

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

**CELESTIAL AND RELATED ASSOCIATIONS OF HARP PARTS IN
SELECTED EUROPEAN OPERAS DURING THE PERIOD 1818 TO 1910**

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: This study explores the development of young poets in selected European countries during the period 1918 to 1938. It focuses specifically on the selected works of the poets, including those by Rilke, Pound, Yeats, and others.

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This study explores the development of young poets in selected European countries during the period 1918 to 1938. It focuses specifically on the selected works of the poets, including those by Rilke, Pound, Yeats, and others. The study is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the historical and cultural context of the period. The second part discusses the development of the poets' work. The third part discusses the reception of the poets' work. The study is based on the author's personal observations and research. It is supplemented by secondary scholarly resources. The author's points of view are otherwise stated. The study is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the historical and cultural context of the period. The second part discusses the development of the poets' work. The third part discusses the reception of the poets' work.

ABSTRACT

Celestial and Related Associations of Harp Parts in Selected European Operas during the period 1818 to 1910

Wan-Ting Suen

This thesis addresses the harp literature in selected European operas composed during the period 1818 to 1910. It focuses specifically on the celestial association of the harp found in operatic works by Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi, Puccini, Bizet, Massenet, Wagner and Strauss. In this paper, "celestial" refers to heavenly images, the spiritual transformation of characters, as well as peace and reconciliation as referenced by the harp parts in operas. There is a need for research in the area because there are few existing resources that explore the relationship of the harp to the opera. There are hardly any studies that involve detailed discussions of the history of the harp in the operatic repertoire. The author hopes that this study will help to enrich understanding in this area. Because of limited resources on this topic, most of the conclusions drawn will be based on the author's personal observations and critical analyze of opera scores, supplemented by secondary scholarly references. In this paper, musical examples will illustrate the author's points unless otherwise indicated. The examples show only the solo harp part, for reasons of space.

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1. Introduction: Use of the Harp in the History of Western Operas

The Harp: an Ancient and Sacred Instrument

The harp, one of the oldest instruments, was already in use at the very beginning of human civilization (around 4000 B.C.E.).¹ In many ancient cultures, the harp was regarded as holy and divine. It was very often associated with supernatural and unearthly power. For instance, in the Sumerian culture, the harp was a temple instrument and frequently appeared in religious rituals. Similarly, in ancient Egypt, the harp was a highly-valued instrument played by priests or priestesses during times of devotion.² In Africa, the harp is the primary form of communication between humans and the supernatural.³ In pre-Christian Celtic society, the Bards (lyric poets) sang eulogies and accompanied themselves on the lyres.⁴ They were prestigious and highly respected members of society and they were often the peace-makers in times of war and conflict. In the Bible, David played the harp to drive away Saul's evil spirit.⁵ In ancient Greece, the legendary Orpheus used the lyre to soothe and move the spirits of the underworld. All in all, the harp is considered sacred in many cultures and felt to possess the power to calm and cast away conflict and evil.

¹ Rajka Dobronic-Mazzoni, *The Eternal Harp: A Musical and Cultural Historical Study*. Translated by Graham McMaster. (Zagreb, Croatia: Golden marketing, 2002), 13.

² Ibid., 26.

³ Sue Carole DeVale, "Power and Meaning in Musical Instruments," *Music and the experience of God*. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1989), 99.

⁴ Joan Rimmer, *The Irish Harp*. (Dublin: Hely Thom Limited, 1969), 12.

⁵ Martin van Schaik, *The Harp in Middle Ages: the Symbolism of a Musical Instrument*. (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1992), 40.

Despite the similarity between the harp and the lyre, it is quite important to notice that the two instruments are not the same. Joan Rimmer indicates:

The main difference between a lyre and a harp lies in the relative positions of strings and soundbox. A lyre is basically of quadrangular or modified quadrangular shape. It consists of a soundbox surmounted by two 'arms' which are connected with each other at the top by a 'yoke.' The strings are fixed at the bottom of the box and then run across it.... A harp...is basically of triangular shape. It has a soundbox, a string-carrying member at an angle from the box, and, in the case of the frame harps, a third part, the fore pillar, which runs between the neck and the end of the sound box, thus enclosing the strings in a solid frame. The strings are fixed at one end directly into the center of the box and at the other to the string-carrying member.⁶

Both the lyre and the harp were depicted in various iconographies in Christianized Europe. However, as time passed, European art works seemed to portray predominantly images of the frame harp (with a column) more often than the lyre.⁷ In Christian iconographies from the medieval period, it was very common to find David playing the harp with a column. The harp was associated with religious services, royal courts, and secular celebrations in Europe from the fifteenth century onwards. Various forms of the harp also appeared throughout Western Europe, such as harps with double or triple rows of strings.⁸

⁶ Rimmer, *The Irish Harp*, 4-5.

⁷ Roslyn Rensch, *Harps and Harpists*. (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1989), 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

The Use of the Harp in Operas: Seventeenth to Eighteenth Century

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) was the first composer in the history of Western music to use the harp in his operas. Interestingly, he chose to use the Greek story of Orpheus in his first opera, *La favola d'Orfeo* (The Fable of Orpheus) in 1607. In act three, Orpheus has just lost his wife, Eurydice, and is determined to enter the underworld to retrieve her. He serenades Charon, the boatman, with his lyre in order to cross the river to the underworld. In his aria *Possente Spirito* (O Strong Spirit), which has six stanzas, each stanza is accompanied by six different instrumental combinations. In the middle of the aria (the third stanza), Monteverdi chose the harp to accompany Orpheus. It was written for "arpa doppia"—a type of harp that had two or more rows of strings. The harp writing is idiomatic; the ritornello is filled with arpeggios and trills, with right and left hands imitating each other. Monteverdi used the full range of the arpa doppia. The harp ritornello enters right after Orpheus sings the last words, "Tanta bellezza il paradiso hà secco" ("such beauty lives in Heaven"). Monteverdi thus used the seventeenth-century harp not only to imitate the sound of the lyre but also to create an allusion to or association with heaven.

Much later (1762), Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-1787) also composed an opera based on the same story of Orpheus. He titled his opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Like Monteverdi, Gluck wrote a harp part to represent the lyre of Orpheus. Gluck carried out a series of opera reforms which put more emphasis on music. He believed that music should serve poetry and portray the meaning of words clearly. In act two, scene one of *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Orpheus encounters many furies when he attempts to

get into the underworld, and they are rebellious and refuse to admit him. Gluck intelligently composed parts for the harp and pizzicato strings playing together to imitate the plucking sound of the lyre. The harp part is simple; it essentially consists of arpeggios in the right hand, with the left hand playing one note per beat to support the harmony. Interestingly, the rhythmic tempo of the harp part gradually slows down as the furies are gradually soothed by Orpheus's harp music. The right hand's rhythm changes from sixteenth notes to eighth notes at the end. Both Monteverdi and Gluck's operas showed that the harp possesses the power to soothe and calm troubled spirits and souls, and both composers used the harp to represent the Greek lyre.

After Gluck used the harp in opera, others began to follow suit. The harp first entered the modern orchestra via the opera house. Haydn used one harp in his opera *L'anima del filosofo* (Orfeo ed Eurydice) (1791), and Le Sueur wrote for twelve harps (six to each of two parts) in his *Ossian ou Les bardes* (Ossian, or The Bards) in 1804.⁹ The increase in popularity of the harp as an orchestral instrument or, more precisely, an orchestral instrument in opera was partly due to the improvement of the instrument itself. As Hans Joachim Zingel points out, "the perfection of the mechanics of harp action by Sébastien Erard in London and Paris in 1815 and 1820 respectively, was particularly critical to the development of harp music in the nineteenth century."¹⁰ The invention of the double-action harp especially enhanced

⁹ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Mechanized harps: 1750-1820", (by Sue Carole DeVale), ed. L. Macy, <<http://www.grovemusic.com>> (Accessed May 6, 2007).

