

Kunstdiva versus Stimmediva

Callas and Sutherland in Bellini's *Norma*

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GNTLEA001

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this dissertation is to analyse the balance between interpretative and vocal ability in bel canto opera, which is traditionally considered as the principal domain of the *Stimmediva*. The dissertation includes a survey of the characteristics of bel canto, Bellini's contribution to it and the performance history of his opera *Norma*. Furthermore, it investigates the German differentiation between *Kunstdiva* and *Stimmediva* as exemplified by two major sopranos of the twentieth century, Maria Callas and Joan Sutherland. Callas's performance of *Norma* is universally recognised as a watershed in the performance history of this role, and Sutherland is widely regarded as her most important immediate successor. Their distinct approaches to the *scena* from Act 1 of *Norma* are contrasted and compared. Three respondents were asked to evaluate recordings of this *scena* by these two artists with regard to style, technique and interpretation. Their responses are presented in table format, and a discussion of the insights that emerge from these form the final part of the dissertation. The conclusion notes the primacy of interpretative ability in the appreciation of vocal performance even within the bel canto style, but argues for a complete integration of dramatic and vocal skills in order to arrive at the ideal interpretation.

Key words: Bel canto; Bellini; Callas; Casta diva; Fine al rito, e il sacro bosco...Ah! bello a me ritorna; *Kunstdiva*; *Norma*; *Scena*; Sediziose voci; *Stimmediva*; Sutherland.

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“People usually complain that music is so ambiguous, and what they are supposed to think when they hear it is so unclear, while words are understood by everyone. But for me it is exactly the opposite...what the music I love expresses to me are thoughts not too indefinite for words, but rather too definite.” – Felix Mendelssohn (n.d)

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Personal background	1
1.2	Rationale of this dissertation	1
1.3	Research question.....	2
1.4	The objective of this dissertation.....	3
1.5	Literature review	3
1.5.1	Interpretation	3
1.5.2	Bel canto	7
1.5.3	Bellini and Norma	8
1.5.4	Interpreters of Norma	9
1.6	Key research concepts	11
1.6.1	Emotion and music	12
1.6.2	Interpretation	13
1.6.3	The relation between music and text	20
1.7	Delimitations of this dissertation.....	23
1.8	Research process	23
1.9	Challenges encountered during the development of the research	24
1.10	Definitions of key terms and concepts	24
2	Bel canto	27
2.1	What is bel canto?	27
2.2	The two pillars of bel canto.....	29
2.2.1	Legato	29
2.2.2	Messa di voce	30
2.3	Components of bel canto.....	31
2.3.1	Beauty of sound and pure, resonant tone.....	31

2.3.2	Effective breath control	32
2.3.3	Pure vowels	34
2.4	Singers on bel canto	35
3	Bellini and <i>Norma</i>	37
3.1	Bellini’s compositional style	37
3.2	<i>Norma</i>	38
3.2.1	The challenges of the role of <i>Norma</i>	39
4	Interpreters of <i>Norma</i>	41
4.1	Interpreters of <i>Norma</i> before Callas	41
4.2	Callas	42
4.2.1	Background.....	42
4.2.2	Callas’s <i>Norma</i>	48
4.3	Sutherland.....	55
4.3.1	Background.....	55
4.3.2	Sutherland’s <i>Norma</i>	58
4.4	Other interpreters of <i>Norma</i> after Callas	60
5	Analysis of the responses to the questionnaire	63
5.1	Section A – Technical, musical and interpretative aspects	63
5.2	Section B – Comparative questions.....	63
6	Conclusion	79
7	Reference list	82
8	Appendix A – Vocal score of the <i>scena</i> from Act 1 of Bellini’s <i>Norma</i>	86

1 Introduction

1.1 Personal background

With this dissertation, I want to investigate the factors that contribute to a convincing portrayal when listening to a performance by an opera singer. In other words, what is it that makes one want to listen to a performer? The factors that seem to contribute to such a portrayal are aptly described by Singher (1983:xvi), who sums up the essence of what I feel every opera singer should aspire to. He holds the view that a singer's greatest gift is not necessarily the quality of her vocal instrument, but that a good interpreter applies a vibrant, creative intellect and innate passion to a palette of musical and dramatic devices in order to express the various emotional states that a character may experience in a role.

When on-stage, it is essential for me to express the imaginative fusion of the music and the words intended by the composer. As an interpreter, I strive to communicate what I have by reflection, instinct and study come to believe represents the intentions of the composer and the librettist. To make the audience experience the inspired vision of the creative team is my interpretative objective. This intense communication with the audience is vital to me, despite the fact that it can be easily disregarded in favour of vocal prowess only, especially in the context of a singing competition. One has to ask oneself if good singing is not equally or even primarily about the interpretative value of a performance. Is it not this that truly communicates to an audience? Conversely, could a performance be carried chiefly by impressive vocal ability? This duality is represented very clearly by the strikingly different approaches of two of the greatest sopranos of the twentieth century, American-born Greek soprano, Maria Callas (1923-1977) and Australian-born coloratura soprano Joan Sutherland (1926-2010). When people talk about Callas, they immediately refer to her impressive interpretative ability; when they talk about Sutherland, they refer mostly to her strong vocal ability. I hope that through this dissertation, I can address some of the issues raised by this divergence in approach to vocal performance.

