [d], [f], [g], [h], [k], [l], [m], [n], [p], [s], [t], [v].

Symbols added because there are no equivalents in the Latin alphabet:

θ	<i>thin, thirst, thumb</i>
ð	<i>thine, this, that</i>
ʌ	<i>whisper, when</i>
J	<i>you, yes</i>
ŋ	<i>sing, think</i>
ʒ	<i>vision, azure</i>
dʒ	<i>joy, George, justice</i>
ɪ	<i>red, remember, every</i>
ʃ	<i>she, sure, shine</i>
tʃ	<i>choose, cheers</i>

Vowels

ɑ	<i>father, hot</i>
ɛ	<i>many, bury, wed</i>
ɪ	<i>hit, been, busy</i>
i	<i>me, chief, feat, receive</i>
ɪ	<i>pretty, lovely</i>
æ	<i>cat, marry, ask, charity</i>
u	<i>too, wound, blue, juice</i>
ju	<i>view, beautiful, usual, tune</i>
ʊ	<i>book, bosom, cushion, full</i>
o	<i>obey, desolate, melody (unstressed phoneme)</i>
ɔ	<i>awful, call, daughter</i>
ɜ	<i>learn, burn, rehearse, journey (stressed phoneme)</i>
ə	<i>father, doctor, vulgar (unstressed phoneme)</i>
ʌ	<i>hum, blood, judge (stressed phoneme)</i>
ə	<i>sofa, heaven, nation (unstressed phoneme)</i>

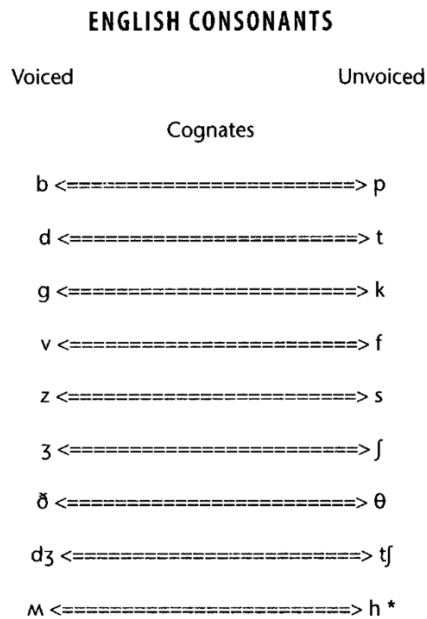
Diphthongs

aɪ	<i>night, buy, sky</i>
eɪ	<i>day, break, reign</i>
ɔɪ	<i>boy voice, toil</i>
oʊ	<i>no, slow, reproach</i>
aʊ	<i>now, about, doubt</i>
ɛə	<i>jak w air, care, there</i>
ɪə	<i>ear, dear, here, tier</i>
ɔə	<i>pour, four, soar</i>
ʊə	<i>sure, tour, poor</i>
ɑə	<i>are, hear, garden</i>

Triphthongs

aɪə	<i>fire, choir, admire</i>
aʊə	<i>our, flower, tower</i>

Diagram no 1¹⁰



In addition to correct pronunciation, an important aspect is the accentuation of selected parts of the sentence. The main emphasis should be on nouns and verbs in the active side, and then on words that modify them - adjectives, adverbs and negations. Usually prepositions, prepositions, conjunctions and auxiliary/joining verbs are not accented. Pronouns, even if they function as the subject of a sentence, are usually not accented. As with prepositions, they should be accented only when there is a comparison between them.

Accented words:

Nouns

Active verbs

Adjectives

Adverbs

Adjectives

Question pronouns

¹⁰ K. LaBouff, *Singing and Communicating in English: A Singer's Guide to English Diction*, Oxford University Press, Nowy Jork, 2008. page 115

Unaccented words:

Prepositions (the, a, an)

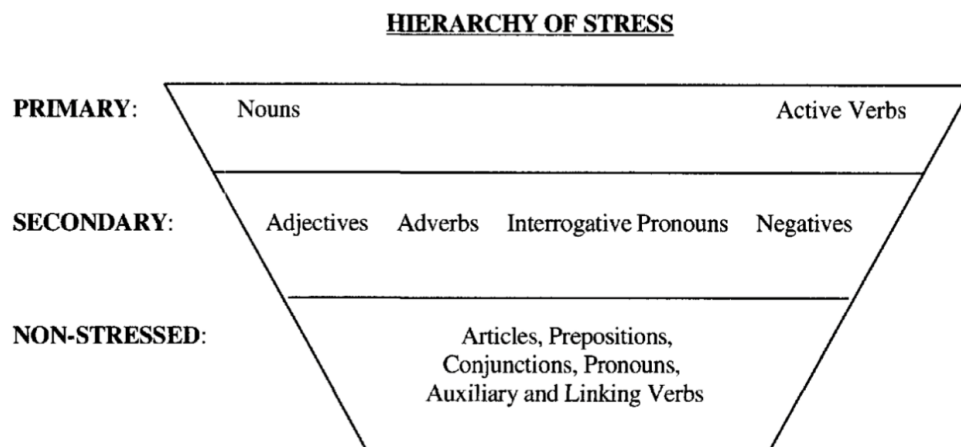
Prepositions (in, through)

Conjunctions (and, or, but)

Pronouns (I, you, he, she)

Auxiliary/joining verbs

Diagram no 2¹¹

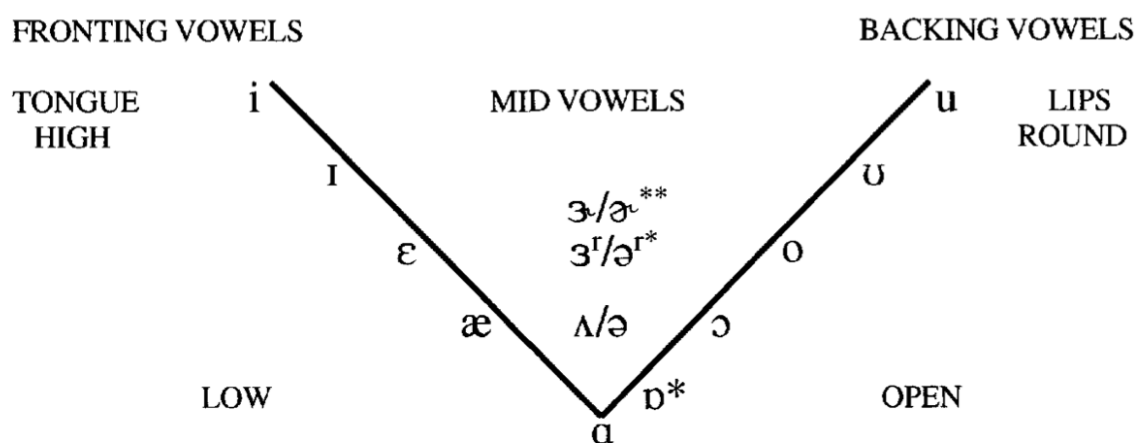


It is worth keeping in mind the differences in speaking and singing. Phonetic transcription will be different for a recited text and different for a sung text, especially in the passaggio or higher register. In both LaBouff's and Marshall's texts, we will find suggestions for replacing selected vowels with others or modifying them so that the sound output is correct, but also optimal for aesthetic value. Proper use of the articulatory organs (i.e., mouth, tongue, soft palate) is crucial when producing consonants and vowels. Direct observation and interaction with singers, singing pedagogues and pianists can help the performer understand which version of a vowel will be clear in perception, with freedom and purity of voice.

A very important reference in LaBouff's entry is the one that deals with vowel modification in the higher register and passaggio. The author suggests using diagram No. 3 (included below) and modifying vowels upward toward the next closed (frontal vowels) vowel on the diagram to get more vocal comfort, e.g. in the word man instead of [æ] try [ɛ], in the word heaven instead of [ɛ] use [e].

¹¹ Ibidem, page 22.

Diagram no 3¹²



*RP/MA only, **AS only.

Kathryn LaBouff has compiled more than a dozen basic pronunciation rules that you should be familiar with as a singer or speaker. Some of them, depending on the context, can be modified. The main principles of pronunciation according to LaBouff: ¹³

1. unaccented syllables in English should be pronounced with the neutral vowel schwa [ə] or one of the possible substitutions [ɪ], [ʊ], [ε] and [o]¹⁴.
2. when there are two adjacent unaccented syllables in a word, the use of a vowel [ə] and one of the substitute vowels is better than two adjacent vowels [ə]¹⁵.
3. unaccented any form of the verb "to be", only in the linking or conditional mode. The verb "to be" is a weak, inactive form of the verb. Its modifiers, the nominative of the predicate or the adjective of the predicate that follows the verb, should receive the main accent¹⁶.
4. on the accented syllable of accented words should be more based on the vowel sound and loosen the "down, to the body" sound. It is recommended to use the full sound of the voice. This is called pulsing the phrase [pulsing the phrase]¹⁷.
5. all vowels should be initiated by respiratory impulses, not laryngeal attacks, which can have a destructive effect on the vocal folds if abused. One way to easily find a "breath lift" impression is to insert the consonant [h] before the initial vowels. For example, *earth* would sound like

¹² Ibidem, page 35.