¹⁰ Hans Joachim Zingel, *Harp Music in the Nineteenth Century*. Edited and translated by Mark Palkovic. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 80.

the instrument's flexibility in playing chromatic music. Sue Carole DeVale describes the double-action mechanism:

Operating on the same fork principle as his earlier single-action harp, Erard's double-action instrument uses Cb as its open key and has 43 strings (*E' to e'''*) and seven pedals, each of which can be depressed twice, housed in a box at the base of the harp. Each string passes between two fork-bearing discs, placed one above the other. When the pedal is depressed into its first notch, the upper disc turns so that the forks grip the string and sharpen it by a semitone, while the lower disc turns about 45° but does not touch the string. When the pedal is depressed a second time, and fixed into the bottom notch, the lower fork turns a further 35°, gripping the string and shortening it by another semitone. Each string, except the highest and the lowest one or two which have no forked discs, can therefore be sharpened two semitones, from flat to natural to sharp, and the harp can be played in any key by the simple expedient of fixing the pedals in the requisite notches.¹¹

The modern harp still uses this mechanism. Because of the invention of the double-action harp, more composers in the beginning of the nineteenth century were willing to compose for the harp— either in solo music, chamber music or both.

This paper therefore will mainly focus on the period from 1818 to 1910. This period saw a tremendous growth in the use of the harp in Western operas. After Gluck, composers in France began to include more harp parts in their operas. Similarly, in Italy, composers such as Rossini and Donizetti (who belonged to the Bel Canto School, which was well-known for its expressive and lyrical melodies in their operas) included elaborate parts for the harp. Towards the second half of the

¹¹ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "The double-action pedal harp" (by Sue Carole DeVale), ed. L. Macy, <<http://www.grovemusic.com>> (Accessed May 6, 2007).

nineteenth century, composers in Germany such as Wagner composed extensively for the harp. He even included six harps in his opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Composers such as Richard Strauss in the twentieth century picked up these traditions and experimented in their own ways. All these will be discussed in detail later.

Celestial Meaning of the Harp

The term "celestial" refers to beings or events that are related to the sky, and by extension, heaven or the divine.¹² In Western operas, the harp is often used to suggest three different kinds of situations. The first one is supernatural, such as witnessing God, an angel, a fairy or the image of heaven. The second concerns the spiritual transformation of characters. The last type is an allusion to purity and involves soothing, healing and purifying effects of the harp, not necessarily involving the sacred per se. All three types are related to each other and can be overlapped in different operas.

¹² *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language online*, 4th ed., s.v. "Celestial," <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/celestial>> (accessed: May 6, 2007).

2. Italian Operas

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Rossini was a major Italian composer who specialized in writing operas in the early nineteenth century. He belonged to the Bel Canto school, which was the predominant style of Italian opera in the beginning of the nineteenth century. "Bel Canto" means "beautiful singing." It first referred to a kind of vocal technique that originated in Italy in the late sixteenth century and reached its peak in the nineteenth century. Bel Canto operas featured extensive ornamentations consisting of fast runs and arpeggios. The three great composers of the Bel Canto School were Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini. Both Rossini and Donizetti's works will be discussed in the following sections.

Mosè in Egitto (1818)

Based on the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament, Rossini wrote an opera about the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt and their final deliverance, crossing the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses. Towards the end of act three, when Moses and the Israelites pray to God for rescue away from Egypt and the army of the Pharaoh, they sing the choral prayer "Dal tuo stellato soglio" ("From Your Starry Throne"). It later became one of the most popular works in the opera.

Rossini wrote the choral prayer for a quartet of voices (Moses, Elcia, Amenofi and Aronne) and chorus. It begins with a short instrumental introduction, played by

the harp and the brass. After a short pause, a harp solo comes in and it accompanies Moses as he sings and seeks for God's help and understanding.

Arpa

Mosè

Dal tuo stel-la - to

Arpa

Mosè

so - glio, Si - gnor, ti vol - gi a no - i: pie - tà de' fi - gli

Figure 1. *Mosè in Egitto*, act three, "Dal tuo stellato soglio."

In figure 1, the harpist plays sixteenth-note arpeggios in the right hand and octaves in the left hand, supporting Moses' melody line. This pattern remains the same throughout the whole choral prayer. Later, the other three solo voices and the chorus join in. They ask God in the prayer to descend from heaven and save them. When each soloist from the quartet sings, only the harp and the woodwinds play. Towards the end of the choral prayer, the whole chorus and quartet sing, supported by the tutti orchestra, symbolizing the unity of the Israelites in asking for God's deliverance. The harp is related celestially in this choral prayer. It symbolizes the

Israelites' prayer and also their strong faith—that God will hear and help them in times of trouble.

¹¹ According to *Exodus 7:19*, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the Nile, and all the Nile will be turned to blood.'"

Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848)

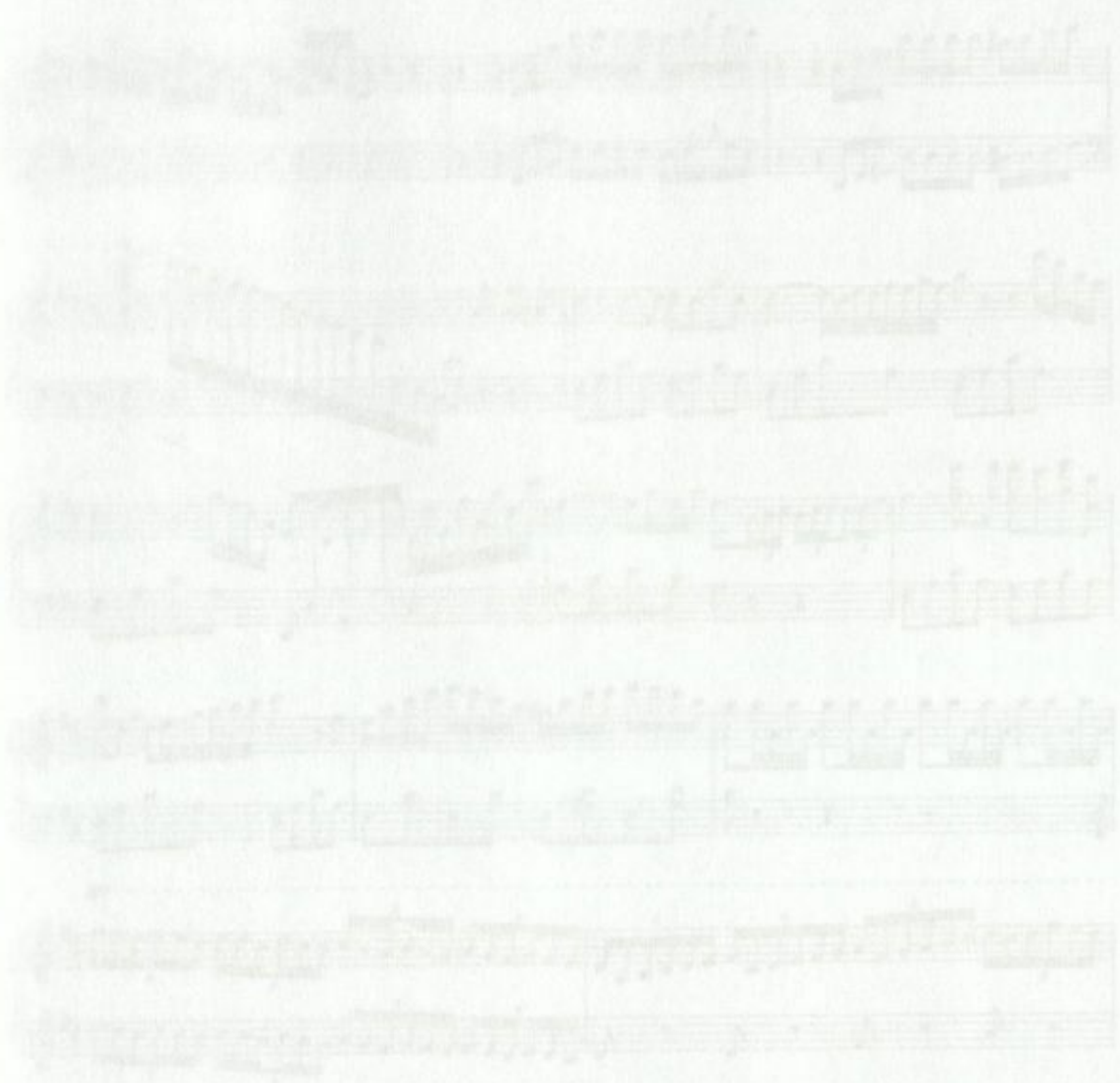
Similarly, Donizetti belonged to the Italian Bel Canto School and was well known for the lyrical quality of his works. He composed his most famous work *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 1835 and the work remains one of the standard pieces in the operatic repertoire.