1.2 Rationale of this dissertation

The aria "Casta diva" from Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma* is perhaps the quintessential bel canto aria in the dramatic coloratura Fach. Flanked by the recitative "Sediziose voci" and the cabaletta "Fine al rito, e il sacro bosco...Ah! bello a me ritorna", it forms the central part of the *scena* in Act 1, which may be regarded as representative of many of the challenges of the role. Both Callas and Sutherland imbued the role of Norma, which can be regarded as the Mount Everest in the operatic soprano's repertoire, with their own individuality, and the differences in their interpretations of the *scena* can to a large

extent be regarded as emblematic of their approach to the role and to bel canto in general. I chose Sutherland, not only because she is perhaps the immediate successor of Callas, but because she is the soprano whose approach was most in contrast to that of Callas in the bel canto repertoire and as a singer. These two singers represent in its clearest form the constant tension between the requirements of interpretation and technique.

By analysing the responses of a panel of three experts, this dissertation will investigate and compare the two documented performances of the *scena* in order to define their strengths and weaknesses, and to provide guidance which would aid a prospective Norma in arriving at an interpretation as close to ideal as possible. As a young opera singer, I regard the Fach of the dramatic coloratura soprano as a direction in which I may develop. Norma is usually regarded as the greatest role in this Fach and Callas as its prime exponent. I am therefore keen to investigate and compare how Callas and her most immediate successor in this Fach, Sutherland, dealt with its challenges on a dramatic and vocal level. As my biggest interest lies in the integration of the singer and the actress, it would have been optimal to use audio-visual recordings for this study. However, since no audio-visual record is available of Callas's interpretation, I decided to rely exclusively on audio documentations.

1.3 Research question

To what extent do the interpretations of Callas and Sutherland of the *scena* from Act I of Bellini's *Norma* provide us with insight into the ideal balance between interpretative and vocal abilities in a bel canto context?

In order to answer the main research question, the following four sub-questions will need to be answered:

1. Is Callas's interpretation of the *scena* in every aspect the ideal one and if not, how does Sutherland surpass Callas in part or in total?
2. What is to be learnt by studying Callas and Sutherland as *belcantistas* as heard in their recordings of the *scena* in Act 1?
3. To what extent does the soprano belonging to the dramatic coloratura Fach have to be a *belcantista* in order to execute the *scena* successfully?
4. How important is the integration of singing and acting in the interpretation of this *scena* and, by extension, in the bel canto repertoire?

1.4 The objective of this dissertation

I hope that the findings will be widely applicable to the study of this *scena* and by extension, to the entire role, as well as to other roles in this Fach. I wish for it to benefit my own eventual interpretation of the role of Norma, as well as be useful to other singers. It will also be of use to anyone, whether singer or audience member, who wishes to gain a fuller understanding of the aesthetic principles underpinning the interpretation of the specific *scena* and of similar passages in the dramatic coloratura Fach and the bel canto repertoire.

1.5 Literature review

While most of my sources date from the Callas-Sutherland era, they are as pertinent today as they were at the time and completely applicable to my research field. The data collected and considered from these sources address a wide range of my interests, for example, the two opera singers Callas and Sutherland, as well as many insightful, holistic discussions around their differing aptitudes as interpretative artists.

There are copious amounts of data available in the literature that considers interpretation in opera. Much of the discussion contained in the data deals rigorously with aspects of interpretation and specifically highlights vocal interpretation as contrasted with a more dramatically interpretative approach. This brings us to the debate centred on singing actresses, such as Callas, and more puristically inclined singers who focus more on the beauty of the voice, such as Sutherland. The divergent ways in which these two singers deal with the extreme challenges of the role, both vocally and dramatically, have been widely documented, and are what make this study interesting, especially within the context of bel canto.

The literature is reviewed under the headings of Interpretation, Bel canto, Bellini and *Norma* and Callas and Sutherland.

1.5.1 Interpretation

The nineteenth-century Viennese music critic, Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904), in his seminal commentary on the music of the nineteenth century *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen (On the musically beautiful)* which appeared in 1854, posits that music has no expressive power and that interpretation is therefore beyond the composer's control (1986:23).

This radical view was embraced by a number of 20th-century composers and authors, perhaps most notably by Stravinsky and other composers of a Modernist and/or Neo-Classical persuasion, but is certainly not one that many operatic composers of the Romantic Era, with the possible exception of Rossini, would have shared.¹

Another aspect highlighted in interpretation is that of emotion versus technique. Gillyanne Kayes in *Singing and the actor* (2000), for example, is of the opinion that the singer must connect to the emotion of the work in order to interpret it (2000:149). Her book describes techniques pertinent to various styles of singing, offering many practical exercises to achieve her objectives.

Most of the sources discussed below assume expressive intention on the part of the composer, and see interpretation as the performer's communication of that intention. The text is regarded by many as central to the interpretation.

Henry Sutherland Edwards (1828-1906) in *History of the opera* (1862) stresses that without clarity of text the expression of the music can become tedious (1862:38). His book remains an authoritative and comprehensive overview of opera from its point of departure in Italy up until Donizetti. The book examines the development of opera and its introduction and influence in other European countries and considers the nature of opera and its various stylistic developments over time. It reflects upon the parallels between opera and drama.

In *Phonetics and diction in singing* (1965), the Austrian chorus-master, conductor, pianist and author, Kurt Adler (1907-1977), claims that neither text nor music is superior in terms of interpretation (1965:3). The book focuses on articulatory techniques in singing and how these affect sound production. The book describes the function and role of the articulators and how they govern diction in singing. Adler covers an extensive range of technical strategies and how they influence not only the actual sound, but how the text is clearly communicated, intensified and coloured by these strategies and how they affect both the phrasing and dramatic expression in singing.