¹³ K. LaBouff, *Singing and Communicating in English: A Singer's Guide to English Diction*, Oxford University Press, Nowy Jork, 2008.

¹⁴ Ibid. page 19.

¹⁵ Ibid. page 20.

¹⁶ Ibid. page 23.

¹⁷ Ibid. page 24.

h-earth. Of course, starting vowels with the [h] sound is not the ultimate goal. But vowels should be initiated with the sensation of breath release that accompanies the beginning of phonation. In the first phase, he suggests inserting [h] to break the ingrained habit of sharp laryngeal attacks in accented words beginning with a vowel¹⁸.

6. break the legato line and release the breath, the so-called breath lift, only when the accented word begins with a vowel. The legato line cannot be interrupted by a breath lift on unaccented words, such as prepositions, conjunctions or pronouns that begin with a vowel¹⁹.

7. The final unaccented "y" and its plural (the "ies" endings) should always be sung as [i]²⁰.

8 The unaccented prefixes or syllables "re-", "be-", "se-", "de-", "e-" plus a consonant, as in the words receive, believe, select, deceive, elect and escape, and the prefixes "im-" and "in-" should be sung with [ɪ]. The suffixes "-ing" and "-ic" also use [ɪ]²¹.

9. use [ʌ] caret for all accented prefixes "un"²².

10. the word the should be sung [ðə] before a voiceless consonant, [ðu] before a voiced consonant, and [ði] before a vowel. [ðə]: the sense, the form, the thought.

11. The word with is pronounced [wɪθ] when followed by a word beginning with a voiceless consonant, e.g. with fire [wɪθ faɪə]; [wɪð] when followed by a word beginning with a vowel or a voiced consonant, e.g. with this [wɪð ðɪs], within [wɪðɪn]²³

2.2 General Southern - specifics

General Southern (GS) is a group of dialects found, among others, in the former Confederate States of America (the southern states that seceded from the United States during the Civil War, i.e., 1861-1865) and in neighboring border states. The American South was settled mainly by the English of the West Midlands and West Country. Southern dialects can be found mainly in states such as Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana and the Ozarks region of Missouri. In addition, some of the southernmost rural counties of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois are characterized by strong southern influences.

¹⁸ Ibid. page 37.

¹⁹ Ibid. page 37.

²⁰ Ibid. page 45.

²¹ Ibid. page 38.

²² Ibid. page 73.

²³ Ibid. page 157.

Diagram no 4²⁴



The main features of GS are:

- replacement of [aɪ] diphthongs with extended [a:], e.g., in the word we [maɪ] - [ma:]; (in higher tessitura, replacement with [a:ɛ] is allowed);
- substitution of diphthongs [aʊ] for [æʊ], e.g., in the word now [naʊ] - [næʊ];
- replacing diphthongs [eɪ] [ɛɪ], e.g., in the word rain [ɪɛm] [ɪɛm];
- in short words using a single vowel [æ] [ɛ] [ɪ], a shwa [ə] is added right after, e.g. pet [pɛt] - [pɛ(ə)t], him [hɪm] - [hɪ(ə)m];
- so-called liquid u [ju] is replaced by [ɹu], e.g., in due [dju] - [dɹu], a faster transition to the vowel "u";
- abandonment of nasality in "-ing" endings, e.g., in the word "doing" [dʊm] - [dʊɪm].

2.3 Appalachian - specifics

The Appalachian dialect (AP) is spoken in the Appalachian mountain range, which includes southern West Virginia, southeastern Ohio, eastern Kentucky, Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. Settlers of the area came from western England, the Scottish highlands, Wales, Ireland and Scotland via Ireland. As a result, Appalachian English has a very distinct coloring of the "r" consonant. One of the most distinctive features of the Appalachian dialect is its pronunciation. The dialect emphasizes greater musicality in

²⁴ https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/13Map_of_USA_States_with_names_white.svg

speech through long vowels and a unique intonation pattern. It also has a distinct way of pronouncing some words, such as the word fire pronounced almost like *far*.

The dialect has its own vocabulary that is unique to the region. The word hillbilly refers to someone who comes from the Appalachian mountains and is often used in other states in a pejorative way to insult uneducated people. In addition to its vocabulary, the dialect also has specific grammatical features. A double negative construction such as *I don't know nothing* is often used, which would be considered incorrect in American Standard. Appalachian uses many colloquial expressions, such as *I reckon* instead of *I think* and *y'all* instead of *you all*. Appalachian is a predominantly rural region whose residents live in areas isolated from cities and thus infrastructure that encourages migration. As a result, the dialect has survived and continues to function today in a relatively unchanged form for centuries. The region is also famous for its *bluegrass*²⁵ folk music, which can be summarized as a fusion of Scots Irish and African-American music, using traditional instruments such as the banjo and fiddle.

According to LaBouff, the most frequently performed operatic repertoire using this dialect is Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*. The general features applicable to AP are the use of principles characteristic of General Southern with some additions described later in the paper.

2.4 Mid-Atlantic - specifics

Mid-Atlantic, on the other hand, is used in selected American operas, oratorios and works of European origin that are not British. It is not a functioning dialect in use, but rather a hybrid pronunciation of North American and British for special purposes. Mid-Atlantic English is a version of English that is not intended to be either predominantly American or British. Mid-Atlantic, also known as Transatlantic Pronunciation, is a type of accent formerly cultivated by American and Canadian actors for use in the theater and by North American reporters for war correspondence. Its purpose was mutual intelligibility on both sides of the Atlantic. It was based on Boston speech of the 1920s; it was essentially North American speech with some accepted features of British pronunciation. In the theater, it was used in stage productions of Shakespeare and other works from the British Isles, and often in film of the first half of the 20th century. This form of "stage British" is not used as often today as it once was. In today's North American theater, the practice is to use the more American-sounding Theater Standard.

²⁵ <https://bluegrassheritage.org/history-of-bluegrass-music/> (October 17th 2023)

The codification of Mid-Atlantic pronunciation in written form is credited to Edith Warman Skinner (1930s). Sir Tyrone Guthrie formed an acting troupe that consisted of British, American and Canadian actors. Frustrated by the fluctuation of all the pronunciation variants he was hearing in his actors' dialogues, he enlisted the help of Edith Skinner to develop a hybrid pronunciation of English that would combine vowel variants and standardize language use. The pronunciation that Skinner developed led to the writing of her book *Speak with Distinction*. It has become one of the main texts for the study and practice of stage speech used by acting schools throughout the English-speaking world.

A useful technique for mastering this pronunciation is to watch some black-and-white Hollywood films from the 1930s and 1940s. Every star in the U.S. studio movie theater system received training in Mid-Atlantic pronunciation. Mid-Atlantic was used, for example, in *The Sound of Music* in the 1960s to combine the British pronunciation of Maria, performed by Dame Julie Andrews, with the North American accents of the performers portraying the von Trapp family. The Mid-Atlantic dialect is often used to characterize an upper-class or highly educated person.

Fluency in the Mid-Atlantic dialect is now a valuable skill for vocalists. For vocal works that are not native to North America, many conductors and directors often request the use of this pronunciation. English-language presentations of European oratorios and operas are more often in Mid-Atlantic than pure British pronunciation (Received Pronunciation) or American Standard. In North America, there are sometimes concerns that using Received Pronunciation, with its darker vowels, may make the work less understandable to North American audiences.

The vowels in Mid-Atlantic are generally pronounced similarly to those in American Standard. The main differences between MA and AS are the reduced coloring of the "r" in [ɜr] and [ər] in diphthongs and triphthongs, and the emergence of optional use of "r" in *flipped* [r] and *rolled* [R]. Usage: [ɹ] always in words with the spelling "wh" such as what, where-fore, why and whether; [ɹ] in words with the vowel "o" e.g. in honest; [ju], i.e. the so-called liquid "u" in words beginning with the consonants "d", "n", "s", "l", "t". "th" e.g. tune, interlude.