Lucia di Lammermoor (1835)

Donizetti composed an elaborate and exquisite solo for the harp in act one, scene 2 in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. In the scene, Lucia waits secretly at night by the fountain near her mother's tomb for her lover Edgardo. The orchestra gives a short introduction, followed by scales on the harp. The running scales and the crystal-like sound of the upper register of the harp resemble the sound of the water of the fountain. After several short exchanges between the harp and the orchestra, the solo for the harp begins. Donizetti wrote the piece originally in Eb major; however, nowadays most orchestras choose to play in D major instead. The reason for this is to allow more flexibility and stamina for the soprano who plays Lucia to sing her solo towards the end of the opera, when she becomes mad, and also to permit the soprano to sing some of the notes an octave higher.¹³ The harp part was brilliantly composed. The melody line on the right hand is extremely lyrical. There are also scales, arpeggios, runs and trills which greatly resemble the singing style of the Bel Canto school. Donizetti successfully set the romantic atmosphere of the night by

¹³ According to Elizabeth Cifani, Principal Harpist of Lyric Opera of Chicago.

writing an elaborate harp part. In addition, the harp solo also seems to foretell the lovers' death, as Lucia later sings about how she sees a maiden's ghost while waiting at the fountain, and that the ghost warns her about the tragic ending of her love affair with Edgardo. In this regard, the harp is related to supernatural events as it is associated with the future death of the characters concerned.



ORCH

f *p* *f*

p

8^{va}

Musical score for orchestra, page 12. The score is in 2/4 time and D major. It consists of six systems of music. The first system is marked "ORCH" and features a piano introduction with dynamics *f* and *p*. The second system continues the piano part with dynamics *p*. The third system features a melodic line in the right hand with a fermata and a descending scale. The fourth system continues the melodic line with triplets. The fifth system features a melodic line with sixteenth-note patterns. The sixth system is marked "8va" and features a melodic line with sixteenth-note patterns and a descending scale. The score is written for piano and orchestra.

Figure 2. *Lucia di Lammermoor*, act 1, scene 2, harp solo (Italian version).

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1910)

A well-known Italian patriot and composer whose lifetime spanned almost a century, Verdi continued with the tradition of the Bel Canto school and, in his own way, pushed it even further. Overall, his writing for the harp showed a gradual change in his understanding of the instrument over time. His works can be divided into three main periods. His early to middle works resembled those of his predecessors. In operas such as *Ernani* (1844), *Il trovatore* (1853) and *La traviata* (1853), through which Verdi established his European fame as a composer, he treated the harp mainly as a guitar in order to accompany solo voices on stage.¹⁴ In *Ernani*, which is going to be discussed in details, the harp serves as a major chordal accompaniment to the solo voice. In *Il trovatore*, Verdi wrote an off-stage harp part to imitate the sound of a lute that was played by a troubadour on stage. The troubadour tries to serenade his lover in the opera. In *La traviata*, similarly, Verdi composed a harp part that was played backstage to accompany the tenor serenade.

Ernani (1844)

Ernani was first performed in Venice, Italy in 1844. Verdi adopted the plot from Victor Hugo's play, *Hernani*. Towards the end of act three in *Ernani*, Don Carlo, King of Spain, sings his solo "O sommo Carlo" ("O Great Charles") in front of the tomb of the Charlemagne at Aix-la-Chapelle. Earlier on, Don Carlo conceals himself in the tomb and overhears the conspiracy between Ernani and Silva. They plan to

¹⁴ Francis Irving Travis, *Verdi's Orchestration*. (Zürich: Juris-Verlag, 1956), 52.

assassinate Don Carlo in order to prevent him from being the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire. After Don Carlo realizes that he is being elected by the signal of the shooting of the three canons, he emerges from the tomb which surprises Ernani, Elvira and Silva. The harp enters, accompanying Don Carlo as he sings about forgiving his conspirators with an oration to Charles the Great.

Similar to Rossini's approach in *Mosè in Egitto*, Verdi composed a part that requires the harpist to play eighth-note triplets in the right hand and octaves in the left hand, accompanying Don Carlo's melody line. Later, Elvira, Ernani, Riccardo and Giovanna sing about their gratefulness for Don Carlo's forgiveness. In their singing, they praise Don Carlo's virtue and think his action resembles God, who returns the offenders with oblivion and mercy.

The harp is related celestially in this aria. The harp begins slowly when Don Carlo sings about his decision to learn from the virtues of the Charlemagne and forgive his conspirators. In contrast to prior acts—when Don Carlo constantly pursues Elvira—he finally gives up his pursuit at the end of act three and places Elvira in the hands of Ernani, realizing their true love. He also makes a vow to the Charlemagne and God that he will imitate the great virtues of the Charlemagne. Thus, Verdi intelligently associates the harp with reconciliation, Godly virtues, and peace.

99 Adagio

Arpa

Don Carlo (concentrato,) fissando la tomba di Carlo (Magno)

Oh som - mo Car - lo, più del tuo no - me le tue vir-

103

Arpa

Car.

- tu - di a - ver vo - gl'i - o. Sa - rò, lo giu - ro a te ed a

Vc.

106

Arpa

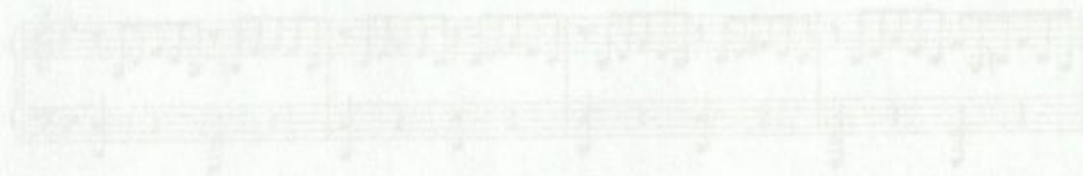
Car.

Di - o, del - le tue ge - - - sta i - mi - ta - tor.

Figure 3. *Ernani*, act 2 scene 6, "O sommo Carlo, più del tuo nome."

La forza del destino (The Force of Destiny) (1862)

Towards the end of this opera, in act four, when Leonora sings her aria "Pace, Pace mio dio" (Peace, peace my God), Verdi designed a harp part to serve as the major accompaniment to Leonora's solo. Verdi marked the tempo *Andante* and the harpist plays slow broken chords in the pattern of eighth notes triplets in the right hand. The left hand plays octaves to support the harmony. The key is mainly Bb major. In the scene, Leonora sings outside the cave in which she has lived for some time. She has become a hermit and has hidden herself from the rest of the world because of her conflicted past. On the one hand she is in love with Don Alvaro, who has accidentally killed her father. On the other hand she has to face her revengeful brother Don Carlo, who is hunting for vengeance for his father's death. In the aria, Leonora seeks peace from God. Right after she starts singing the word "Pace" (peace), the harp enters.



A Andante $\text{♩} = 56$

Leonora: Pa ce.