Robert Donington (1907-1990), British musicologist and instrumentalist, in *The opera* (1978), agrees that text and music share equal importance, but adds that music enhances the power of the text

¹ It resurfaces in *Musicology: The key concepts* (2016) by Dr David Beard, Senior Lecturer in Music at Cardiff University, and Professor Kenneth Gloag, Professor of Music at Cardiff University. This handbook discusses various topics relating to music research in essay form, but also considers various aspects of interpretation. Another work which claims that music per se is not emotional is *Handbook of music and emotion: Theory, research, applications* by Patrik N. Juslin and John Sloboda (2010:455-457). It offers an array of multidisciplinary perspectives on subjects such as musical emotions, the quantification of emotions, emotion and musical conduct and significant applications thereof.

(1978:1). His book is a comprehensive study of opera from its inception, but with a focus on current practices. The book is informative concerning many stylistic elements of opera, as well as the development of musical and theatrical ideas. It is a well-spring of information regarding composers, librettists and operatic characters, and reflects on many philosophies surrounding opera.

Another comprehensive handbook of opera, *The Cambridge companion to opera studies* (2012) by Nicholas Till, introduces novel ways of examining a powerful and stimulating art form. It surveys 400 years of opera and pioneers new understandings from disciplines such as social anthropology and performance studies to media theory, genre theory and gender studies. His views on interpretation largely coincide with those of Donington (2012:1-2).

Victor Heinz Fuchs in *The art of singing and voice technique* (1963), his study on appropriate technical strategies for expressive and musical singing, posits that clarity of diction is paramount to expressive interpretation (1963:51).

M.J. Fourie agrees with Fuchs on the importance of diction. In her MMus dissertation, 'n *Ondersoek na sangpedagogiek met besondere verwysing na die Schubert-liedere as onderrigliteratuur* (1986), centred on Schubert songs and the fusion of the beauty of the poetry and the music, she examines the pedagogical value of these songs as teaching material. Her approach is essentially technical, but with a major emphasis on interpretation (1986:332-333).

Some authors and artists stress the paramount importance of the music.

The renowned theatre historian and stage director Walther R. Volbach (1897-1996) in *Problems of opera production* (1953) also argues that opera is primarily about the music (1953:11). His book reveals deep insights, gleaned from decades of successful work in the theatre, into the practical mechanisms of opera, both onstage and off.

Maria Callas: Sacred monster (1998) is a biography by author and broadcaster, Stelios Emille Galatopoulos (1932-), on the life of Maria Callas. As a close personal friend of Callas, he endows the book with many intimate insights into her closest relationships and reveals some of her core beliefs. He gives an excellent evaluation of Callas's artistic accomplishments. In the book Callas expresses the belief with regard to interpretation that “[m]usic begins where words stop.” (1998:429).

A practical demonstration of this approach is given by Callas in *Callas at Juilliard: The master classes* (1988), a transcription in book form by music critic John Ardoin (1935-2001) of masterclasses given

by Callas at Julliard. The book vividly encapsulates the profound understanding of a meticulous artist as she imparts in a simple practical way the exacting processes of interpretation and the nature of singing.

The great Italian tenor Enrico Caruso (1873-1921) and equally famous Italian coloratura soprano Luisa Tetrazzini (1871-1940), although not as direct in approach, give practical and technical advice on singing based on their particular personal interpretative experiences in the 1975 compendium *Caruso and Tetrazzini on the art of Singing*, a republication of their writings on the subject.

Many authors discuss the relationship between interpretation and emotion.

In *On singers and singing: Lectures and an essay* (1957), the composer, singer and conductor Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947) expresses the belief that emotion is integrated into interpretation through visualisation (1957:123-124).

A related view is expressed in *Singing and imagination: A human approach to a great musical tradition* (1998) written by English baritone and voice teacher Thomas Jeffrey Hemsley (1927-2013). He deals with vocal technique and expresses the view that although fundamental principles govern good singing, the emotions and imagination of the interpreter greatly influence the quality of the overall performance.

An interpretive guide to operatic arias (1983), by teacher and baritone Martial Singher (1904-1990) offers a guide to vocal technique and comprehensive insights into interpretation by placing arias in dramatic and musical context. He postulates that interpretation is governed by musical elements such as phraseology, dynamics and tempo as well as dramatic elements such as nuance, colour, variation of pace and silences. He ascribes the highest value to the indications in the score as the primary guideline for interpretation (1983:xiii;xvi).

A similar approach is expressed in *The singer and his art* (1970) by leading Danish lieder singer Aksel Schiøtz (1906-1975) with regard to the art song and other aspects of classical singing.

According to Helena Matheopoulos in her book *Diva: Great sopranos and mezzos discuss their art*, interpretation can be viewed from various perspectives, be it text, music, emotion, technique or discovering the intentions of the composer. For her, it comes down to two different kinds of artistic imagination: in opera, some are stimulated more by the sentiments expressed in the text, while others respond mostly to the music (1991:70).

Several authors stress the importance of technical control in conveying emotion.

The journalist, Jürgen Kesting (1940-), in the booklet, *A diva's glory days: Maria Callas* (n.d.), reviews the recordings of Callas between 1947 and 1956 and analyses them methodically. Kesting agrees with Kayes that the singer needs to connect to the emotion of the work, but emphasises that emotion must be controlled within the interpretation (Kesting, n.d.:83).

Richard Miller in the book *Training soprano voices* (2000), which delineates the soprano Fach and offers technical expertise gleaned from the historic vocal pedagogy and new research on the singing voice, postulates that emotion is controlled by technical abilities (2000:160).

He warns that if a singer is hoping to achieve plausible communication of the drama and the singer is advised by the stage director or coach to immerse her/himself totally in the emotion of the text, complications may occur for the singer. The final question comes down to how one unites technical ability with artistic expression with regards to communicating in performance. More competency in technical skill will result in greater prospects for artistic expression. Skill is not the product of raw emotion in singing, but results from the arranging of physical, acoustic and controlled emotional responses into one shape. He concludes that technique and communication need to be united into one action to achieve an artistic performance.