Table no 1– dialect differences

Explanation	Examples	American Standard	General Southern	Appalachian	Mid- Atlantic
	dance	dæns	dæns	dæns	dans
	doing	duɪŋ	dum	dum	duɪŋ

	down	daʊn	dæʊn	dæʊn	daʊn
	dream	drim	drim	drim	drim
	earth	ɜθ	ɜθ	ɜθ	ɜθ
“r” coloring different than MA	father	faðð	faðð	faðð	faðð ^r
	for	fɔð	fɔð	fɔð	fɔð ^r
	from	fɪɹɹm	fɪɹɹm	fɪɹɹm	fɹm
	hand	hænd	hænd	hænd	hænd
	heart	hæɹt	hæɹt	hæɹt	hæɹt
	like	laɪk	la:k	la:k	laɪk
[ʌ] changes to [ʊ]	love	lʌv	lʌv/lʊv	lʊv	lʌv
	man	mæn	mæn	mæn	mæn
	me	mi	m(i)i	m(i)i	mi
	must	mʌst	mʌst	mʌst	mʌst
No diphthongs in Southern dialects, longer vowel.	my	maɪ	ma:	ma:	maɪ
	new	nju	niu	niu	nju
	night	naɪt	na:ʔ / na:(t)	na:ʔ / na:(t)	naɪt
	not	nɒt	nɒt	nɒt	nɒt
	now	nəʊ	næʊ	næʊ	nəʊ
	of	əv / ʌv	əv / ʌv	əv / ʌv	ʊv
	on	ɒn	ɒn	ɒn	ʊn
	owe	oʊ	oʊ	oʊ	oʊ
	pond	pænd	pəʊnd	pəʊnd	pəʊnd
	pretty	pɹɪti	pɹɪti / pɜ:r(t)i	pɹɪti / pɜ:r(t)i	pɹɪti
	rain	ɹeɪn	ɹeɪn	ɹeɪn	reɪn
	say	seɪ	seɪ	seɪ	seɪ
	sere	sɪə	seə:	seə:	sɪə ^r

	shall	ʃæl	ʃæl	ʃæl	ʃæl
	singing	sɪŋɪŋ	seɪŋɪn	seɪŋɪn	sɪŋɪŋ
	sound	saʊnd	sæʊnd	sæʊnd	saʊnd
	sure	ʃʊə	ʃʊə	ʃʊə	ʃʊəʳ
	the (before vowel)	ði	ði	ðə	ði
	the (before consonant)	ðə	ðə	ðə	ðə
	think	θɪŋk	θeɪŋk	θeɪŋk	θɪŋk
	very	veɪɹi	veɪɹi	veɪɹi	veɹi
	want	wʌnt	wʌnt	wʌnt	wɒnt
	warming	wɔə-mɪŋ	wɔə:mɪn	wɔə:mɪn	wɔəʳ mɪŋ
	was	wʌz	wʌz	wʌz	wɒz
	wasn't	wʌzənt	wʌdənt	wʌdənt	wʌzənt
	when	wen	wen	wen	wen
	when	wen	wɪn	wɪn	wen

3. ESSENTIAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE WORK AND THE COMPOSERS.

OVERVIEW OF THE LIBRETTO IN TERMS OF SELECTED EXCERPTS

3.1 Gian Carlo Menotti, *The Medium*

3.1.1 Life and work

Gian Carlo Menotti was born on July 7, 1911 in Cadegliano on Lake Lugano Italy, and died on February 1, 2007 in Monte Carlo, Monaco. He composed his first opera, *Death of Pierrot*, at the age of 11. At 18, he entered the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, which was preceded by an education at the Milan Conservatory of Music.

During his studies in the Lombardian capital, Menotti had the chance to encounter the music of the great composers of the beginning of the century: Mahler, Ravel, Stravinsky and Debussy, but the one who had the greatest influence on the young musician's development was undoubtedly Puccini²⁶.

His first American success was the opera *Amelia Goes to the Ball*. The work premiered in 1937 in Philadelphia, and a year later it was staged at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Another success was the radio opera *The Old Maid and the Thief* (1939), which debuted on stage in 1941 and on television two years later. Unfortunately, another one-act staged at the Metropolitan Opera was a failure and was taken off the stage by the composer himself. In 1947, the opera *The Medium* was a triumph, bringing the composer back into the public eye. The opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, originally created specifically for television broadcast, was received with great enthusiasm. However, it soon became the most performed American opera on the boards of theaters.

On Broadway, the composer enjoyed incredible success with the double bill: the previously mentioned *The Medium* and *The Telephone*²⁷

Menotti possessed extraordinary dramatic skills, hence he always wrote his librettos himself. This brought him twice the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize, consecutively for his works *The Consul* (1950) and *The Saint of the Bleeker Street*

²⁶ K. Wlaschin, *Encyclopedia of American Opera*, McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina, London, 2006, s. 237

²⁷ Ibidem.

(1954). Menotti's other works include: *The Unicorn, The Gorgon and the Manticore* (1956, madrigal opera), *Maria Golovin* (1958, television opera), *Labirynth* (1963, television opera), *The Last Savage* (1963, comic opera written for the Paris Opera), *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* (1963, religious cantata), *Martin's Life* (1964, church opera), and *The Most Important Man* (1971, premiered at New York City Opera), *Tamu-Tamu* (1973, anthropological opera), *The Egg* (1976, church opera), *The Hero* (1976, comic opera), *Landscapes and Remembrances* (1976, autobiographical cantata), *La Loca* (1979, opera written especially for soprano Beverly Sills commissioned by San Diego Opera), and *Goya* (1986, written especially for tenor Placido Domingo commissioned by Washington Opera). Menotti also composed many operas for children: *Help, Help, The Globolinks* (1968), *The Trial of the Gypsy* (1978), *Chip and his Dog* (1979), *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* (1982), *A Bride From Pluto* (1982), and *The Singing Child* (1993). He has also written the libretto for two Samuel Barber operas (*Vanessa* and *A Hand of Bridge*). In 1958 he founded The Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy²⁸

3.1.2 The Medium

His double bill is the most famous pair in the history of American opera: *The Telephone* and *The Medium*. The latter made its debut on May 8, 1946 at the Brander Matthews Theatre at Columbia University. After musical and stage alterations and the addition of a 22-minute one-act, *The Telephone*, the duet was presented on Broadway at New York's Heckscher Theatre in February 1947. They were also the first two American operas recorded in their entirety by the Columbia label. After its successful debut at the Heckscher Theatre, the production moved to the Ethel Barrymore Theatre to remain there for six months (beginning May 1, 1947). In the premiere cast, the roles of Madame Flora were created by Claramae Turner, Monica by Evelyn Keller, and Toby by Leo Coleman. The opera also featured Beverly Dame (Mrs. Gobineau), Frank Rogier, (Mr. Gobineau) and Catherine Mastice (Mrs. Nolan) as supporting characters. Oliver Smith was responsible for the set design, Fabio Rieti for the costumes, and the work was orchestrated by Otto Leuning. When the company moved to Broadway to the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, Marie Powers took over the role of Flora, with Leo Barzin behind the conductor's desk. The role of Madame Flora was performed by singers

²⁸ Ibidem.

such as Regina Resnik (Washington Opera, 1970) and Regine Crespin (Opera de Paris), and even in the last years of her career Renata Scottò (Torino Opera, 1999)²⁹.

Received enthusiastically by critics, *The Medium*, was staged six hundred times in just a few years. The work evoked a magical atmosphere from the very beginning, and its premiere is one of the most important moments in the history of American opera. Jean Cocteau said of the work:

*Menotti has made out of plays, operas, and out of opera, plays. He has been able to find, in his admirable "Medium," a vocal style which elevates the ordinary and every-day into lyric drama*³⁰.

Medium became a phenomenon because of the extraordinary sense with which Menotti was able to portray the characters of the main characters. In the typical melodrama love triangle, the father is replaced by a controlling mother (Baba), and the partners are a childish daughter (Monica) and her deaf, future-born brother (Toby). Thanks to such conceived characters, the opera gains freshness and escapes excessive sentimentalism³¹.

In the libretto, Madame Flora earns her living as a medium. She lives with her teenage daughter Monica and her mute sidekick Toby. With the help of two household members and an arsenal of tricks, she convinces clients that she is able to put them in touch with their deceased family members. During one of the séances, a strange thing happens to her: she feels a foreign hand on her throat. Out of fear, she is unable to continue her charlatan routine. She blames it on Toby and throws him out on the street. When Toby secretly returns to the apartment, a frightened and drunk Madame Flora shoots him thinking he is a ghost who haunted her during a previous séance.

Just before *The Black Swan* aria, Madame Flora accuses Toby of grabbing her by the neck during the last séance. She explodes with anger and beats the boy. Monica drags the agitated mother away and tries to control the situation by singing a familiar song. The last lines of the aria are sung in duet with the mother.

Monica's waltz opens the second act of the opera. It begins after applause when Toby is just finishing a home puppet theater performance. During the aria, Monica tries to establish a dialogue with the silent boy, resulting in a confession of love between the characters.