The musical score is written for piano in a 2/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The tempo is marked 'Andante' with a metronome marking of quarter note = 56. The piece is divided into two sections, A and B. Section A begins with a vocal line for Leonora, with lyrics 'Pa ce.' The vocal line consists of a few notes followed by a long rest. The piano accompaniment starts with a series of chords in the bass and a melodic line in the treble. Section B begins with a new piano accompaniment. The score consists of seven systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The first system includes the vocal line. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplet markings in the first system. The overall mood is calm and reflective.

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of five systems of music. Each system includes a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is marked with a 'C' in a box above the first system and a 'D' in a box above the fifth system. The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The final system concludes with a double bar line.

Figure 4. *La forza del destino*, act 4, scene 6, "Pace, pace mio dio."

The aria begins with a short introduction by the orchestra, playing out the major motive of the opera (which appeared in the Prelude of the opera). When Leonora announces the word "Pace" ("peace"), the harp is played and becomes the main accompaniment of the singer. The atmosphere becomes quiet and meditative as Leonora starts to reveal her thoughts during the aria. The string section starts and supports the singer occasionally. Later on, the orchestra brings back the major theme when Leonora mentions the fact that heaven does not permit the love between her and Don Alvaro on earth, and only death will realize their reunion and grant her peace. The harp stops right after Leonora sings the repeated words "Invan la pace qui sperò quest'alma" ("In vain this soul of mine sought peace"). Her aria ends when she is interrupted by some strange noise nearby and she hurries back into her cave.

In this aria, the harp is associated with peace that Leonora hopes to seek from God. It also seems to have a purifying effect on Leonora's mind as she calmly reveals her struggles and concern. Additionally, the harp also serves to suggest the upcoming death of Leonora, as her libretto keeps asking for peace which seems only possible in heaven.

Aida (1871)

Verdi used the harp to signify heaven and death in *Aida*. Towards the end of act four, Radames is sentenced to death by being trapped inside a tomb and Aida secretly enters the tomb to accompany him. The harp starts to play when Aida begins singing "Vedi? ...di morte l'angelo." ("Do you see angel of death?") The key is Db major. In the beginning, the harpist plays simple eighth notes in the right hand. The harp part then changes to sixteenth-notes arpeggios, playing *pppp* (extremely soft) when Aida sings about seeing heaven's gate opening. The change of rhythmic pattern and dynamic level of the harp part also seems to portray the soft and celestial atmosphere of heaven that Aida experiences in the scene.

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system is marked "Adantfno" and shows a right hand with eighth notes and a left hand with quarter notes. The second system is marked "leggermente" and "pppp", showing a right hand with sixteenth-note arpeggios and a left hand with quarter notes. The third system continues with similar patterns, ending with a fermata on the final note of the right hand.

Figure 5. *Aida*, act 4, tomb scene, rehearsal U.

Verdi included two harp parts in *Aida*. He wrote the first harp to be played in the orchestra pit, when Radames and Aida are singing their duets in the tomb scene. He wrote the second harp part to be played backstage, supporting another action that is happening at the same time on stage. While Radames and Aida are inside the tomb, in the same scene, the audience can see priestesses plucking Egyptian harps and chanting for Radames' death above the tomb. The backstage harp plays simple rolled chords to accompany the choir that is chanting on stage. The use of a second harp part to represent the Egyptian harps on stage shows Verdi's intelligence and understanding of the harp. The second harp part is also celestially associated as the priestesses chant for Radames' and Aida's smooth transitions into heaven.



Figure 6. *Aida*, act 4, tomb scene, rehearsal V to X. (Harp 1 and 2)

The image displays a musical score for two harps, labeled 1 and 2, in a key signature of three flats (E-flat major/C minor) and a common time signature. The score is divided into three systems, each marked with a rehearsal sign (V, X, and X).

- System 1 (Rehearsal V):** Harp 1 begins with a *mf* dynamic, playing a series of chords. Harp 2 is silent until the end of the system, where it enters with a *f* dynamic.
- System 2 (Rehearsal X):** Harp 1 plays a continuous eighth-note accompaniment starting with a *ppp* dynamic. Harp 2 remains silent throughout this system.
- System 3 (Rehearsal X):** Harp 1 is silent. Harp 2 plays a series of chords starting with a *ppp* dynamic.

Figure 6. *Aida*, act 4, tomb scene, rehearsal V to X. (Harp 1 and 2)

Otello (1887)

Verdi also used the harp to symbolize spiritual references in his tragic opera *Otello*. It was Verdi's penultimate opera, based on William Shakespeare's play *Othello*. The compositional style is significantly different from Verdi's previous operas. He also developed a deeper understanding of the harp. He explored a fuller range of the timbre of the harp in order to match the characters' changing emotions and moods.

In act one, scene three, when Desdemona and Otello sing their love duet, it is remarkable to see how Verdi associates Desdemona's soothing presence with the harp. It is also interesting to see how Verdi matches the libretto with the sound of the harp. When Desdemona mentions Otello's difficult past and sings the words "Quando narravi l'esule tua vita, E i fieri eventi e i lunghi tuoi dolor" ("When you told of your life in exile, the fierce events and your long sorrows"), the harpist plays arpeggios in the lowest register of the harp where the wire strings are. Consequently, the sound produced is rather percussive and guitar-like. This darker sound matches closely with the "fierce events" and "long sorrows" of Otello.

The image shows a musical score for the harp and voice. The harp part (Arpa) is in the upper staff, playing arpeggios in the lowest register. The voice part (D.) is in the lower staff, singing the lyrics "Quan - do nar - ra - - vi l'e - su - le tua vi - - ta ei fieri e -". The harp part is marked "p" and "legato".

Figure 7. *Otello*, act 1, scene 3. "Quando narravi l'esule tua vita."

On the other hand, when she sings about how Otello led her into the shining deserts, the harp part suddenly jumps to the upper register and the harpist plays rolled chords, along with the woodwinds that double Desdemona's melody line and the strings that play light tremolos in the background. Verdi also marked the harp part *dolcissimo*, directing the passage to be performed sweeter, softer and with tender emotion. The orchestration overall depicts the vivid picture of a "fulgidi deserti" ("shining deserts") as well as Desdemona's nostalgia of her past with Otello.

The image shows a musical score for the harp and Desdemona's voice. The harp part is written on two staves (treble and bass clefs) and consists of rolled chords in the upper register. The vocal line is written on a single staff (treble clef) and is marked 'dolce'. The lyrics are: 'nar-ravi al-lor gli spa-si-mi soffer-ti e le ca-te-ne e del-lo schia-vo il'.

Figure 8. *Otello*, act 1, scene 3.

Moreover, after Otello sings "Venga la morte!" ("Let death come") and sings about how divine the moment is, Desdemona sings "Disperda il ciel gli affanni" ("let heaven dispel all sorrow"). Right before her entrance, the harp plays *pianissimo* arpeggiated chords. The harp is once again associated with heaven. It also reflects the healing power that Desdemona possesses. She and the harp seem to be able to "dispel all sorrows" of Otello.

Arpa

D.
- sper - da il ciel gli af - fan - ni e A-mor non mu-ti col mu-tar de

O.

Figure 9. *Otello*, act 1, scene 3, rehearsal XX.

Finally, one last symbolic reference occurs towards the end of the aria, when Otello says, “Venere splende” (“Venus is shining”). The harpist plays thirty-second note arpeggios in both hands in the high register of the harp to produce a bright and celestial sound, representing the Goddess Venus. The key is Db major. The sound of the open strings of the harp makes a bright and ecstatic ending to act one.

Arpa

D.
O - tel-

O.
Vien... Ve - ne - re splen -

mf
dolcissimo

Arpa

(s'avviano abbracciati verso il castello)

D. lo!

O. de.

Figure 10. *Otello*, act 1 scene 3, rehearsal ZZ.

Overall, the harp is used to represent Venus, heaven, as well as Desdemona's soothing presence to Otello as she comforts him about his difficult past in this love duet.

