

THE



of AUDITIONING

A Handbook for Opera Singers,
Accompanists and Coaches
by Anthony Legge

Revised Edition



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Preface

When the idea of writing this book first came to me, I felt there was a 'vacuum of knowledge' among singers about the technique of auditioning. Since the book has come into print, the reaction to it has demonstrated to me how deep that need was, and how important it is to help singers present themselves in the best possible way.

A brilliant painting still needs a good, suitable frame to bring out all its facets, and painters are aware of the vital effect that the right frame brings to each work that they execute. So, in the same way, singers should be encouraged to 'sell their talents' and to discover just how well the ideas and feelings that they are trying to communicate really do get over the footlights. If this book can help in even a small way, I will be very honoured.

I am aware that the position of some of the arias within the different *Fächer* are, to some degree, controversial. Ideally, roles should not be compartmentalized in any way, but for many opera companies and agents some system needs to be adopted to aid them in their difficult task of casting so many different roles. I hope that some of the suggested placings of these roles will stimulate the reader's own perception of the vocal and musical strengths and weaknesses demonstrated by each aria. I also hope that accompanists will find the book useful for learning the repertoire and helping singers to choose new material for learning, even if they decide ultimately not to use a particular aria for audition purposes.

The reason for my writing this book is still as relevant now as it was when I originally wrote it, nearly 30 years ago. For this new, revised edition, I have expanded it with some countertenor audition arias suggesting several styles of singing, an updated list of arias, and a new chapter about life after a successful audition.

I would like to thank once more my many colleagues who have, over many years, given me much encouragement and the benefit of their knowledge. I am grateful to Linda Hawken for inspiring me to prepare this new Peters edition, mindful that the company has issued so many useful publications of much of the repertoire mentioned in this book.

Anthony Legge

Introduction

Auditioning is an experience that you, as a singer, cannot avoid. You may find yourself singing for a panel of judges at a competition or festival, for an agent, for the representatives of a music society or orchestra, or for an opera company. An audition is the simplest and, until someone discovers a better alternative, the best way for you to show off your qualities to those people who may wish to employ or reward you.

Since you cannot avoid auditioning – and very few singers enjoy their brief moments on the audition platform – it seems sensible to try and face up to the whole problem from the start. This book is designed to help you to find a simple and effective way to present your capabilities and talents to greatest advantage.

One way for competition and festival judges, agents, administrators, producers and conductors to discover the qualities of singers is to hear them in performance but, unfortunately, this is not always possible. It is important to put yourself in the shoes of those who are going to listen to you. They want you to sing at your best because they are looking for the most thrilling and exciting talent they can find, and when they find it they will be quite delighted.

Luck plays a significant part in a singer's career. You need to be offering an audition panel precisely the qualities they are looking for at a given time. The singer may be compared to a very special coat displayed in a shop window. Passers-by may stop and admire it but, because of the hot weather, decide that it is not what they are looking for there and then. The reason for which a singer is not chosen may be very different from the one that he or she imagines.

Those singers who wish to make a career outside the world of opera will generally find themselves auditioning for specific repertoire or engagements. They will often know which piece of music is to be performed and can thus prepare an appropriate audition aria or song. Lists of songs, oratorios, etc. may be found in many books, especially American editions such as *Singers Repertoire* by Berton Coffin (Scarecrow Press, New York 1960) or *Music for the Voice* by Sergius Kagen (Indiana University Press 1968).

When auditioning for an opera company, it can sometimes happen that a singer knows for which opera he or she is being auditioned but, in general, one finds that a company or agent is looking for a voice type rather than someone to fill a specific role. The system of voice types is most utilized in German-speaking opera houses, and the German *Fach* system is explained on pages 44–9. Opera singers need to be fully aware of the demands of an entire role when offering an aria to an audition panel. For this reason, I have compiled in Part II a selection of operatic repertoire, set out in accordance with the *Fach* system (see my comment on this in the Preface), specifically highlighting the difficulties and advantages of each aria, together with my reasons for choosing it. Part III provides the singer with a life-long reference list of arias suitable for operatic auditions, including many additional pieces, for instance, some Handel arias. This information will also be of great value to accompanists, giving them a clear guide as to what to expect when playing for auditions.

The right approach

One of the most fundamental decisions for you to make is to establish exactly what kind of singer you are and in what field you have most to offer. Be realistic and yet do not undersell yourself. Whatever you choose to sing must be fully within your capabilities, both vocally and emotionally, and must be music you could perform ‘standing on your head’.