²⁹ Ibidem. Page 236.

³⁰ E. K. Kirk, *American Opera*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2001, s. 247.

³¹ Ibid.

3.2 Marc Blitzstein, *Regina*

3.2.1 Life and works

Marc Blitzstein, an American composer, lyricist and playwright, was best known for his work in musical theater and opera. Blitzstein, who was born on March 2, 1905, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, showed an early inclination toward music, engaging in piano and composition lessons during his teenage years. Blitzstein's career developed significantly in the 1930s and 1940s, characterized by active involvement in leftist political movements and an unwavering commitment to creating art that reflected social consciousness. At the time, he established contact with the leftist cultural scene in New York, engaging in collaborations with prominent figures such as writer Clifford Odets and director Orson Welles.

Marc Blitzstein has held positions at various esteemed academic institutions. One of the outstanding institutions he was associated with was the New School for Social Research in New York, where he held the position of lecturer in music. Blitzstein passed on his knowledge and experience to New School students who were interested in music composition, theory and performance.

In addition, Blitzstein served as a visiting speaker at a number of universities, including at the University of California, Berkeley. Through his commitment to teaching, he was a significant influence on the next generation of musicians, composers and also academics. Blitzstein's famous work is the opera *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937), composed as part of the Federal Theatre Project. The opera attracted attention for its exploration of labor unrest and corporate abuses, as its initial staging was halted by government authorities due to its controversial nature. Blitzstein's significant contribution is the English version of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* (1954), which played a key role in introducing American audiences to the artistic works of Brecht and Weill.

Blitzstein's musical compositions often contained astute social criticism and a unique combination of classical, jazz and popular music elements. In addition, he was a very productive author of both musical and theatrical criticism, as well as essays on politics and society. Unfortunately, Marc Blitzstein's life was prematurely ended in 1964 as a result of a robbery attack that took place at his residence in Martinique. Although Blitzstein died prematurely, his influence on American music and theater is still revered and studied, and his work continues to influence the creative and political spheres.

3.2.2 *Regina*

His most flagship work is his opera *Regina* (1949), which is an adaptation of Lillian Hellman's theatrical work *The Little Foxes*. The opera is widely regarded as one of his most ambitious, skillfully combining opera and musical theater.

The *Regina* opera is set in 1990 in Bowden, Alabama. Regina Giddens and her brothers are power- and money-hungry men who pursue their goals regardless of the consequences. Regina's disabled husband Horace and their daughter Alexandra disagree with the family's politics and way of doing business. Horace learns of his wife's despicable intentions³². Regina, however, refuses to change her ways and deprives him of access to medicine, as a result of which he dies of a heart attack. This is found out by Alexandra, who leaves her mother, not wanting to have anything to do with her or her fortune.

The aria *Music, music, music* I later analyzed comes from Act I of the opera and is performed by Birdie, Regina's sister-in-law. We are at the moment in the opera when Regina decides to hold a party at which a well-known businessman from Chicago is to appear. This one, upon his arrival, strikes up a conversation with Birdie, who is disregarded by the family on a daily basis. They laugh and talk about music and travel. Later that evening, Birdie tells Alexandra about her impressions, which is captured by the composer in the form of an aria.

What will it be for me? is also an aria from the first act, but performed by Alexandra, Regina's daughter. Just before the aria, Birdie warns her niece about the marriage plans hatched by Regina and her brother Oscar. These want Alexandra to marry her cousin so that the family will keep the estate. Birdie recalls her marriage and the fact that she was married off against her will. She wants to protect Alexandra from her fate. In this almost musical aria, Alexandra, surprised by her aunt's confession, wonders with youthful naiveté what it would be like to be in love.

³² Regina and her brothers plan a new business, Horace refuses to finance it, then Oscar (Regina's brother) proposes marriage between his son Leo and Regina's daughter Alexandra - first cousins - as a way to get Horace's money, but Horace and Alexandra are outraged by the suggestion, as is Birdie. Horace refuses when Regina asks him directly for money, so Leo, a bank teller, is forced to steal Horace's railroad bonds from the bank's safe-deposit box.

3.3 Carlisle Floyd, *Susannah*

3.3.1 Life and works

Floyd was born in Latta, South Carolina in 1926 as the son of a Methodist minister. He began piano lessons when he was just six years old. He continued his musical studies at Syracuse University, where he earned a Bachelor of Music degree in 1946. In 1947, he moved to Florida, where he became a lecturer in the Department of Music at Florida State University in the piano class. During this period, he began writing operatic works. His first opera, *Slow Dusk*, premiered at Syracuse University in 1949 to great acclaim. He received his master's degree that same year. His second opera was *Fugitives*, which unfortunately was not met with enthusiasm from the public, Carlisle Floyd commented in an interview with the NEA: "*Nobody sees this, this is the opera I learned on. It was a complete failure.*"

Just a year later came the premiere of his third opera, titled *Susannah* (1955). Floyd's other notable operas include: *Of Mice and Men*, which premiered at the Seattle Opera in 1970, and *Cold Sassy Tree*, which premiered at the Houston Grand Opera in 2000. These works were staged both in the United States and abroad. Floyd wrote a total of nine operatic works including: *Bilby's Doll*, *Willie Stark* and *Flower and Hawk*. Floyd is known for his unique approach to composition, which often incorporates folk melodies and motifs from the South and the Appalachian region. His operas are considered typically American because they focus on issues related to American culture, such as racism, poverty and social inequality.

In addition to his work as a composer and librettist, Floyd was also a professor of music at Florida State University and the University of Houston. He has received numerous honors and awards including the National Medal of Arts and the Robert Ward Commission from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In an interview with Opera News, he stated: "*I don't consider myself a famous composer, but someone who loves what he does. I love the whole process of creating an opera, bringing it to life.*"

With a career spanning more than six decades, Floyd's legacy as a composer, librettist and educator has had a profound impact on the continuing musical evolution of the United States. His contribution to the American operatic tradition will undoubtedly be felt for generations to come.

3.3.2 *Susannah*

In a cross-section of his entire career, *Susannah* is the work that was to bring him the greatest fame. The composer wrote the work at the age of 27. The first production didn't bring Floyd

much publicity, and it wasn't until its debut in New York in 1956 that it caught the attention of reviewers, including Ronald Eyer: "*A promising talent drew national attention with the premiere of Susannah at the New York City Opera Company*"³³. The first performer of the leading role was Phyllis Curtin, who believed in the potential of opera and committed herself to its dissemination. It can be said that Floyd owes part of its success to her. She also created a performance prototype for subsequent generations with her interpretation. The opera's libretto is an adaptation of the biblical story of Susanna, which Floyd modernizes and relocates to a fictional town in Tennessee. The piece tells the tragic story of a young girl falsely accused of "bad conduct." Because of its subject matter, the piece has often received public comment. Despite its difficult theme of religious persecution and social injustice, it has won the approval of the American public. Contrary to the opinions of some critics who claimed that the opera was merely a regional work, to date *Susannah* has been presented in more than eight hundred productions, including at the Metropolitan Opera in 1999, featuring renowned soprano Renée Fleming in the title role.

The opera begins with a scene in the square, where residents await the arrival of a preacher. Nineteen-year-old Susannah Polk, with her beauty and innocence, attracts the attention of all the men. For obvious reasons, this does not arouse the sympathy of their wives. Cleric Olin Blich immediately takes notice of Susannah and asks her to dance. Later that night, Susannah sits with her friend Little Bat on the veranda of her house and dreams of the day when she can leave the valley and see the rest of the world. Unaware of her impending fate, she sings her first aria *Ain't it a pretty night*. The next morning, the four church elders encounter Susanna bathing in a cove near her farm. Outraged, they return to the town and inform the residents of the incident, suggesting the heroine's promiscuity. That evening at the church picnic, the four wives of the church elders discuss the - according to them - scandalous behavior and, upon seeing Susanna, announce that she is not welcome in this company. The girl decides to return home, where she finds Little Bat, who explains why she has received such a reaction from the residents. He confesses to a lie imposed by his mother, Mrs. McLean: she made him say that he was seduced by Susanna. The girl announces that she does not want to see him again.