Falstaff (1893)

Falstaff was Verdi's final opera before his death. As with *Otello*, Verdi based his story plot on a Shakespeare play, "The Merry Wives of Windsor," and he employed the same librettist, Arrigo Boito. However, *Falstaff* was a comic opera instead of a tragic one.

In the opera, Verdi showed a significant change in his style of writing for the harp. Not only did he postpone introducing the instrument till the last act of the opera, but also he introduced a harp technique that was new in his operas: harmonics. Instead of treating the harp like a chordal accompaniment (which he liked to do before in other operas such as *Ernani*, *Il trovatore*, *La forza del destino*, *Aida*, or even *Otello*), Verdi created unique tone colors for the harp in *Falstaff*.

In act three, the harp comes in when Falstaff thinks he sees the fairy queen, who is actually Nanetta in disguise. Falstaff assumes he will die very soon after seeing the fairy queen. Verdi successfully established this surreal and dreamlike atmosphere by having the harp play harmonics on the bass wires, doubling the melody with the bass clarinet. This is a rather unusual approach to harp writing. Normally, composers compose harmonics around the middle register of the harp but seldom in the lower register (where the bass wire strings are). Thus, Verdi created unique tone colors by blending the harmonics of the harp's lower wire strings with the sound of the bass clarinet.

Figure 11 consists of five systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The key signature is G major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system starts with a boxed number '35' in the upper left. The first two measures of the first system are marked *ppp*. The second system includes a *p* dynamic and features a triplet in the bass line and a slur in the treble line. The third system has a *pp* dynamic and includes a triplet in the bass line. The fourth system also has a *pp* dynamic. The fifth system has a *pp* dynamic. The score concludes with an *8va* marking above the final notes.

Figure 11. Aebi, op. 3, "Su il d'un soffio etico", rehearsal no. 35-37

In Nanetta's busy queen aria, "Sul fil d'un soffio etesio" (On the breath of an Etesian breeze), Nanetta sings about the magical dances of the song. Towards the

The image displays a musical score for two systems. The first system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The first system begins with a *ppp* dynamic marking. The melody in the treble clef starts with a quarter rest, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, B4, and C5. The bass line consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system of the first system features a *p* dynamic marking and includes a fermata over the first measure, with a '2' above the staff indicating a second ending. The second system of the score is more complex, featuring triplets in both staves. The treble clef has a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) followed by a triplet of eighth notes (C5, B4, A4). The bass clef has a triplet of eighth notes (G3, A3, B3) followed by a triplet of eighth notes (C4, B3, A3). The piece concludes with a final triplet of eighth notes in the bass clef (G3, A3, B3).

Figure 11. *Falstaff*, act 3, "Sul fil d'un soffio etesio", rehearsal no.35-37.

In Nanetta's fairy queen aria, "Sul fil d'un soffio etesio" (On the breath of an Etesian breeze), Nanetta sings about the magical dances of the song. Towards the end, when she pronounces magical incarnations and charms, the harp brings out the main theme by imitating the melody of the flutes. Later, the aria ends with several harmonics in the lower register of the harp. Verdi chose to end the magical encounter of Sir Falstaff with the unique tone colors of the harp, as if to suggest that Falstaff has totally been charmed by the enchantment of the sound of the harp.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the end of Act 3 of Falstaff. The first system, labeled 'W', shows a piano introduction in D major and common time. The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system, labeled 'X', continues the piano introduction with more complex melodic lines in both hands. The score is written in a standard musical notation style with a treble and bass clef.

Figure 12. *Falstaff*, end of act 3, W-X.

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

Puccini was another traditional Italian composer but he established his own compositional style that bore a signature of the early twentieth century. Unlike Verdi, who mainly treated the harp as a chordal accompaniment, Puccini wrote relatively weightier and more elaborate parts for the harp. However, most of them either double other instruments (especially the woodwinds) or blend in very well with the rest of the orchestra. In two of his one-act operas, *Gianni Schicchi* and *Suor Angelica* in *Il trittico* (1918) there are some exposed and elaborate solos for the harp. In *Gianni Schicchi*, Puccini wrote the famous aria "O mio babbino caro" ("O, my dearest papa") for the character Laretta. In the aria, Laretta pleads with her father Gianni Schicchi to allow her to marry her lover. The harp serves as the major accompaniment to the soprano and the instrument represents the innocence of Laretta.

Suor Angelica (1918)

Puccini's *Suor Angelica* means "Sister Angelica". It refers to the main character in the opera, Angelica, who is a Catholic nun. *Suor Angelica* belongs to the three one-act operas in *Il trittico*: *Il tabarro*, *Suor Angelica*, and *Gianni Schicchi*. The name *Il trittico* means triptych, which is "usually a picture or carving in three hinged sections."¹⁵ These short operas are emotionally charged works.

¹⁵ Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Puccini: A Critical Guide*. (New York: Atheneum, 1982), 219.

In *Suor Angelica* there is a particularly strong association between the harp and Catholicism. According to Charles Osborne, religion and other supernatural topics have never been common subjects in Puccini's works.¹⁶ Thus, *Suor Angelica* was the first opera in which Puccini associated the harp with heaven or spiritual transformation. It is uncertain why Puccini had this religious allusion in mind, but one hypothesis is that Puccini was influenced by Verdi, who included many heavenly allusions with the harp in his later works. In Sister Angelica's aria, "Senza mamma, o bimbo, tu sei morto," she sings about the possibility of meeting her son in heaven. The harp brings out the main theme of the melody, which was used later and further developed by other instruments in the orchestra. It is written in F major, and the harp softly enters in *sostenuto* (sustained), *dolce* and *legato* (sweet and smooth) while Sister Angelica sings about her son, "an angel in heaven".

¹⁶ Osborne, *Complete Operas of Puccini*, 232.

60

pp

4

quanto t'ua -mava questa
tua mamma!

4

61 A tempo ma
ben sostenuto

pp

pp

pp

Un poco meno sostenuto

p

Figure 11. *Sac Agnello*, rehearsal no. 4-62

Later when Sister Angelica beholds the Virgin Mary (Mother of Jesus Christ)



Figure 13. *Suor Angelica*, rehearsal no.60-62.

Later, when Sister Angelica believes the Virgin Mary (Mother of Jesus Christ) has descended from heaven and shines around her; the harp enters again, playing arpeggios in thirty-second notes. The key is mainly C major, although it shifts back and forth to G major occasionally. Overall, the part sounds quite joyful and hopeful, which matches closely with the words Sister Angelica is singing.



64 Moderato con moto

The image displays a musical score for exercise 64, titled "Moderato con moto". The score is written for piano and consists of five systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The tempo is marked "Moderato con moto" and the dynamics are marked "p" (piano). The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with sixteenth and thirty-second notes, often beamed together. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes several measures with sixteenth-note runs and sixteenth-note chords. The first system begins with a piano dynamic marking. The second system includes a measure with a sixteenth-note chord marked with a "6" and a slur. The third system continues the sixteenth-note runs. The fourth system includes a measure with a sixteenth-note chord marked with a "6" and a slur. The fifth system concludes the exercise with a final measure.

The most vivid example portraying the ethereal quality of the harp is perhaps

poco allarg'

mf

a tempo

poco allargando

65

3

3

Figure 14. *Suor Angelica*, rehearsal no. 64-65.

The most vivid example portraying the ethereal quality of the harp is perhaps at the end of the opera, when it concludes with running arpeggios and rolled chords in the upper register of the harp. At this point, Sister Angelica has already drunk poison. She irrationally hopes that by suicide, she will be able to see her child in heaven. What she does not realize is, according to Catholicism, committing suicide prevents a person from going to heaven. Instantly, Sister Angelica suddenly realizes this fact and starts praying to the Virgin Mary for forgiveness of her suicidal sin. Angelica believes that the Virgin, who is also a mother herself, will understand Angelica's love and longing for her own child. The harp, combining with the choir and the organ at the end of the opera, signifies the spiritual transformation of Sister Angelica. She envisions the Virgin Mary holding a child as the poison gradually takes her life away. However, she happily welcomes heaven's gate opening for her—as she will finally be able to unite with her beloved son in heaven.