Singing is about one simple concept – *communication*. The audition panel is only interested in what ‘comes across the footlights’. You may find that some singers are not as vocally or musically proficient as you, but they may have a great ability to communicate. The panel is looking to see what you communicate when you first walk into the audition room or on to the stage – assuredness, generosity of character, and a philosophical attitude to the outcome of the audition. When you first start to sing the panel immediately recognizes, in the same way that the public can, the quality and timbre of your voice and, if you have chosen a suitable aria, can also recognize your vocal and dynamic range. If it is a well-experienced panel, the members need less time to make their judgements, so a long aria is not always expedient, especially when the panel has so many other singers to hear. It is very hard to face these truths in their raw state, for the singing profession is not an easy one; often the hard facts about your singing ability will be said behind your back. If you are going to be a successful singer, nothing will put you off. The panel knows that if you can audition successfully, there is a good chance that you can perform successfully: the latter is so much easier in comparison. Of course there are exceptions to the rule, and there have been cases where good auditions have not led to good performances, but this is not your problem. Your concern is to present the best possible package to those darkly lit people in the stalls.

Surprisingly enough, the panel is often slightly nervous of your attitude towards them. Why is this? There have been occasions when

Preparing your music

Preparation of music begins weeks before an audition and can be compared to an assault course. Each layer and detail of the music should be dealt with separately. One part of your brain looks after the words, the musical details, motivations and thought processes; another part looks after the singing, vowel sounds, emotions and imagination. This is a simplified explanation of the learning process, but it helps to know that the brain is divided into different compartments, which need to be programmed separately.

Let us start with the latter, the emotional compartment which deals with the singing. Emotions have to find their release in a physical outlet and, when someone is emotionally upset, one of these outlets is the human voice. In singing you are involved in communicating the emotions, thoughts and ideas of your chosen character. An aria or song can be the outpouring of great passion, as in 'Vissi d'arte' (Puccini's *Tosca*), or the highly articulate and verbal outpourings of Figaro in 'Largo al factotum' (Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*). If you have chosen an emotional aria, you run the risk of being dominated by those very emotions which you are trying to communicate, rather than being the master of them. Your breath and vocal cords (which work in tandem) are the first physical outlets which must be taught the music. Start by learning the notes: not just the tune, but each and every interval, so that the music becomes part of your very being.

The best way for a singer to approach this is to select his or her favourite and most comfortable (i.e. well-placed) vowel sound, and to sing the aria through on this sound alone, without at first being restricted by the rhythm, tempo and repeated notes of the piece. The voice needs to be taught the intervals and the shape of each phrase most thoroughly before going on to the next stage. If you sing your aria as a 'vocalise' with a perfect line and shape, you will then have a good

foundation on which to build. Try to imagine which voice-sounds really carry through a hall. Not the short, cutting consonants (K's and G's) nor the plosives (P's, B's, T's) – but the open vowels. Any sustained note will have to be sung on a vowel sound, the consonants existing to give clarity, shape and meaning. It follows that any aria is made up of great stretches of vowel sounds, coloured and highlighted by the consonants.

When you are happy with this first part of the preparation and feel you understand the resonance and physical shape of each phrase, you can sing the aria with the vowels of the text. The addition of the original vowels will help to create the rhythm of the phrase. For example, let us take a phrase from 'O mio Fernando' (*La favorita* by Donizetti) sung by Leonora in Act III.

ma pu-ro l'a-mor mi-o co-me il per-do-no
dan-na-to ahi las-sa! è a-di-spe-ra-to or-ror

Assuming that you have already practised this on your favourite vowel sound and really know the intervals, move on to the next stage of putting the actual vowels in, which will look like this:

a u o a o i o e i e o
a o a e a i e a o

Some of the vowel sounds have caused certain notes to be tied together: for example, the C in bar 2 is tied over to the C in bar 3. Later, when you put in the consonants, the 'c' of 'come' will achieve the reiteration of the note, while you maintain the same vowel sound. This example represents, in a simplified form, an indication, through the vowel

Opera auditions

Within the United Kingdom there are at present five full-time opera companies and many seasonal ones, which are listed below. On the continent there are many more, with the greatest number of these concentrated within the German-speaking countries. The process of applying to the German-speaking companies is unique and is dealt with in depth later. All other opera companies within such countries as the Netherlands, France, Spain, Italy, Scandinavia, America and Australia can be approached in much the same way as those in the UK. For lists of Opera Agents and Opera Companies visit Operabase – www.operabase.com.

Should you speak their language? Of course this is helpful, but if you do not, don't be put off: try and attempt the language in order to show your willingness to learn. Often you will discover that the panel members speak English better than you expect. They will require you to sing at least one aria in their language to enable you to demonstrate your diction and pronunciation.

Auditioning in the UK and non-German-speaking countries

The usual practice is to apply either through an agent or directly to the respective opera house.