The following two books share Miller's premise that technique is key to interpretation and emotional control:

- *The student voice: An introduction to developing the singing voice* (2010) by renowned pedagogue Colin Baldy is a book dedicated to the development and maintenance of a sound vocal technique, using specific methods that align with physiological principles. The author offers the reader exercises and suggests repertoire for particular developmental stages.
- *The singer's and actor's throat* (1952) is a book by voice researcher Norman A. Punt in which the author meticulously investigates the use of the voice from a functional laryngological perspective.

1.5.2 *Bel canto*

Although quantities of literature describe *bel canto*, it remains a term that by general consensus is hard to define precisely. This will also emerge from the literature surveyed below.

Bel canto: A history of vocal pedagogy (1999) by musicologist and tenor James Arthur Stark (1938-) uses as its key reference an essay by Spanish singer, music educator and vocal pedagogue Manuel Patricio Rodríguez García (1805-1906). He investigates the pedagogical development of the *bel canto*

vocal technique from diverse sources in comparison to the writings of García, while offering a series of laboratory tests to validate his findings. He offers comprehensive insights into the foundation of virtuosity in singing, discusses the castrati, national adaptations to vocal technique and the enigmas of bel canto. He does, however posit that bel canto is an under-defined notion and believes that vocal prowess enables one to use bel canto as a medium for dramatic expression (1999:xvii).

In *Diva: The new generation: The sopranos and mezzos of the decade discuss their roles* (1998) Helena Matheopoulos stresses that bel canto in the first place means beautiful singing (1998:xiii). The book is a transcribed set of 26 revealing and thought-provoking interviews with some of the most celebrated female singers of modern times. The interviews cover aspects of each singer's career development and include some personal anecdotes, but a considerable part of each interview focuses on the dramatic and vocal analysis of a specific role.

There are various books on the bel canto vocal approach that assist in the more accurate definition of bel canto:

- *Bel canto principles and practices* (1950) by author, voice builder and pedagogue Cornelius Lawrence Reid (1911-2008) is dedicated to the ideologies of bel canto underpinned by specific vocal strategies. Reid offers a myriad of practical exercises and advice that includes all conceivable devices a singer might need in the execution of the bel canto repertoire.
- *Manual of bel canto* (1959) by Ida Franca deals with the rudimentary technical principles that undergird the bel canto school of singing. The author proposes a complete system of voice production based on historical writings and personal encounters with masters. She provides the voice student with practical exercises as aids to her concepts.
- *Bel canto: A performer's guide* (2013) by researcher, performer, and vocal coach Robert Toft empowers performers of bel canto with authentic historical knowledge from a variety of verifiable sources. The many practical strategies contained in the book enable the performer to make informed decisions regarding interpretation and ornamentation in bel canto style.

1.5.3 Bellini and Norma

Bellini by Leslie Orrey (1908-1981), succinctly narrates the personal life of Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835) and evaluates his operas from their inception. The role of his principal librettist Felice Romani (1788-1865) is accentuated. Bellini's compositional devices, such as tonal simplicity and the Bellinian melody, are surveyed and compared to other composers. The author posits that seemingly endless melodies are the quintessential component of Bellini's compositional style (1969:127-129).

In *Norma* [DVD] (1978), a booklet accompanying the digital remastering of the 1978 live recording of Bellini's *Norma* with Sutherland, conducted by her husband, Australian conductor and pianist Richard Alan Bonyng (1930-), H. Dreyer commends Bellini's style as natural and simple (1978:15). The author analyses the interpretation on the recording while offering insights into the bel canto style with reference to Bellini.

In an interview with South African composer Hendrik Hofmeyr (1957-), he explains the compositional devices used by Bellini to create his 'endless' melodies (Hofmeyr, 2016a).

The Norwegian-born publisher, author, lecturer and nature photographer, Kjell Bloch Sandved (1922-2015) in his encyclopaedia *The world of music* (1954) also remarks on the opera *Norma*'s intense expressive language (1954:1470).

In *Callas: La Divina* (1963), Stelios praises the opera for its lyrical and theatrical magnificence and its epic nature (1963:108).²

1.5.4 Interpreters of Norma

Some of the greatest sopranos of the past two centuries have attempted the role of Norma. This dissertation will look at some of them in passing, but the main focus will remain on the interpretations of Callas and Sutherland.

Musicologist and music critic, Giancarlo Landini (1953-) in the article, *A never ending story: Giancarlo Landini on the singers of Norma* (2016) from *Opera* magazine, succinctly evaluates various sopranos in aspects of vocalism and the interpretation of Norma. He does not regard American soprano Rosa Ponselle (1897-1981) and German soprano Lilli Lehmann (1848-1929) as predecessors to Callas, as he regards them as inadequate in comparison (2016:1088).

According to Kesting, Callas steps into the lineage of Italian sopranos Giuditta Pasta (1797-1865) (Kesting, n.d.:84) and Giulia Grisi (1811-1869) (Kesting, n.d.:83).

Grosse Saenger unserer Zeit is the original title of the book by Kurt Pahlen (1907-2003), the Austrian conductor, composer and musicologist, translated by Oliver Coburn in 1973 as *Great singers: From the seventeenth century to the present day*. The book discusses the most famous operatic singers in terms of their vocal endowments and artistic achievements. He postulates that Callas's artistry grew

² His book is a biography of Callas that thoroughly describes the private and artistic life of Callas. The book considers the artistry and repertoire of Callas and analyses 17 of her most famous roles, including Norma.

out of a distinguished lineage of predecessors, and that the “hypnotic power” of Spanish soprano Maria Malibran (1808-1836), Swedish soprano Jenny Lind (1820-1887) and Italian-French soprano Adelina Patti (1843-1919) seems to have been transmitted to Callas. Pahlen (1973:205).