Act two begins a few days later, when Sam informs his sister that the community wants a public confession and convinces her to attend evening prayer. Inside the church, Reverend

³³ Review of *Susannah*, by Steve Hicken (Florida State University, Tallahassee), *The Tallahassee Democrat*, November 6th, 2005

Blitch accuses Susanna of promiscuity and urges her to confess her sins. The girl runs out of the church and returns home, where she reminisces about old times in solitude while singing the folk song *The Trees On Mountain*. Suddenly, Preacher Blitch emerges from the darkness and again urges the girl to confess, but his intentions are quite quickly clouded by lust. He sexually abuses Susanna, while realizing that the girl was a virgin and was innocently accused of adultery. The next day, an embarrassed Blitch tries to soothe the atmosphere and convince the community that the rumors about Susanna are untrue. Despite his efforts, the elders and their wives do not believe the preacher. After returning home, a drunk Sam finds out what happened and runs to the church with all his might. Susannah hears a shot from afar. Little Bat runs into her house, shouting that Sam killed Blitch. Residents come to Susannah's farm and threaten her and her brother. Susannah grabs a gun and forces them to leave her property.

3.4 Douglas Moore, *The Ballad of Baby Doe*

3.4.1 Life and works

Douglas Moore was one of the most important creators of modern American opera. Born in 1893 in Cutchogue, New York, he began his studies at Yale University with Horatio Parker, to later continue his education with Nadia Boulanger and Vincent d'Indy in Paris. From 1926 to 1962 he was professionally attached to the Barnard College at Columbia University. From 1940 he became head of the music department. His work had a great influence on the further development of American opera as we know it today. An important feature of his works was the themes of his libretti, which correlated strongly with American identity.

Of the 10 operas he composed, the most famous remains *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, which, in the year of the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence (1776), lived to see as many as five versions staged and was hailed as "*the great opera of America*"³⁴. Another work that features a strong female character, and his last opera, is *Carry Nation* (1966) to a libretto by William North Jayne. Two folk operas, *The Headless Horse* (1936) and *The Devil and the Daniel Webster* (1938), for which the poet Stephen Vincent Benét wrote an excellent *libretti*, also focus on strictly American themes. For *Giants in the Earth*, the composer received a Pulitzer Prize in 1951, but despite this, it did not gain much publicity. The satirical opera

³⁴ K. Wlaschin, *Encyclopedia of American Opera*, McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina, London, 2006, page 251.

Gallantry (1957), also composed to a libretto by Arnold Sundgaard, is one of the first operas to parody television. An acquaintance with the poet Vachel Lindsay, whom Moore met in 1923, contributed to a clear path in his work and an interest in strictly American themes. The beginnings of this passion can be traced back to his 1928 opera *Jesse James* to a libretto by J.M. Brown. After completing his folk operas, Moore composed two operas for children, *The Emperor's New Clothes* (1948) and *Puss in the Boots* (1950), both staged in New York³⁵. Moore received five honorary degrees and a Guggenheim Fellowship (as did Carlisle Floyd).

3.4.2 *The Ballad of Baby Doe*

The plot contained in the libretto, written by John Latouche (author of the libretto to L. Bernstein's *Candide*, among others), tells a touching love story between a great mining magnate and a young girl (Baby Doe), who becomes an iconic figure throughout the history of American opera. The opera is set in 1880 in Leadville, Colorado, and the plot is based on fact. The story of Baby Doe fascinated Moore from the moment he read about it in the newspaper:

I began to think of writing an opera about her. Here was a woman once famous for her beauty, who had been married to the richest man in Colorado, [...], and who had been frozen to death in a miserable shack beside an abandoned silver mine... I found myself always returning to the theme and wondering how it could be realized in an opera.³⁶

The opera's libretto remains mostly faithful to the true story. The work premiered at the Central City Opera House in Colorado on July 7, 1956. It starred Dolores Wilson in the title role, first audiences saw Walter Cassel as Horace, and Martha Lipton as Augusta, Horace's first wife. When the opera moved to New York in 1958, it caused quite a sensation. It starred Beverly Sills in the lead role, Vladimir Rosing was entrusted with direction, and the baton was given to Emerson Buckley, who also conducted the world premiere. Considered the most important and iconic recording, is the 1958 recording with the aforementioned cast.

The opera *The Baby Doe* is set in 1880 in Leadville, Colorado, and the plot is based on fact. Mining magnate Horace Tabor falls in love with Elizabeth McCourt called Baby Doe

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

and leaves his wife for her. He marries her in Washington, D.C., where he resides during his senatorial term. President Chester Arthur himself shows up at the wedding, while the first lady stays at home, sending a signal to the invited aristocracy that Baby Doe is not acceptable in "good company." Horace and Baby Doe's relationship becomes a source of gossip and moral condemnation, reflecting the conflict between individual desires and social norms. Viewers are captivated by the narrative, which explores the complex interplay of love, ambition and betrayal as the characters confront the grave consequences of their decisions. Tabor's fortune depends on silver mining, and when the presidential candidate supporting his business loses the next election, the senator loses all his wealth. Baby Doe remains faithful to her spouse despite bankruptcy and both, one by one, die in poverty.

The *Willow Song* aria is the first aria in which the title character appears. Baby Doe arrived in Leadville and became the heroine of town gossip. Horace Tabor, interested in the newcomer, accidentally overhears a conversation between two women who claim that she is married. We find ourselves in the hotel lobby of the Clarendon Hotel, where Baby Doe sits down at the piano and sings the Willow Song. In *Dearest Mama*, meanwhile, Baby Doe is preparing to leave Leadville, writing a letter to her mother in which she admits her feelings for Horace.

3.5 Kirke Mechem, *Tartuffe*

3.5.1 Life and works

Kirke Mechem (born March 16, 1925) is an American composer known mainly for his choral works and songs. He was born in Wichita, Kansas, and studied at Stanford University and Harvard University. Mechem's early works included jazz and folk influences, but he later shifted toward neoclassicism and romanticism. He composed five operas, one of which has stood the test of time: *Tartuffe*. The opera premiered in San Francisco on May 27, 1980 and has since been staged regularly throughout the country. Mechem's other operas include *Befana*, *John Brown*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Rivals*. A work worth noting is the dramatic cantata *The King's Contest* to a libretto by the composer. Mechem has received numerous awards and honors for his music, including a Grammy nomination.

He has also served on the music faculties of several universities, including Stanford, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and the University of Kansas. His most famous opera, *Tartuffe*, made its debut at the San Francisco Opera in the American Opera Project series, May

27, 1980, under the baton of David Alger. Since then, it has been staged by Arizona State University, Baton Rouge, Northwestern University and the Pittsburgh Opera, among others³⁷. In total, there have been more than 450 performances³⁸.

3.5.2 *Tartuffe*

Tartuffe, a comedic opera in three acts, shows the creativity of composer Kirke Mechem. In creating this opera, Mechem not only composed the music, but also wrote the libretto, a common practice in his repertoire. He took inspiration from Molière's timeless play of the same name: *Tartuffe* is set in the lavish interiors of a 17th-century Parisian house owned by the wealthy Orgon. This operatic adaptation following Molière delves into the complexities of human nature, exploring themes of deception, moral ambiguity and the eternal struggle between appearances and reality.

Fair Robin I love is an aria from the first act. Dorine, Marianne's maid, can sometimes be snarky, insolent and streetwise, but she always tries to offer good advice. Without her helper, Marianne would probably have succumbed to Orgon's pressure and married the Saint - *Tartuffe*.

3.6 Ned Rorem, *Our Town*

3.6.1 Life and works

Ned Rorem was born in 1923 in Richmond, Indiana. He began his musical studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia before continuing further studies at the Juilliard School in New York. He gained early fame in 1948, winning the Song of the Year Award for *The Lordly Hudson*, and his later popularity came with the 1976 Pulitzer Prize for his orchestral suite *Air Music*. He wrote seven operas in his career, four of which have been recorded. The composer's most acclaimed opera is *Miss Jullie* to a libretto by Kenward Elmslie, based on the popular play by Arnold Strindberg. It was commissioned by the New York City Opera and staged in 1965. It is the composer's only opera written for symphony orchestra, the others being chamber operas. *A Childhood Miracle*, whose libretto tells the story of an animated

³⁷ K. Wlaschin, *Encyclopedia of American Opera*, McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina, London, 2006, page 378.

³⁸ <https://www.kirkemechem.com/tartuffe.html> (March 2nd, 2024)

snowman, was completed in 1951 and produced by Punch Opera in New York. Another short opera form, *The Robbers*, for which the libretto was revised by Marc Blitzstein, saw production at Mannes College of Music on April 14, 1958. Other works include: *The Last Days*, *Bertha*, *Fables*, *Sisters Who Are Not Sisters*, *Hearing*.

3.6.2 *Our Town*

The opera *Our Town* was based on Thornton Wilder's 1938 play. The theatrical production has been one of the more frequently performed plays in the United States for many years. The story is set in the fictional American town of Grover's Corner, whose alleged history dates back to the 17th century. The plot focuses on the lives of selected residents. Each act is shown in the years 1901, 1904 and 1913, respectively. We meet characters from the neighborhood families of doctor Gibbs and newspaper publisher Webb. Their descendants George Gibbs and Emily Webb decide to get married. They live on a farm. The idyll is irretrievably interrupted when Emily dies giving birth to her second child.