If agents have time to hear you and need your type of voice on their books, they will usually be prepared to work for you. They will know about vacancies in casting within opera houses, but more through word of mouth than through any organized system. The more established agents will have better knowledge and stronger contacts. As already mentioned, you can apply directly to an opera house, but they will expect an agent to negotiate your contract, and having an agent will help towards easier relations with the company.


Introduction and voice types

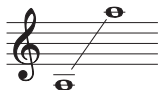
In this section are listed some useful operatic audition arias, standard and not so standard. As explained in the introduction to this book, there are many extant lists of singing repertoire, but few resources available to the opera singer who needs to know just what demands must be met when undertaking a certain aria. Consequently, arias have been arranged chronologically under different voice types, basically corresponding to the German *Fach* system. This is to give a guide to the weight and character of voice expected for an aria, and to give an idea as to which *Fach* a German opera house might feel you belong. A simplified description of each voice type is also included. This provides a sketch of the different attributes. Obviously, any such list is only a general guide, and it may well be that you feel your voice straddles two or more different types. I have included a modern aria or two for each voice type, including some for the countertenor voice. There are many Handel arias for a countertenor to choose from, and I have only put in two arias from Rinaldo to demonstrate the possibility of contrast.

For each aria, I have given the range of voice needed, timings and a description of the qualities required to sing it. I have also placed the aria in its context within the opera. As far as possible I have kept to the original version of the opera (for example, the Swedish original version of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*), and to the original language, except where it has become very difficult to find an edition printed in that language. Should this be the case, I have given the original language in the comment. With arias by Eastern European or Russian composers, it is not generally expected that you should sing in the original language but, at the same time, it would be invidious for me to recommend a good singing translation – this is a matter of personal taste. The transliteration of the Russian titles has been done according to the actual sounding of the Russian words, as opposed to a literal letter-for-letter rendering. The

Soprano arias

Soubrette soprano

1. **Deh vieni, non tardar** (Susanna)
(Recit: Giunse alfin il momento)
Le nozze di Figaro (1786), Act IV no 27
Mozart [3'30"]  EP734, EP4231A



Near Seville, 18th century: Susanna, who is dressed as the Countess (as arranged by Figaro), is out in the garden at night. She knows that Figaro is secretly watching her, and plays on his jealousy by pretending to be waiting for the Count. She hints that she will follow her instincts and will respond to the rapturous atmosphere of the garden by letting love take her over.

This aria has a deceptively wide range and needs beautiful tone and line throughout. The recitative requires much atmospheric colour; the amoral text needs to be fully brought out and any added appoggiaturas should not interfere with the flow and charm of the text and music. The aria is in the 'serenade' mode, normally reserved for men, therefore the line needs to imitate that kind of sexual urge – quite a radical statement for that period. The caesura marks near the end of the aria denote possible places for tasteful cadenzas.

2. **Batti, batti, o bel Masetto** (Zerlina)

(Recit: Ma se colpo io non ho)

Don Giovanni (1787), Act I no 13

Mozart [4'20"]  EP734, EP4231A




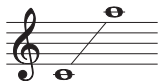
Seville, 17th century: Masetto is understandably annoyed that his bride-to-be, Zerlina, has been taken away by Don Giovanni on Masetto's wedding day. When she returns, in order to pacify Masetto's suspicions about her, Zerlina invites him to beat her; she can then kiss the hands that have hurt her, and peace will be restored.

A useful aria containing first a slow and then a more dancing section (it is best to begin with the end of the secco recitative). It needs a light, unobtrusive top to the voice, and much charm and femininity. The pianist must be continually aware of the cello obbligato semiquaver part, which unites the tempo and music of the two sections. In the second section, the dotted crotchet pulse ideally should match the crotchet pulse of the first section. The text in some versions gives 'contento' instead of 'contenti', and the text underlay in the last four bars of the voice part is as follows: vo-'gliam' (on the first beat), 'pas-' (second beat), '-sar' (first beat) in both phrases.

3. **In uomini, in soldati** (Despina)

Così fan tutte (1790), Act I no 12

Mozart [2'25"]  EP4474



Naples, 18th century: Despina, a maid, asks Fiordiligi and Dorabella if they can give an example of a man (or soldier) who is faithful. She tells them not to trust men, and to fool them in the same way that men fool women.

A light and dancing aria needing good diction. The words should be full of cynicism. The trills of 'la ra la' must be cleanly executed and variety of phrasing is extremely important throughout. Remember that the repetition of the text possibly derives from the fact that you are singing to two naïve girls who come from northern Italy and know nothing about real Neapolitan life. The caesuras are opportunities for small, tasteful cadenzas.