In *The Callas legacy*, Ardoin, a personal friend and confidant of Callas, asserts that not all of Callas’s forerunners could be regarded as part of this lineage, as French-Italian dramatic soprano Gina Cigna (1900-2001) and Italian soprano Claudia Muzio (1889-1936), for example, lacked dramatic instinct and the vocal technique to express the true character of Norma (1977:9-10).

In *Callas: The art and the life: The great years*, he methodically evaluates all the recordings made by Callas garnering valuable insights for the reader, and argues that her Norma was unsurpassed (1974:252). He discusses the immense effect Callas had on opera, concurring with Galatopoulos that she changed the face of opera in her time, and appraises her art and life in a truthful way.

He asserts, in *Callas at Juilliard: The master classes* (1988:xv), that Callas was the most powerful force in Italian opera in the previous century.

T. Blain, in the booklet accompanying the 2014 CD *Voice on top: The great sopranos*, states that before Callas much of Bellini’s music was perceived as excessively decorative and not able to convey the inherent emotion in the text (2014:n.p.). The booklet offers the biographies and critical appraisals of Callas, Lucia Popp (1939-1993) and Elisabeth Söderström (1927-2009).

In *Callas: Her life, her loves, her music*, Anne Edwards argues that Callas brought about this change by changing the exclusively florid style of singing into one that is truly expressive (2001:97). This in-depth biography of Callas expounds the extraordinary career and incandescent fame of the “twentieth century’s most celebrated operatic diva.” The biography equates the iconic career of Callas that transformed much of opera, with the dramatic metamorphosis in her personal life that ultimately led to the tragic conclusion of her life. It documents her deeply personal struggles and her relentless pursuit of vocal and interpretative excellence.

Much of the discussion around the relative merits of Callas and Sutherland, or, for that matter, Italian soprano Renata Tebaldi (1922-2004), who is the singer most often contrasted with Callas, springs from their different approaches, which are reflected in the *Kunstdiva* versus *Stimmediva* debate. In the article, *Why more Callas & Tebaldi debate?* (2000), Christopher Weimer defines a *Kunstdiva* as a singer mainly concerned with the emotional conveyance of the text and the dramatic impact of their performance, while a *Stimmediva*’s primary focus would be the conveyance of the musical

complexities of the score through a beautifully resonant voice. These distinct approaches form the basis of the debate in this article.

Callas undeniably falls into the category of the *Kunstdiva*. *Maria Callas: A musical biography* (2003) by New York music and voice specialist author, Robert Levine, highlights the artistic accomplishments of Callas. The author includes the many-faceted opinions of the press. Callas is quoted by Levine (2003:133-134) as saying that a beautiful voice is not enough for interpretation and that you need variety of tone colour and emotion to fully express the essence of a character. He posits that Callas was a great actress and singer in one person.

(Kesting, n.d.:86) stresses to the dramatic power of her enunciation and *La Stupenda: A biography of Joan Sutherland* (1981) by writer, producer and director Brian Walter Adams, examines and relates the extensive and distinguished career of Sutherland against a background of ill health and personal challenge. The biography was written in collaboration with Sutherland and Bonyngé. The intertwined nature of the lives and careers of Sutherland and Bonyngé demonstrates a powerful partnership in opera. Adams offers that Callas's voice was not beautiful (1981:249), but that Sutherland on the other hand had bad diction and enunciation (1981:213).

Joan Sutherland (1962), a biography by the highly successful novelist, biographer and script writer Russell Braddon (1921-1995), chronicles the life of Sutherland from her awkward beginnings to the "greatest Australian prima donna since Dame Nellie Melba". He contrasts her down-to-earth nature with the rich beauty of her voice and musical excellence. He does however also comment that Sutherland had to be sent to acting classes by Covent Garden, as her style of acting consisted entirely of a "General Pained Expression" and "a mastery of the art of falling down" (1962:57-58).

1.6 Key research concepts

Beard & Gloag (2016:n.p.) argue that certain concepts can inform the approach to a research subject in music. I discovered two of these particularly appropriate to this study, namely:

- Emotion and music
- Interpretation

I have added a third, more specific to the subject, namely:

- The relation between music and text

These notions are particularly useful when reviewing and evaluating the interpretative approaches of the two singers.

1.6.1 Emotion and music

For the purposes of this study, it is imperative to investigate the correlation between emotion, music and subjectivity. The relation between music and emotion is much-debated, as they are both experienced subjectively. They are also interconnected, which further complicates matters.

Beard & Gloag (2016:85) describe research into music and emotion as an important topic that continues to develop within the sciences, social sciences and humanities. Different body-structure-related responses, such as heartbeat, body temperature and facial expression, are measurable. Some argue that emotion occurs in a short time-frame when these responses arise simultaneously (Beard & Gloag, 2016:86).

Hanslick was an important opponent of the concept of emotional meaning in music. He argues that we should resist attributing human emotions to music since musical affect is too unclear, and expression is a purely musical matter defined completely by tonal, melodic forms. In short, Hanslick postulates that music “cannot present or express emotions themselves, but only the energetic, changing aspects of emotion.” Stravinsky adopted a more extreme position, claiming that “music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all [...] Expression has never been an inherent property of music. That is by no means the purpose of its existence.” (Beard & Gloag, 2016:86-87).

This point of view posits that emotion is ideologically opposed to the more logically and structurally conceived aspects of music. Hanslick and Stravinsky were clearly concerned that the acknowledgment of emotion in music places interpretation beyond the control of the composer (Beard & Gloag, 2016:87).