In one of the last scenes of the work, Emily, already dead, sees her own funeral, accompanied by the souls of other dead people. She regresses to her childhood, contemplating the momentum of her loved ones' lives and the sense of time passing very quickly.

In Ned Rorem's operatic adaptation of *Our Town*, the aria *Take me back* from Act III provides a key moment of emotional intensity and introspection for the character of Emily. The aria appears as the climax of the opera, as Emily struggles with the realization of leaving the world she once knew.

4. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED WORKS

In this chapter I will present analyses of the arias I recorded. I consider the most important part of my compilation to be the IPA transcription of each aria. The work put in, both during the preparation and the recording process itself, translated into the performance notes I formulated, which can serve as an aid to all female performers of the selected arias, but also following my methodology and toolkit, the whole opera roles.

Detailed IPA transcriptions and explanations are available in the Polish version of this dissertation.

4.1 *Monica's Waltz (The Medium)*

Key: F major (no key mark designation, as the piece goes through numerous modulations)

Ambitus: d1 - b2

Tempo: *Allegretto* (♩. = 58)

Place of action: unspecified, urban center, Madame Flora's apartment
Choice of dialect dictated by the place of action: American Standard

Monica, Madame Flora's daughter, became involved in the fraudulent business of her esoteric séances. The emotional core of the narrative is based on the relationship between mother and daughter. The juxtaposition of Monica's reticence with her mother's tempestuous and deceitful nature create a poignant and emotionally charged atmosphere in the work. The heroine becomes embroiled in a sequence of sad events and inner turmoil.

Her true nature is shown through her warm, non-verbal relationship with Toby (Madame Flora's stepson) and interactions with her mother's clients. The audience observes the character's profound transformation as she navigates the complexities of daily life "orchestrated" by her own mother. The combination of all these elements contributes to the formation of a character who, like Alexandra (*Regina*, M. Blitzstein) portrayed in this work, struggles with the dissonance between empathy and sensitivity and the ruthless and greedy image of a parent.

The piece is addressed to Toby, a silent listener, but in response to his behavior (a firm grip on her arm), Monica begins an apparent dialogue with him, speaking on his behalf. The singer should delicately mark this interchange of roles. The aria thus has a dialogic character.

In addition to enforcing the correct pronunciation of American Standard, this piece carries the difficulty of changing harmonies in the piano (orchestra) part. Despite the repeated motifs of the vocal line, the singer may have difficulty maintaining proper intonation (recording 1:27- 1:35; 3:36-3:50).

4.2 *Black Swan* (The Medium)

Key: g- minor

Ambitus: d1 - g2

Tempo: *Allegretto, con moto* (♩= 74)

Baba accuses Toby of grabbing her by the neck during a seance. Monica, trying to distract her, sings a lullaby-song they both know. The song has a contemplative, makes all the characters fall into a kind of trance, which is emphasized in the didascalies - Monica sits, Madame Flora lies resting her head on her lap, Toby takes a tambourine in his hand and plays to the rhythm of the music.

Melody sung by Monica creates the emotional distance between parent and child. In *Black Swan's* lullaby, a regular, pulsating rhythm underscores the melody, and the tambourine used on stage by Toby shows the emotional bond between the characters. The modal nature of the melody is more ominous than soothing, creating anxiety in the listener. Monica's lullaby discreetly conveys to the audience her loyalty to Toby through sonic dissimilarity, e.g. the lowered seventh scale degree, the percussion rhythm, the simple folk structure, alluding to musical motifs associated with him.

This part of Monica's vocal part is written in the midrange, and the lower tessitura can be a challenge for sopranos, especially when it comes to carrying the sound. The monotony of the melodic line doesn't make the task any easier, so one has to focus on speaking the text as close to speech as possible. This also affects resonance. In the full-length version, mezzo-soprano Baba joins in bar forty (*The spools unravel and the needles break*; recording 2:11- 3:00), prompting the soprano to maintain a higher, bright-sounding resonance so as not to compete with the other character's strongly developed chest register.

4.3 *Music, music, music* (Regina)

Key: E-flat major

Ambitus: c1 - b2

Tempo: *Allegro commodo*

Place of action: unspecified southern state (United States of America)

Dialect choice dictated by place of action: General Southern

Birdie Hubbard, one of the key characters in Blitzstein's opera, is the wife of Oscar Hubbard, a wealthy and ruthless businessman, and the sister-in-law of Regina Giddens, the work's main character. Birdie is portrayed as a fragile and sensitive individual, trapped in a marriage devoid of affection. In addition, she struggles with alcoholism, and her mental suffering is aggravated by her spouse's chauvinistic behavior.

Birdie's character acts as a symbolic image of the negative impact of her husband's greed and ruthless domination. An exceptionally significant moment in the opera is the aria *Music*, where Birdie expresses her inner conflict and her desire for liberation and a return to the simple joys she enjoyed before her marriage. The heroine becomes a contrast to the other characters, especially Regina and her siblings, whose main goal is the relentless pursuit of wealth and influence. It is Birdie's sensitivity that determines her tragic fate, in which she becomes a victim of a brutal world that she is unable to resist. Birdie's sensitivity makes her a tragic figure in the opera's plot.

The variety of vocal lines in the aria emphasizes the intensity of the emotions Birdie feels. The melody dynamically oscillates, rising and falling, which conveys the complexity of the heroine's inner struggles. Interval jumps serve to capture the essence of these emotions.

An important element is the performer's process of learning the aria and gradually becoming accustomed to the unusual melodic line, which leads to full comfort in her interpretation. The composer uses a variety of harmonic progressions, including both consonances and more dissonant chords, alterations and chromaticism, to convey the emotional complexity of Birdie's character. The aria is characterized by a variety of harmonic sequences, oscillating between moments of stability and tension. The use of dissonant chords, unresolved progressions and unexpected harmonic changes serves to illustrate the anxiety with which Birdie is filled, reflecting her inner instability. The performer must master this technique to a degree that will enable her to fully convey the emotional palette and properly interpret the piece, focusing not only on the precise extraction of specific sounds, but also on

the expression of deep emotions. In addition, at the end of the composition, there is a decimation jump on b2, which requires solid breathing support, especially on the lower note.

4.4 *What will it be for me?* (Regina)

Key: C major

Ambitus: e1 - g2

Tempo: *Grazioso*

As one of the key characters in Marc Blitzstein's opera, Alexandra plays an important role in portraying the relationships within the Giddens family. She is the daughter of the titular Regina and Horace Giddens. Through her involvement in family conflicts and complex power dynamics, Alexandra becomes an important witness as well as a participant in events.

As she observes the actions of her loved ones, the protagonist undergoes a metamorphosis, developing from a relatively innocent and naive young girl into a more aware and mature woman. She becomes a witness to the spreading epidemic of greed in her family, which leads to the moral downfall of her mother Regina and her uncles, Ben and Oscar. Alexandra's character serves as a moral compass, initially symbolizing innocence and purity. Her maturation process serves as a vivid illustration of the trajectory of the moral corruption of the other characters, further emphasizing the dramatic nature of their downfall.

The spoken text, which appears repeatedly in this section, brings additional challenges that are not encountered during the singing. In particular, General Southern is characterized by a very specific melody, which must be well learned before performing the piece. In the aria, it is important to maintain legato phrases and pay special attention to the places located on the so-called transition notes.

4.5 *Ain't it a pretty night!* (Susannah)

Key: ges - major

Ambitus: b - ais2

Tempo: *Adagio sostenuto* (♩= 50).

Place of action: Leadville, Tennessee, Appalachian mountain range (southeastern part of the United States of America), between Nashville, Asheville and Knoxville.

The choice of dialect dictated the place of action: Appalachian

In addition to the typical accent characteristic of southern regions, which was described in Regina's example, several new features specific to this area appear in the aria *Ain't it a pretty night*. This first aria of the main character is an ideal introduction for a performer interested in interpreting the entire role. Placed at the beginning of the opera, the aria introduces the audience to Susannah's character and musical personality.

The aria *Ain't it a pretty night* can be divided into several parts, which are derived from the text, key and tempo markings. It is characterized by flowing tonality, frequent modulations, but it cannot be considered atonal. It remains within six keys: G flat major, E flat major, G major, E minor, E major and E flat minor. It begins and ends in the key of G flat major, and the melodic line ends on the dominant chord of G flat major. The full harmonic solution comes at the end of the aria, when the heroine's brother, Sam, continues in the key of G flat major.