Part III

Index of Audition Arias

Here follows an extensive list of audition arias, listed by composer, within the six voice types (Soprano, Mezzo-soprano, Countertenor, Tenor, Baritone and Bass). You will be able to see at a glance to which *Fach* a specific aria belongs. This will give you some idea of the wide choice of audition arias open to you. Those that I highly recommend for audition purposes have already been treated in depth in Part II and can be traced through their aria number. Others, available in Peters Edition, are given with their catalogue (EP) number.

Soprano arias

S = Soubrette

LC = Lyric coloratura

L = Lyric

DC = Dramatic coloratura

JD = Spinto (Jugendlich-Dramatischer)

D = Dramatic

HD = Heavy dramatic

* = Long aria (which may need to be cut)

SI = Short introduction and/or playout

Cabaletta or recitative title in brackets

Voice	Composer	Aria title	Character	Opera (Act/No.)	Aria No.
LC	Auber	Quel bonheur, je respire	Zerline	<i>Fra Diavolo</i> (II/7) 3'30"	15
L	Barber	Do not utter a word	Vanessa	<i>Vanessa</i> (I/fig 22–27) 2'50'	48
S	Beethoven	O wär'ich schon mit dir vereint	Marzelline	<i>Fidelio</i> (I/2) 4'	5
D	Beethoven	Abscheulicher! wo eilst du hin?	Fidelio	<i>Fidelio</i> (I/9) 6'30"	90
L	Bellini	Oh! quante volte	Giulietta	<i>I Capuleti e i Montecchi</i> (II/4) 5'45"	37
DC*	Bellini	Casta diva (Ah, bello a me ritorno)	Norma	<i>Norma</i> (I/4) 5'15" (SI)+2'30" (1v)	58
DC*	Bellini	Qui la voce sua soave (Vien, diletto)	Elvira	<i>I puritani</i> (II/fig 24) 2'35" + 2'30" (1v SI)	61
DC*	Bellini	Ah! non credea mirarti (Ah! Non giunge)	Amina	<i>La sonnambula</i> (III/14) 3'30" + 1'45" (1v)	59

JD	Berg	Und ist kein Betrug – Bible Scene	Marie	<i>Wozzeck</i> (III/1, bars 3–62) 3'20"	89
DC	Berg	Wenn sich die Menschen um meinethwillen umgebracht haben – Lulu Lied	Lulu	<i>Lulu</i> (II/1, bars 490–537) 2'22"	70
LC*	Bernstein	Glitter and be gay	Cunegonde	<i>Candide</i> (I/7) 3'45" (cut)	30
L	Bizet	Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante	Micaëla	<i>Carmen</i> (III/22) 4'30"	39
L	Bizet	Comme autrefois dans la nuit sombre	Leïla	<i>Les pêcheurs de perles</i> (II/7) 5'	38
DC	Boito	L'altra notte in fondo al mare	Margherita	<i>Mefistofele</i> (III) 3'15"	68
L	Britten	Embroidery Aria	Ellen	<i>Peter Grimes</i> (III/fig 23) 3'10"	47
LC	Britten	Come, now a roundel	Tytania	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> (I/fig 94) 2'5"	31
JD	Britten	How beautiful it is (Tower Scene)	Governess	<i>The Turn of the Screw</i> (I/sc 4/7 after fig 22) 4'30" –	
L	Catalani	Ebben? ... Ne andrò lontana	La Wally	<i>La Wally</i> (I/letter Q) 3'30"	40
JD	Cilea	Io son l'umile ancella	Adriana	<i>Adriana Lecouvreur</i> (I/fig 13) 2'30"	86
S	Charpentier	Depuis le jour	Louise	<i>Louise</i> (III/1) 4'	8
LC	Delibes	Où va la jeune Hindoue? – Bell song	Lakmé	<i>Lakmé</i> (II/10) 6'45"	26
DC	Donizetti	Il faut partir	Marie	<i>La fille du régiment</i> (I/13) 2'45" (1v)	62
LC	Donizetti	O luce di quest'anima	Linda	<i>Linda di Chamounix</i> (I/4) 4'30"	16
DC	Donizetti	Regnava nel silenzio	Lucia	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i> (I/2) 3'10" + 4'15" (SI)	60
LC	Donizetti	Quel guardo il cavaliere	Norina	<i>Don Pasquale</i> (I/sc 2/no 3) 5'45"	17
L	Dvořák	Měsíčku na nebi – Song to the moon	Rusalka	<i>Rusalka</i> (I/fig 39) 4'10"	43
JD	Giordano	La mamma morta	Maddalena	<i>Andrea Chénier</i> (III/fig 23) 4'	85
JD	Gluck	Divinités du Styx	Alceste	<i>Alceste</i> (II/7) 3'50"	72
JD	Gluck	Ô malheureuse Iphigénie	Iphigénie	<i>Iphigénie en Tauride</i> (II/sc 6) 3'15" EP 734	–