The philosopher Susanne K. Langer, in her book *Reflections on art* (1958:n.p.), turned Hanslick’s ideas around by positing that music suggest emotions that we cannot name. Although Hanslick believes that music does not intrinsically possess emotional qualities, his ideas agree with Langer in the sense that all the arts have the power to produce effects upon our feelings. Music does this more rapidly and intensely than the other arts; for example, a few chords can transport us into a different state of mind immediately: “The other arts persuade us, but music invades us.” (Hanslick, 1986:50). This ties in with the quotation by Mendelssohn which prefaces this study.

Donington (1978:1) adds that music has the capacity to sway us in powerful ways, and postulates that music has a tremendous impact on our deeper associations, which closely relate to our constant mood changes, and that this makes us feel alive and human.

In Langer (1958:3-4), Virgil C. Aldrich philosophizes about the concept that beauty is a feeling, thus subjective, whilst others maintain that, as aesthetic sensation, it is objective.

Otto Baensch (quoted in Langer, 1958:10-11) adds another viewpoint by stressing the importance of emotion in art. He hypothesizes however that this emotion is expressed in art in a scientific way. Art, like science, is a mental activity to bring certain contents to objectively valid cognition for the individual, even if it is something which he has not known before. Thus art aims to be “understood.”

Beard & Gloag (2016:86) agree with this viewpoint, adding the observation that thinking is an important requirement for emotional responses. Responses to particular types of writing or art will differ and be deepened by a listener’s or a performer’s knowledge of particular musical styles and genres. Competency in style-related aspects focuses the attention of listeners and performers to moments when composers cause emotion by playing with formal or plain conventions. In almost the same way, music analysts can help us to appreciate emotions in music on a deeper level.

1.6.2 Interpretation

Interpretation, in my opinion, can be summarised as the psychological internalisation and personal integration of artistic meaning and the communication thereof to an audience.

Beard & Gloag (2016:139-140) believe that interpretation suggests a level of understanding and the communication of that understanding. They postulate that all music-making and musicological activity constitute a form of interpretation. One of the most obvious ways in which music involves interpretation is through the act of performance, and the musicological study of performance through contexts such as period performance practice.

Hahn (1957:197) agrees that a singer can only interpret once sufficient assimilation through study, visualization and contemplation has taken place. He maintains that such preparation will awaken the emotions of the audience.

Hemsley (1998:23) also agrees with the above authors, but is more specific in his analyses of the tools singers must use to achieve this. He regards a talent for singing as an essential pre-requisite, but suggests that it constitutes but a small percentage of what is necessary for any singer to achieve an

ideal artistic performance within the scope of that particular singer's ability. Having a strong and beautiful voice does not necessarily designate such talent, or a natural instinct for singing. Hemsley feels that what is of primary importance for the voice is to be capable of expressing everything which the music carries within itself, using dynamics and vocal colour as tools of interpretation.

Singer (1983:xiii) defines the aim of interpretation as realisation of the indications in the score and adherence to the composer's style. The composer created a guideline for the singer through his musical ideas and performance indications, helping the singer to bring out the characteristics of the specific style the composer intended. The singer should internalise and develop these guidelines in order to make their interpretation unique and to distinguish themselves from the other singers performing the same aria.

Franca (1959:86) adds to the groundwork and musical tools alluded to above, the element of text. The key to the nature of vocal expression is found in the text and the musical composition. In order to explain or reproduce, the singer must first take in and process the poetic and musical content. The artist must be deeply affected by what he wants to express or interpret, without allowing the emotion to compromise the technical aspects of its representation. Such an approach requires a high degree of natural sensitivity directed and regulated by study.

Hahn (1957:121) asks the question "As an interpreter, how is the singer to move an audience emotionally?" He argues that great voices with enormous technical aptitude, while being able to excel musically often lack emotional appeal, and maintains that the concept of contextual internalisation as a considered aspect of preparation and in-the-moment intellectual engagement is essential to convey the emotional content of music to the audience. He also argues that in order to bring across a wide variety of emotion, one must enter into a changing state of mind which evolves from and surpasses both the cold, rational and wildly irrational sides of one's personality. One must allow oneself to discover a different personality, but at the same time do it quite consciously. It is this ability to combine two unique mental states of thought and emotion that defines the talent of a singer (Hahn, 1957:123-124).

As an artist, one seeks to identify with the character one is to represent and to experience the emotions one wishes to bring across. It is only natural, when we strive for perfection, to compare ourselves with others in looking at emotions from every perspective, examining, analysing and discovering them in our artistic souls. It would be ideal if we could penetrate to the very core of the human heart to find the secrets of expression and more specifically artistic expression to make them individual.

Hahn (1957:121-122) suggests a technique to give credence to these ideas would be for singers to develop the skill to sing visually, and through that process think what the words they are saying suggest and communicate to the listener. If the words suggest objects, the singer must visualise them while singing; if the words describe a state of mind, the singer must search internally for the emotion he is trying to express. It is important, however, to keep at the back of one's mind as an artist, while singing, that one has to feel the full power of the emotions one interprets, but not completely lose contact with reality, otherwise it would affect one's singing to such an extent that one would not be able to continue.

Essentially Hahn (1957:131-132) believes in a system that deeply seeks out the essence of the emotional content in music, using analytical tools to transcend the interpreter's natural emotional inclination to find the authentic emotion inherent in a piece. He considers the mind both in preparation and performance as being essential to impart the innate emotion in the music. Baensch, Beard & Gloag and Hahn seem to agree on this more scientific approach to expression.

Many of the positive strategies of interpretation have been considered above, but according to Juslin & Sloboda (2010:455-457) a music performance usually presents an expressive form of the emotion and not the emotion itself as "spontaneous" (genuine feeling) or "symbolic" (portrayed). On a practical level, one could say that the interpretation has to balance the spontaneous and the symbolic, as too much of either will be detrimental to the effect. They remind us to allow room for the immediacy of performance, yet caution against its abuse.