82

Musical score for measure 82, piano part. The score is in 4/4 time and features a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a steady bass line.

Musical score for measures 82-83, piano part. The score is in 4/4 time and features a forte (*ff*) dynamic. The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a steady bass line. The measure number 83 is indicated above the staff.

83

Musical score for measure 83, piano part. The score is in 4/4 time and features a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a steady bass line. The measure number 83 is indicated above the staff.

Musical score for measures 83-84, piano part. The score is in 4/4 time and features a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a steady bass line. The measure number 83 is indicated above the staff.

Musical score for measures 84-85, piano part. The score is in 4/4 time and features a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a steady bass line. The measure number 84 is indicated above the staff.

84 *pp*

(8^{va})

ppp

pppp

Figure 15. *Suor Angelica*, rehearsal no. 82-84.

3. French Operas

Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

Carmen (1875)

Bizet, a French composer, created his opera *Carmen* in 1875, and it later became one of his most popular works. He composed a mezzo-soprano part for the major role of Carmen. Bizet scored for either one or two harps in his opera, but the second harp doubles the first harp part. In general, Bizet did not write a very complicated part for the harp. It was rather straight-forward and simple. The harp seems to represent purity and innocence in the opera.

In act one, the harp accompanies the duet of Micaëla and Don José, "Parle-moi de ma mère!" (Speak to me of my mother!) In the duet, Micaëla talks about how Don José's mother asked her (after church one day) to deliver a letter to Don José. The harp part begins when Micaëla sings about Don José's mother dreaming about her son all the time. The harpist plays arpeggios with both hands and serves as a chordal accompaniment to Micaëla's solo. The part stops when Micaëla tells Don José that his mother also asked Micaëla to bring him a kiss. The harp symbolizes Micaëla's purity and also Don José's innocent past. The part is also rather spiritual in the sense that it is tied with a mother's prayer and best wishes for her son, which in turn gives him the strength and courage that he needs at that point in the opera. (Don José has just been seduced by Carmen)

Allegro Moderato

Figure 16. *Carmen*, act 1, scene 7, "Parle-moi de ma mère!"

Moreover, in the entr'acte before act three, Bizet composed a harp part to accompany a flute solo, which plays the main melody. The harp plays a very simple accompaniment and supports the harmony that remains almost the same throughout the piece. The duet later joins and is supported by the orchestra as the music

develops. The entr'acte ends with a repeat of the flute and harp duet. The key is Eb major.

The musical score is presented in five systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is three flats (Eb major) and the time signature is common time (C). The first system is marked *pp*. The second system includes the tempo marking *un peu moto* and the dynamic marking *p*. The music consists of a repeating melodic motif in the treble clef and a supporting bass line in the bass clef.

Figure 17. Carmen, entr'acte to act 3

The musical score is presented in six systems, each consisting of a treble and bass staff. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes the following dynamic markings and articulations:

- System 1: *cresc.* (crescendo)
- System 2: *dim.* (diminuendo)
- System 3: *f* (forte) in the bass staff, *dim.* (diminuendo) in the treble staff
- System 4: *p* (piano) in the bass staff
- System 5: *pp* (pianissimo) in the bass staff

The score concludes with a double bar line and fermatas on the final notes of both staves in the sixth system.

Figure 17. *Carmen*, entr'acte to act 3.

At the end of act two, Don José has just fallen in love with Carmen. By composing a flute and harp duet prior to the beginning of act three, Bizet established a pure and innocent atmosphere. It seems to suggest the calming and soothing effect of the harp. Bizet used the sound of the harp to clear up the chaos that just happened in act two and to prepare the audience for act three.

Thais, throughout the opera. Thais was an Egyptian courtesan who lived her life for lust and pleasure. Later she was converted into a holy ascetic by the monk Athanasi.

At the end of act two scene one, Athanasi has just asked Thais to repent for her life. Thais, in solitude, is disgusted by her sinful past and starts to repent. Bizet wrote an orchestral interlude that included an elaborate harp part as well as a violin solo and named it "Méditation religieuse." Written in the key of D major, the interlude is simple and beautiful. The harp accompaniment adds a very ethereal effect to the whole piece. This interlude serves as a symbol of Thais' repentance, a rather significant moment as she changes her heart and begins to long for Jesus Christ whole heartedly.

The lyrical and meditative theme from the interlude recurs a few times during the opera (in different keys), but the most powerful example is the end when Thais is about to die and environs God. Bizet composed a duet to be sung by Athanasi and Thais in counterpoint with the original violin solo. Thais begins the aria by singing "C'est toi, mon père!" ("Is that you, my father?") At this point, Thais has crossed the desert with Athanasi in a monastery where she will spend the rest of her

Jules Massenet (1842-1912)

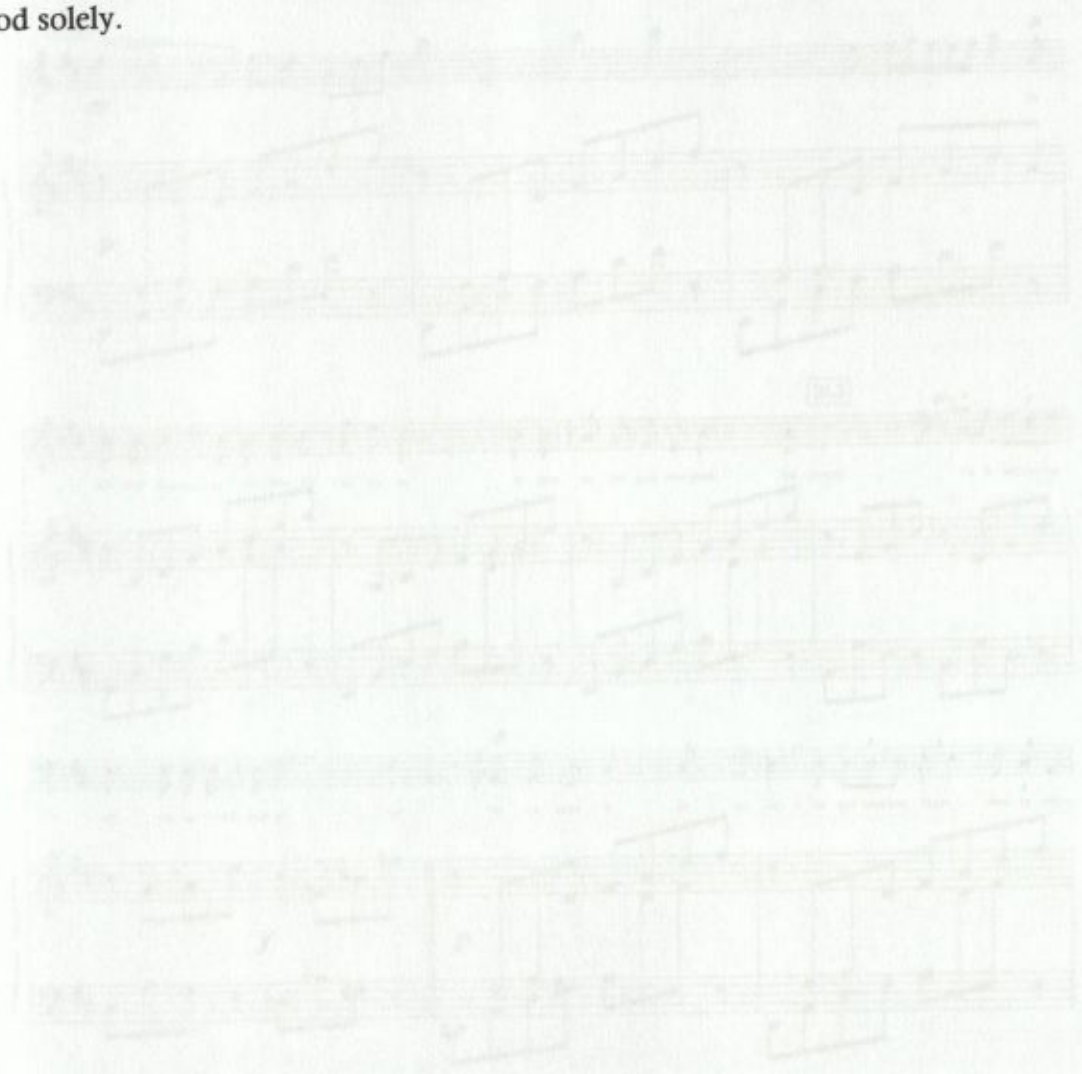
Thaïs (1894)

The opera *Thaïs*, composed by Massenet, is perhaps one of the most prominent examples of the celestial association of the harp. Massenet frequently used the harp to relate to the redemption and spiritual transformation of the main character, Thaïs, throughout the opera. Thaïs was an Egyptian courtesan who lived her life for lust and pleasure. Later she was converted into a holy ascetic by the monk Athanaël.