The aria begins just after the duet with Little Bat, where the characters reminisce about country dances. Three bars before the aria, the composer suggests the upcoming change of tempo with the *poco a poco rall.* marking, putting the heroine in a contemplative mood. The first spoken phrase *Ain't it a pretty night* is in the tempo of *Adagio sostenuto*.

In the sixth bar, the meter changes from 4/4 to 6/4, giving the melody a more fluid, narrative feel as the heroine describes the reality around her. In the eleventh bar, the *più mosso* marking appears; this is also the moment when the heroine addresses the audience, Little Bata, directly and lets her imagination flow.

The change of tempo and meter in the eighteenth bar to 8/4 suggest a return to the character's earlier emotional state. Susannah wonders what life is like beyond the mountain tops she sees on the horizon, and decides to go away to see for herself cities with "tall buildings and street lamps."

The return to *tempo primo* in the thirty-fourth bar suggests a return to the familiar, and the heroine fears homesickness, realizing that her place is in the mountains amid "the smell of pines and the sound of crickets." The acceleration in the C4 section and the change in articulation are like the excitement and decision to leave, and the heroine knows that she can always return to her hometown. In the forty-seventh bar, Susannah returns to the B2 theme, appreciating the beauty of the night sky strewn with stars.

Just before the aria, we find ourselves in the scene of the opera, when a feast is taking place in the courtyard of New Hope Church. Parishioners await the arrival of the new preacher, Olin Blicht. Susannah Polk innocently dances with the residents, which causes displeasure among

some of the wives, provoking them to make rude comments. Bitch arrives earlier than expected and invites Susannah to dance. After the party is over, Little Bat's friend escorts her home. Susannah sings the aria *Ain't it a pretty night* on the veranda, initially addressing it to Little Bat. The girl believes that a world full of new possibilities and experiences stretches out before her. This aria provides the audience with the first opportunity to get to know Susannah's character, showing her girlish nature and naiveté.

The text of the aria resembles prose more than a poetic poem, with no metrical structure or rhymes, giving it the character of an unstructured monologue. The only exceptions are three statements: "Ain't it a pretty night" and the repetition of the second stanza at the end of the aria. The thoughtful prose style gives the impression that Susannah is expressing her thoughts in a spontaneous manner, and the repeated motif of "Ain't it a Pretty Night" fills in the moments when she stops to think them over. The beginning of the aria is a description of the night sky, and in the second part the heroine's thoughts turn beyond the New Hope Valley to Nashville, Asheville and Knoxville, focusing on her desire to see another new world. However, Susannah realizes that she would be homesick if she left the valley for too long and decides that she will leave only temporarily.

After the change of heart, there is no longer the phrase "Ain't it a pretty night" but a long pause as Susannah reflects on her homesickness. Unlike the previous sections, this part of the text unfolds naturally, reflecting the heroine's train of thought. The final repetition of the title line comes after Susannah has decided that she will return to the valley when she sees what the world hides. As she finishes dreaming, Susannah takes another moment to repeat the description of the night sky above her. This final pause coupled with the repetition of the first stanza suggests fatigue; although she had fun imagining her future, tonight she is happy to be at home.

Performing this aria requires the vocalist to be proficient in the use of vocal tools and interpretive skills to properly convey the emotional depth and beauty of the piece. The singer must maintain a smooth and expressive melodic line, while keeping the narrative flow and precise diction. It is also necessary to clearly convey dynamic differences in singing, from *pianissimo* to *forte*, and to consciously control breathing, especially during long, emotionally charged phrases. The singer should be strongly connected to the text of the aria in order to effectively convey the feelings and images described in the libretto, which will increase audience understanding and engagement.

A major challenge is to navigate the wide ambitus of two octaves and to bring out the text over such a vast interval and dynamic space, especially in the context of including dialect. The artist's interpretation will have a significant impact on the audience's perception of the character. If the singer succeeds in conveying Susannah's youthful spirit and naive optimism, the audience will gain sympathy for the character in the opera's decisive moments. In addition, the performer's deeper discovery of the emotions and meaning of the music will make it possible to credibly portray the character's transformation from the first aria to the second, which can move the audience.

4.6 *The trees on the mountains* (Susannah)

Key: g minor

Ambitus: des1 - h2 (c3)

Tempo: *Andante piangendo* (♩= 96)

The Trees on the Mountain aria maintains similar emotional saturation as the first aria but focuses on the heroine's feelings of isolation and longing for understanding. In this aria, Susannah seeks peace in nature as the opposite of the critical attitudes and isolation she experiences in her society. She expresses her longing for unconditional affection and closeness, longing to find someone who will understand and reciprocate her feelings.

In terms of composition, although both arias reflect Susannah's emotional state, they differ in their themes. *Ain't it a Pretty Night* emphasizes the aesthetic and peaceful qualities of the night and the strong need for change in the heroine's life. In contrast, *The Trees on the Mountain* delves more deeply into the emotions of seclusion and longing for understanding.

The transition between the two arias reflects Susannah's emotional trajectory, with a sense of awe and gratitude toward the surrounding beauty evolving into a deep sense of longing for emotional intimacy.

Ain't it a Pretty Night is usually performed at a moderate tempo, allowing for flexibility and frequent rubato to emphasize the emotional essence of the text. The orchestration of *The Trees on the Mountain* presents an intimate arrangement, maintaining a delicacy with the vocal melody that emphasizes Susannah's inner state. The dynamics in the orchestra part are meticulously nuanced, emphasizing the pensive and introspective nature of this section of the opera.

The reflective and sentimental aspects of the aria require a smooth and expressive performance to fully convey the sensitivity of the heroine and her longing for human connection. Precise phrasing, breath control and dynamics are needed to respond smoothly to changes in sound intensity, shape melodic lines and expressively emphasize emotions in phrases.

The composer introduced some difficulties by suggesting that some phrases be sung on a single breath, despite punctuation or typical phrasing points, in order to convey the naturalness of human expression, similar to a sobbing man who does not interrupt his speech during a conversation but selects his breath only when really necessary. Examples of this use can be heard between 0:08 and 0:24 and 0:42 and 0:57 on the recording.

4.7 Willow Song (The Ballad of Baby Doe)

Key: B-flat major

Ambitus: f1-d3

Tempo: *Andante con moto* / *Andante espressivo*

Place of Action: Leadville, Colorado (Midwestern part of the United States of America)

Dialect choice dictated by the place of action: American Standard.

Willow Song is one of the most sublime opera arias, and its text, inspired by folk songs, portrays the deep loneliness of Baby Doe as she recalls her lost love. This melancholy song becomes a contemplative moment for her as she ponders her decisions and future. Soprano Beverly Sills, the first and unforgettable performer of the song, brought a unique style to her performance, using a light, shimmering voice that perfectly conveyed the character's youth and naiveté. Although the part of Baby Doe is usually addressed to a lyric soprano, she is often cast as a coloratura soprano to emphasize her youthful vulnerability. This unique aria, placed at the beginning of the opera, allows the audience to understand the sensitivity and psychological complexity of the main character. Her emotional expression, subtly contained in the sounds, makes *Willow Song* one of the most unforgettable moments in the history of American opera.

Willow Song exudes the complexity of Baby Doe's character through a complex melodic movement that reflects her inner conflicts and passions. The piece stands out as a blend of American folk song and operatic aria through melodic movement that oscillates between simple phrases and more complex constructions, requiring a variety of means of expression from the singer. Characteristically, there are subtle tonal shifts in the stanzas, which gradually build tension to culminate in octave or even higher pitches, especially in moments of

heightened emotion. The aria begins with a vocalization that is meant to be sung lightly, seemingly out of breath, but this carries the risk of intonation impurities, for which special attention must be paid.

The technical challenges of the aria require excellent breath control and the ability to maintain sound quality, especially in the difficult tessitura (h2, d3; recording 2:28-2:45) and during long phrases, which adds depth and drama to the interpretation. *Willow Song* is a moment when the main character sings for herself, sunk in reflection, not seeking external recognition. This requires great skill and dramatic awareness on the part of the performer.

4.8 *Dearest Mama* (The Ballad of Baby Doe)

Key: A major

Ambitus: e1-cis3

Tempo: Allegro moderato

Place of Action: Leadville, Colorado (Midwestern part of the United States of America).

Dialect choice dictated by the place of action: American Standard

The aria *Dearest Mama* captures the mood of Baby Doe's inner conflict, who is torn between her love for Horace Tabor, a wealthy and married silver magnate, and the social judgments and consequences of their scandalous relationship. The aria's form emphasizes ambivalent feelings and a longing for recognition and understanding, especially from the heroine's mother. Music and text synergistically evoke a deep longing combined with remorse. *Dearest Mama* provides an insight into Baby Doe's inner struggles and emotional state, contemplating her difficult choices. The text highlights her vulnerability and her need for a mother's advice and support in the face of conflicting emotions and social constraints.