This brings us back to the balance between control and emotion, which is central to the *Kunstdiva/Stimmediva* debate. A well-breathed note may be perfect and beautiful, but might not have enough meaning, but at the same time, "a note that trembles with emotion and does not flow with the breath wears out the voice." (Kesting, n.d.:83).

Fourie is in absolute agreement with Franca and also stresses the importance of the musical aspects of interpretation in a more specific manner than Hemsley. He adds some technical and practical considerations without which interpretation cannot happen. Interpretation not only involves the convincing embodiment of the content of the text, but also includes the correct implementation or execution of the musical content. The singer must have a thorough knowledge of certain rules, especially with regard to style, which apply to the performance practice (Fourie, 1986:403).

He considers the following as factors that influence and determine interpretation:

- Adequate technique
- The important role of the thought process of the singer

- A natural feeling for mood, emotion and atmosphere
- Stage personality and magnetism
- Memorization
- Humility, honesty and sincerity
- Clear and effective diction (Fourie, 1986:403-412).

It is only by taking all of the above factors into account that the following aspects of singing will be possible:³

- Effective phrasing
- Correct note attack involving pure intonation
- A sustained legato line
- A large vocal range
- Control over a wide variety of dynamics
- Voice flexibility and especially voice swiftness
- Proper diction
- Control over a wide variety of tone colours
- Expressive and convincing interpretation (Fourie, 1986:403-412).

The whole of the above-mentioned spectrum of the singing process is initiated and controlled in the thoughts of the singer. It goes without saying that any person who has a sincere need to sing to the best of his/her ability should obtain the best available training.

In the view of Galatopoulos (1963:23-24), a voice is not excellent in isolation, but rather turns out to be so when it is appropriately and effectively adjusted to a specific circumstance. He compares the playing of the virtuoso violinist, Kreisler on a mediocre instrument to that of a relatively proficient player on a Stradivarius. He makes the point in agreement with Hahn that a beautiful instrument played without “dramatic expression” will at all times be deficient, lacking the ability to express the drama of a situation. He goes on to comment, pertinent to this study, that Callas had an exceptional voice and technique which she used to powerfully express the music.

Miller (2000:159) concurs with Galatopolous about the importance of technique in communicating emotion through singing. He also calls for a certain disengagement from the singer to guard against

³ Fourie includes *bel canto* as one of the aspects, but this seems inappropriate, as it is really a term which encompasses all of the aspects described.

possible excesses in passion that may hinder the effective conveying of emotion. He theorizes that art should not be thought of as being reality. While trusting the feelings of the character in which the singer has been cast, the singer remains the medium for its expression. No individual on-stage is fully experiencing the feelings involved in the roles being enacted. Art is the potential to portray reality through the comprehension and not only the experiencing of all the thoughts that any person may be confronted with. The capacity to reproduce the entire range of human emotions, which surpasses what any man or woman can ever experience, is a mark of the fullest artistic awareness.

Hemsley (1998:24) agrees with Galatopolous and Miller about the value of technique in emotive expression and also explores a more psychological angle in expressing emotion. He postulates that, if the raw material of singing is the expression of emotion, then a singer's first undertaking must be to find a way of "mobilizing" his or her "life-energy." One of the first necessities of technique is that singers should come into the habit of channelling this power without losing the intellectual and physical poise which is crucial to being flexibly and naturally alert, and precisely responsive to the functioning of their imagination.

It is worth considering Yehudi Menuhin's remark that "interpretation is technique's worst enemy" (Kesting, n.d.:83-84). This statement is highly contentious, since most great musicians would argue that the goal of unrestricted interpretation is the very spur to perfecting a transcendental technique. It is surely the balance between interpretation and technique that is a prerequisite for a convincing performance. Menuhin, being an instrumentalist, deals only with the musical/dramatic aspects of interpretation, whereas singers have to consider text and physical embodiment as elements of both their technical and interpretative strategies.

Already in the nineteenth century, Wagner stressed the importance of the body in interpretation: "If music is the soul of the world, then the actor – the actor's body – becomes an expression of that soul. The theatrical space inscribes the actor's body as a material presence in the very moment that it militates against a materialist practice of presence." (quoted in Joe & Theresa 2002:44).

The focus on physical characterisation was taken to new heights by Walter Felsenstein (1901-1975) director of the *Komische Oper* in East Berlin between 1947 and 1975. According to Till (2012:149), Felsenstein was presented with enough funding to rehearse productions for quite a few months. Singers then, as Felsenstein put it, had the possibility to explore the complete life of the character, reaching beyond the stage action and the text. This gave room to the imagination of the audience to make the character even more alive to them than what was being portrayed on stage. Felsenstein insisted that

the singing-actor/actress had to persuade the audience “that singing is a necessity” and that was the only way in which the drama could be expressed. He defined singing as:

exalted expression, concentration on its highest level and singers, searching for the most powerful motivation in their characters, should employ their total physique and incorporate their breathing, intonation, and rhythmic flow into the realization of the character.

Felsenstein, like Konstantin Sergeievich Stanislavski (1863-1938), the Russian theatre practitioner recognised as an outstanding character actor and one of the leading theatre directors of his generation, regarded the limited method of how opera singers were trained as the one obstacle that stood in the way of attaining this artistic ideal. The focus was only on vocal development, with little interest in theatrical or musical values (Till, 2012:149).

For Pahlen (1973:174), the opera singer transforms himself with each interpretation; each new role offers the singer new opportunities to find the correct vocal colour and the most suitable personality for the character. For the artist the difference between great and smaller roles does not really exist. The roles are the medium through which a singer can express his/her personality. She also stresses that singers should always remember that they are interpreters and they should serve the composer. The greatest power a singer could put at the service of music is to bring truth from the soul, give it to the public and have it accepted by them.