At the end of act two scene one, Athanaël has just asked Thaïs to repent for her life. Thaïs, in solitude, is disgusted by her sinful past and starts to repent. Massenet wrote an orchestral interlude that included an elaborate harp part as well as a violin solo and named it "Méditation religieuse." Written in the key of D major, the interlude is simple and beautiful. The harp accompaniment adds a very ethereal effect to the whole piece. This interlude serves as a symbol of Thaïs' repentance, a rather significant moment as she changes her heart and begins to long for Jesus Christ whole-heartedly.

The lyrical and meditative theme from the interlude recurs a few times during the opera (in different keys), but the most powerful example is the end when Thaïs is about to die and envisions God. Massenet composed a duet to be sung by Athanaël and Thaïs in counterpoint with the original violin solo. Thaïs begins the aria by singing "C'est toi, mon père!" ("Is that you, my father?") At this point, Thaïs has crossed the desert with Athanaël to a monastery where she will spend the rest of her

life. However, she is deathly ill by the time Athanaël comes to visit. In the duet, while Thaïs mentions how much she loves God and how she sees angels and prophets waiting for her, Athanaël sings about how much he loves her as a woman. There is a sharp contrast in their libretto. Athanaël changes from platonic to physical love for Thaïs—while Thaïs transforms from longing for earthly pleasures to loving God solely.



p Tha - is' *pp* C'est tel, non pe - is'

The first system consists of a vocal line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics 'Tha - is' and 'C'est tel, non pe - is'. The piano accompaniment is mostly silent, with some faint notes visible.

262 *pp* *p*

1st Violin Solo

The second system features a violin solo in the upper staff, marked '1st Violin Solo' and 'pp'. The piano accompaniment in the lower staff is marked 'p' and consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

263 *p*

son vient il de l'eau de la fou-tu se dent tu lui gras mes pieds son gueris' 7a la sold' au ve

The third system contains a vocal line with lyrics: 'son vient il de l'eau de la fou-tu se dent tu lui gras mes pieds son gueris' 7a la sold' au ve'. The piano accompaniment continues with the same eighth-note pattern.

p *f* *p*

re de la haute mer tel tel Tu son vient il de ces dat - tes que tout tout l'homme dans la fin -

The fourth system continues the vocal line with lyrics: 're de la haute mer tel tel Tu son vient il de ces dat - tes que tout tout l'homme dans la fin -'. The piano accompaniment has a dynamic change from 'p' to 'f' and back to 'p'.

264

chœur de To - u - tel Ah! - le me souviens soule ment de - voir te voir à ma pa - ce Dées tu se -

piu f *f*

265

ra - tu pa - re - ment sur tout le sou - vent il de les saint - les pa - ro - les En ce

p

266

jour ou, par toi, Tu con - ti - le seul a - mour! Quand tu par -

piu p

le Je r ai men - ti! Et la voi - la l'au - - - - - tel Je r ai men - ti Et les voi - la les

mf *piu f*

267

tu - ses de Te - ter - nel ma - jor! Non, le ciel... rien s'a - sis - te... Remontre la vie et que l'annonce

e - ter - nel Je su - crist! Le ciel son - strer Voi - si les an - ges

268

et les an - ges et les saints! Ils vien - tent a - voir

un son - ne - re, Les saints tou - te plus des deuses! Entendez vous Ma voix et ai - Donnez sa -

269

plano

mf

Man - ches - tu -

8^{va}

plu

ches - tu -

8^{va}

fort

ces - tu -

ces - tu -

Figure 18 shows a musical score for a scene in *Thaïs*. The score consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in G major and 4/4 time, with lyrics "I OUS" and "Vies!". The piano accompaniment features a harp-like texture with a forte (*f*) dynamic marking. The score is numbered 271.

Figure 18. *Thaïs*, act 3 scene 3.

In essence, the harp in *Thaïs* represents the religious transformation of Thaïs: she changes from a hedonistic, pleasure-seeking courtesan to a religious person who only believes in the love of God. The harp also acts as an instrument of redemption: Thaïs redeems her sins as a prostitute by suffering in the desert and through her own death at the end.

4. German Operas

Two major operatic composers of German heritage during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss. Both of them were famous for composing for the opera and were both interested in programmatic music. Interestingly, both of them were also well known for their rather demanding harp parts. Their compositions imposed many challenges for harpists. Some of the works, despite their difficulties, successfully used the harp and helped enhance dramatic effects on stage.

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Wagner's operas in general featured many harp parts, yet some of them were also notorious for their difficulties. Earlier operas, such as *Tannhäuser* (1845), imposed tremendous demands on the harpist due to the chromaticism of the music, extremely fast passages and the great length of the parts. However, Wagner effectively composed harp parts that enhanced dramatic effects on stage in his later works— such as *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1867) and *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. One famous example is his use of six harps to imitate the magic fire in the end of *Die Walküre* (1856), the second opera from *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

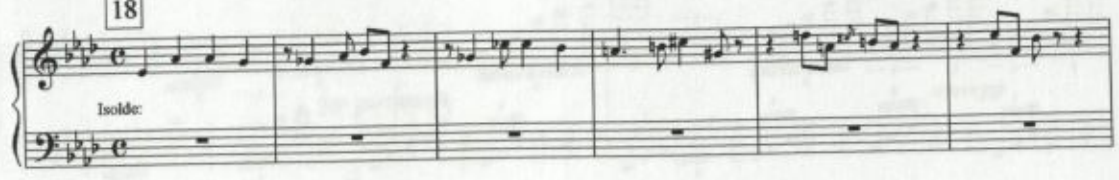
Tristan und Isolde (1857)

In the final scene of the opera *Tristan und Isolde* (1857), when Isolde sees the dead body of Tristan, she sings the famous aria "Liebestod" ("Love-death"). At the sight of Tristan's death, Isolde is spiritually transformed, and a rather elaborate harp part accompanies the aria along with the orchestra. The harp enters after Isolde sings the words "sternumstrahlet hoch sich hebt" ("Raising himself high amidst the stars"). Wagner closely composed the harp part to match the meaning of the libretto of Isolde. The harp enters again with a rolled chord after nine measures of rest when Isolde sings the words "wonnig mild, süsser Atem" ("joyously tender, sweet breath"). The harp then continues with sixteenth notes triplets, marked *dolce* (sweet) to underscore the joy that Isolde is experiencing.

Later, at rehearsal letter H, the orchestra takes up a more dominant role when it brings out the main theme, and the harp part, marked *fortissimo* (loud), blends in with the orchestra and pushes the music to its climax. Towards the end, the harp part becomes exposed once more as Isolde sings the last four words: "ertrinken" (to drown), "versinken" (to sink), "unbewusst" (unconscious) and "höchste Lust!" (Highest bliss). Towards the end, Isolde gradually loses consciousness and dies next to Tristan, with the harp rolling the last two chords, ending the whole aria.