The theme of love permeates every stanza of the aria, beginning with her ended relationship with Harvey, and showing Baby Doe's deep affection for Horace. This love, however, is not without sacrifice. The protagonist struggles with the daunting reality of social expectations, which are a powerful barrier to her happiness. The social norms of the time dictate that her love for Horace, a man of wealth and high status, is forbidden - a sentiment echoed in the poignant lines: "But dear mother, he's not free to marry/ It is wrong for us to feel the way we do".

The aria is written in the form of a letter, which opens up additional interpretive possibilities for the performer. As in the case of the most famous aria from the opera *Eugene Onegin*, the

singer can use the *rubato* technique to convey the impression as if she is making up words on the fly. Moments of hesitation and wondering what to write can be depicted through subtle changes in tempo and dynamics. By clearly accentuating selected phrases, the performer can convey the impression that the character is considering various thoughts and emotions, thus creating a more vivid and authentic interpretation. In addition, delicate tempo manipulations can emphasize the emotional changes in the text, which brings an additional layer of subtlety and depth to the performance.

The middle section of the Baby Doe aria provides a unique opportunity for the performer to express extreme emotion and excitement. Rising to a high *cis3*, Baby Doe reaches the climax of her expression, where the sounds become a symbol of her dilemma, but also of her desire. However, singing in such a high register not only creates technical challenges for the performer, but also affects the clarity of the words. The priority becomes clarity of sound, which sometimes leads to imperfect articulation. This compromised approach allows for a better extraction of emotion through greater control over the sound, despite the partial loss of intelligibility of the text.

4.9 *Fair Robin I love* (Tartuffe)

Key: A major (no key marks) Ambitus: e1-c3

Tempo: *Allegro*

Place of Action: Paris, France

Dialect choice dictated by place of action: Mid-Atlantic

Fair Robin's aria I love is not only an important moment in *Tartuffe*, but also an important turning point for the characters of Dorine and Mariane. In this scene, Dorine, an energetic maid, encourages Mariane to be brave and decide her own fate in the matter of love. Although Mariane is intimidated by her father's pressure, Dorine inspires her to express her feelings and defend her freedom of choice.

Musically, the aria is intricately composed, using A minor as the major key, which gives it a melancholic and mysterious feel. Dorine's melodic line exudes energy and determination, which emphasizes her firmness in conveying Mariane's message of freedom and courage. *Fair Robin, I love* not only emphasizes the individuality and strength of Dorine's character, but also brings hope for Mariane's liberation from the oppression she experiences under the influence of her father and Tartuffe. This is the moment when the music becomes a vehicle for

a powerful message about the need to make autonomous decisions and fight for one's own happiness.

Through a detailed analysis of the structure and interpretation of *Fair Robin I love*, it is possible to see its multilayered nature and its importance to both the character of Dorine and the overall narrative of the *Tartuffe* opera. Through dynamic phrasing, exploration of different vocal registers and a rich stylistic palette, the performer is able to show the various aspects of Dorine's character and her contribution to the development of the plot.

Dorine's vocal expression, with its exaggerated pitch changes and dynamic phrasing, adds a sense of urgency, vitality and frivolity to the aria, which fully reflects the character of the character. At the same time, Dorine's sensitive interpretation of John Dryden's verses makes it possible to convey the longing and indignation that resides in her heart. The structure of the aria, which includes both recitative and melodic parts, reflects the complexity of the themes covered in the opera, as well as the contrast between folk melodies and operatic interludes.

Finally, *Fair Robin I love* not only highlights the individuality of Dorine's character, but also provides an important element in developing the plot and themes of the opera *Tartuffe*. By synthesizing traditional operatic forms with modern sensibilities, this aria becomes not only a showcase of performance, but also an important tool in creating depth and complexity in the drama. It is a testament to *Tartuffe*'s enduring legacy and its timeless significance in the history of opera.

4.10 Take Me Back (Our Town)

Tonality: the composer uses chords taken from extended tonal harmonics, but it is impossible to clearly define the tonal center

Ambitus: d1- c3

Tempo: ♩= 96 (*Andante moderato*)

Place of action: the state of New Hampshire (northeastern United States of America)

Dialect choice dictated by the place of action: American Standard.

The character of Emily Webb in Ned Rorem's opera *Our Town* stays true to the original concept created by Thornton Wilder in his play of the same name. Emily is portrayed as an interesting and vivid personality who matures through the stages of life, from childhood to death. A key

moment in Emily's narrative is her wedding day to George Gibbs, which symbolizes the eagerness and hopes that accompany a tumultuous youthful romance.

In the opera, as in the play, the scene of Emily and George's marriage is an important turning point that shows the character's emotional development and her changing outlook on life. However, as the plot of the opera unfolds, we see that Emily begins to contemplate the transient nature of existence and the importance of coincidences in life. This introspection becomes more apparent as Emily grows up and her perspective on the world matures. Through her story, we not only see Emily's personal growth, but also discover universal truths about human existence and the human condition.

In the opera's third act, the character Emily, already a being from beyond the worlds, has the opportunity to return to the events of her past. In this moment, she decides to return to the blissful moments from her life, realizing the value and beauty of everyday experiences. Through this journey back in time, Emily gains a deeper understanding of the need to cherish and appreciate the seemingly ordinary aspects of everyday life.

Rorem's operatic adaptation brilliantly portrays these themes, using music as the main means to depict inner transformation. The melody and harmonies in this act of the opera capture the character's emotions and reflections, highlighting her deep contemplation of human nature and the essence of life. Through the subtlety and depth of the music, the audience can better understand Emily's experiences and her growing awareness and understanding. The music in the opera is not only a backdrop for the events, but also a profound tool of expression that helps reveal the deeper psychological layers of the characters and their evolution.

Take Me Back presents a huge challenge for both the singer and the audience. This technically difficult and emotionally profound aria requires excellent control of vocal technique, while remaining fully sensitive to the dramatic journey Emily is going through. The singer must deftly balance between bursts of grief and tender, intimate moments, trying to convey both the emotional intensity and subtle depth of the character. The richness of vocal timbres and dynamic contrasts are key to bringing out the drama of the aria, while breath control helps maintain intensity in the most emotional passages. Text and interpretation are equally important so that the audience can fully immerse themselves in Emily's inner journey and understand her process of accepting death and passing.

The performance of this aria is a moment that stays deeply in the audience's memory, thanks to the richness of emotion and depth of the performance. With the proper use of the chest

and head registers, the singer can show the full range of emotions and convey to the audience the fullness of Emily's experience.

5. CONCLUSION

This dissertation explains the crucial role that proficiency in American diction plays in developing refined vocal artistry, both for performers and educators. In the field of classical singing, the importance of mastering the nuances of diction cannot be judged. Just as an in-depth understanding of vocal technique is essential to achieving a polished performance, so is a proficient mastery of the linguistic elements inherent in the repertoire. Very important in this area is the understanding and application of the phonetic alphabet (IPA) in American diction, given the rich repertoire of vocal music there, which includes a variety of styles and genres.

Over the past few years, I have been able to expand my existing knowledge of English dialects. Each of them has distinct phonetic features as described in the above work and audible on the recording.

Effective communication with an audience depends on understanding the text - which can only be achieved through meticulous attention to diction. By pronouncing each word with precision and clarity, singers have a direct and deep connection with listeners, improving the overall impression and reception of their performance.

Integral to the exploration of American diction is the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) as a standardized notation system. IPA transcriptions offer a comprehensive and systematic approach to determining the phonetic complexities of American English, as well as other languages, providing singers with a map for navigating the linguistic terrain of the repertoire. By using IPA transcriptions in the analysis of American vocal works, researchers and practitioners alike gain invaluable insight into the subtle nuances of pronunciation and articulation, thereby increasing their interpretive, technical, as well as communicative prowess.

It is worth noting that in the Polish education system, the core curriculum does not provide for the teaching of IPA. While English is widely spoken by the younger generation in Poland, and as a result, there is no emphasis on the nuances of pronunciation and dialect, especially that which goes beyond American or British English. Therefore, incorporating IPA into vocal education programs would not only increase students' proficiency in American diction, but would also serve as a valuable tool for communicating with educators about the diction of other foreign languages. This broader linguistic competence would undoubtedly

enrich the educational experience and professional development of classical singers in Poland and abroad.

With new vocal repertoire being created each year in the United States, the importance of English phonetics in classical singing is undeniable.

I would like to encourage aspiring vocalists to dig deeper so that they can continue their artistic journey at an even higher level by expanding their vocal repertoire with contemporary American works.

I hope that this study will prove to be a valuable and helpful source of guidance, as well as inspiration, and will serve as a resource for singers pointing the way to mastery in the field of classical vocal performance.

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