18

Isolde:



wa - er leuch - tet. *pp*



19

20

müht - si *pp*



21

più pp



Gg

p *poco cresc.*



dim.



22

pp *sempre pp*

morendo

Hh

f *p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

cresc.

pp *cresc.*

The musical score consists of seven systems of piano accompaniment. The first system shows a complex texture with triplets in both hands. The second system begins with measure 23, marked with a box, and features a melodic line in the right hand with triplets. The third system continues with intricate triplet patterns. The fourth system includes a *dim.* marking. The fifth system features a *pia p* marking. The sixth system begins with measure 24, marked with a box, and includes a *pp* marking. The seventh system concludes with a double bar line and a *pp* marking, showing a final chordal structure with a fermata.

Figure 19. *Tristan und Isolde*, act 3 scene 3, "Liebestod"

Similar to *Thaïs*, the harp is related to the spiritual transformation of Isolde the moment she sees Tristan's dead body in front of her. Instead of grieving over Tristan's body, she is ecstatic and joyful about his death. The love between her and Tristan is not permitted on earth because Isolde is already engaged to King Marke. Thus the lovers can only unite in another life. Moreover, their love for each other is so strong that it seems to be able to overcome death and surpasses life. The aria brings out the power of love (instead of religion) that can transform a person spiritually.

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Strauss was another German composer who was famous for his extremely difficult writing for the harp. For example, he wrote the parts for the harp in his opera *Salome* (1905) in a rather pianistic way that did not fit the harp very well. As Salome gradually removes her veils in her dance of the seven veils, the harpists have to play chords on every beat of the measure— with both hands jumping from one register to the next. The extremely chromatic parts also require a frequent change of pedals. In certain measures one has to change the notes enharmonically in order to make the pedal changes possible. In general, the harp writing is rather ineffective—as it imposes a lot of unnecessary stress for the harpists concerned.

Der Rosenkavalier (The Cavalier of the Rose) (1910)

It was not until the opera *Der Rosenkavalier* that Strauss showed a much better understanding of the harp as an instrument. The harp parts are simpler in general, perhaps because the opera is set in the court of the eighteenth century Vienna. Strauss composed two harp parts for this opera.

The harp is, again, related to the spiritual transformation of the characters in this opera. At the end of the opera, Sophie and Octavian are able to reunite and the two young lovers sing their love duet. The harps come in soon after the former lover of Octavian, the Marschallin, blesses the newfound love of Octavian and Sophie. The harps play a short introduction and begin the aria "Ist ein Traum/Spür'nur dich, allein" ("It is a dream/I feel only you"). Both lovers are ecstatic about their love, and they cannot believe it is true. The libretto of Octavian and Sophie is remarkably different. While Sophie cannot believe that she and Octavian can finally be together for eternity, Octavian sings that he only loves Sophie, and everything else was just a dream.

The key is G major. Strauss also marked the section *Andante tranquillo*. While the first harp plays simple chordal patterns, the second harp plays double harmonics. They are represented by small circles on top of the notes concerned in the score (Figure 18). The harmonic sounds an octave higher than the note notated on the page. Both first and second harp parts double the melodies of the singers, thus enriching the harmonies. Overall, the harp parts provide accompaniment for the

singers in a very gentle and subtle manner, which creates an everlasting and almost surreal moment at the end of the opera.

In conclusion, the harp parts serve as a symbol of spiritual transformation of both of the characters concerned. Similar to Tristan and Isolde, Octavian and Sophie are renewed by the blissfulness of their love. Furthermore, the harp is related to heaven. Sophie sings "bang wie an der himmlischen Schwel!" ("I am in awe as if I were at the gate of heaven!")

297 ♩ = 69

Harp 1

Harp 2

p *pp* *p*

Hp. 1

Hp. 2

Musical score for two harp parts, Hp. 1 and Hp. 2, measures 295-299. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 12/8. Hp. 1 has a melodic line with eighth-note patterns and rests. Hp. 2 provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes.

Hp. 1

Hp. 2

Musical score for two harp parts, Hp. 1 and Hp. 2, measures 298-302. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 12/8. Measure 298 is marked with a box containing the number 298. Hp. 1 has a melodic line with eighth-note patterns and rests. Hp. 2 provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. Dynamics include *p* and *pp*.

The image shows a musical score for two harp parts, Hp. 1 and Hp. 2, from the opera *Der Rosenkavalier*, act 3, rehearsal no. 297-298. The score is written in G major and 3/4 time. Hp. 1 begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Hp. 2 begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and features a chordal accompaniment in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Both parts conclude with a final chord and a fermata.

Figure 20. *Der Rosenkavalier*, act 3. Rehearsal no.297-298

5. Conclusion

Despite their different cultural backgrounds and time periods, composers in the history of Western music unanimously used the harp to signify heavenly images, the spiritual transformation of characters, as well as purity and peace. These concepts relate closely with each other and overlap. First of all, the harp is related to prayer, heavenly images, and the supernatural. In *Mosè in Egitto*, Rossini relates the harp with Moses and the Israelites' prayer to God. Similarly, in *La forza del destino*, the harp accompanies Leonora as she prays to God for inner strength and peace. In the duet between Micaëla and Don José in act one of *Carmen*, the harp is related to Don José's mother's prayer and love for her son. In *Suor Angelica*, the harp is associated with Sister Angelica's prayer to the Virgin Mary for forgiveness. In *Thaïs*, a lengthy harp solo accompanies the violin as *Thaïs*, an Egyptian courtesan reflects on her sinful past in "Méditation religieuse" of act two. Moreover, the same theme comes back as she experiences angels and God at the end of the opera. In *Aida*, the Egyptians pluck the harps as they chant and pray for the smooth transition of Radames to heaven. In *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the harp is associated with Lucia seeing the spirit at the fountain in act one. In *Otello*, the harp is used to symbolize the goddess Venus at the end of the love duet between Otello and Desdemona in act one. Finally, in *Falstaff*, the harp is played when Falstaff thinks he sees a fairy and is charmed by it. Overall, the harp is connected with prayer, Godly images, and fairies.

Secondly, the harp is related to the spiritual transformation of the characters concerned. In *Thaïs*, the spiritual epiphany of the major protagonist *Thaïs* is best

symbolized with the harp solo in both act two and at the end. In *Suor Angelica*, Sister Angelica experiences God and goes through a spiritual revelation at the end of the opera because of her prayer. The transformation is represented by the harp, the choir and other percussion instruments. In *Tristan und Isolde*, Isolde encounters an epiphany within herself upon seeing the dead body of her beloved Tristan in her solo aria "Liebestod." Last but not least, in *Der Rosenkavalier*, the harp is used to highlight the spiritual transformation of Sophie and Octavian. They are very consumed by their new found love and the harp parts best illustrate their passion.

Third, the harp is closely linked with peace and harmony and its ability to soothe, purify, and heal in the operas. In *La forza del destino*, the harp is related to the "peace" that Leonora seeks. In *Ermani*, the harp is connected with reconciliation and peace between the conspirators and Don Carlo. In *Otello*, the harp seems to represent Desdemona's soothing personality as she calms Otello when they discuss their past in the love duet in act one. In the entr'acte to act three of *Carmen*, a harp and flute duet is played to clean up the chaotic atmosphere of the previous act.

Overall, the three different categories of celestial association of the harp overlap within operas. For instance, *Otello* uses the harp as both an association to the supernatural as well as an instrument of healing. On the other hand, in *Carmen*, the harp is both related to prayer as well as an instrument that can purify the atmosphere. Both examples show that the meanings of "celestial" are rather broad and closely allied with one another.

In conclusion, the harp has been an archetypal symbol of spirituality and healing since ancient times. It has been an instrument of peace and has been associated with heaven, angels and the supernatural. My dissertation aspires to shed light on the role and meaning of the harp to both harpists and non-harpists alike. I also hope that the observations made in this paper will help to fill in the gaps in harp and music scholarship, and inspire more research to be conducted on the relationship between the harp and the opera.

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