Malde, Allen & Zeller (2009:170) expand this idea by arguing that anything a singer wants to communicate has to be done through receptive information, i.e. through visible and/or audible action. Anything an artist decides to do, the audience will attempt to make sense of within the dramatic context. It is of vital importance that the artist be completely aware of what he or she does on stage as anything that is unintentionally unclear or too convoluted will be unconvincing to the audience.

Another possible hindrance to interpretation, according to Hemsley (1998:196), is emotional insecurity, the greatest enemy of interpretation in all art forms. Singers tend to forget that there should be a large amount of enjoyment in singing, but because singers are sometimes obsessed with the idea of the voice, they subconsciously separate technique from interpretation. They forget that all the aspects of singing must be combined in the singer’s imagination on a physical and emotional level. Artists who have gained experience and have learned to have faith in their preparation, truly sing from the heart and that is as it should be.

In the context of this study the interpretation within the confines of bel canto also needs to be considered. Flawlessness in bel canto and life-like dramatic acting are once in a while to be discovered together, but only in opera-singers of artistic integrity. Most authors agree that in the bel canto era, dramatic verisimilitude was not an important criterion, but, as the nineteenth century progressed, dramatic truth became a primary aim in musical theatre. Verdi once wrote that in art as in life one must above all be sincere (Pahlen, 1973:25). Victor Maurel (1848-1923), regarded as one of the century's great singers, and the first to sing Iago and Falstaff, gave this judgment on the fundamental distinction between his own age and the bel canto era: "At the time of the bel canto school probably no singing teacher talked about expression in singing; all that audiences expected from an opera-singer was that he should sing as beautifully as possible" (Pahlen, 1973:25).

The above viewpoint is patently subjective, and takes no account of the enormous success of a singer like French mezzo-soprano Pauline Viardot (1821-1910) who, already in the 1830s and -40s, took great trouble to study the literary sources of the parts she sang, and was idolised for the emotional intensity of her performances, rather than for her vocal abilities as described by A. FitzLyon in her biography *The price of genius – A life of Pauline Viardot* (1964:73).

Kesting (n.d.:83-84) correctly maintains that even in the bel canto era, beautiful singing was not the only criterion for interpretation. A large variety of wonderful singers of the old school revealed how easily an obvious defect could be modified into a source of infinite beauty. The history of art may have a tendency to propose that it is not necessarily the purest voice that, for example, possesses exquisite tone, that lends itself to the best achievements of being passionate and sincere in the art of singing. No voice whose timbre is incapable of variation can ever produce that variety of non-transparent tone, which is simultaneously moving and natural in the portrayal of certain moments of wild emotion.

For Fourie (1986:402), in any era interpretation is the most creative and compelling aspect of any performing art. The singer is more privileged than other performing artists because he is given the opportunity to convey great human emotions, expressed in the language of poets and poems through music. The singer develops his vocal technique and all other factors related to it, with the sole purpose of being able to interpret convincingly and to the full intensity of his emotional ability to allow him to do justice to the intentions of the poet as well as the composer.

Due to these many considerations, it is at times possible to lose sight of the most essential point, expressed as follows by Stark (1999:188): Despite the best vocal training and insight into musical styles, the true mystery and beauty of singing as a form of artistic expression is ultimately a matter of

the heart. True artists rely greatly on their musical instincts and intuition to find a thousand nuances and intangible elements of expressive singing that evade our limited analytical abilities and surpass our intellectual arguments.

One is reminded of George Sand's comment on Viardot's singing: "This voice goes from the heart to the heart." (FitzLyon, 1964:77).

1.6.3 The relation between music and text

Volbach (1953:11) lists the Aristotelian elements of drama as plot, characters, thought, diction, melody and spectacle, and claims that opera fundamentally consists of the same elements, except that here, music takes the lead and all other parts occupy a lower position. Opera is music in dramatic form, and according to Volbach (1953:12), some who appreciate music maintain that they do not even look at the stage in an opera house, since it takes their attention away from the enjoyment of the music. This can be the case whenever poor acting or unsatisfactory settings bring about inappropriateness of performance, and again illustrates the supremacy of music in the communication of the dramatic intent.

In the debate around the issue of whether or not the dramatic text or the beauty of music deserves the superior role in opera, Hanslick (1986:23), while feeling that ultimately the music is more important, postulates that flexibility of dominance may be a method to unify words and music. The constant struggle, in which the artist needs to allow occasionally one or the other to triumph, is the point from which all the deficiencies of opera originate. The aim of a competent opera composer will be to constantly try to reconcile and adjust the music and the text without favouring the one feature over the other. Opera is however primarily about music and not drama; this will be clear if the musical element is neglected.

Till (2012:1-2) proposes a balance when he succinctly points out that the text communicates the drama, while the music expresses it.

For Donington (1978:2) "in opera, what the poetry outlines, the music extends". He clarifies his statement by explaining that music can show development of character and that the drama can therefore unfold as much in the music as in the words. He notes that it is still opera when action-driven text is spoken, and only the more emotionally reactive words are sung. He mentions as examples Mozart's *Magic Flute*, Beethoven's *Fidelio* and the original version of Bizet's *Carmen*.

However, Volbach (1953:11) feels that music calls directly on our emotions to a far greater extent than the spoken word, and most opera lovers would probably agree with him.

Sung text is clearly of vital importance to the dramatic interpretation. For the audience to enter into the spirit of a dramatic situation, a string of incomprehensible words would be of no use (Edwards, 1862:38).

For Kayes (2000:134), sung text demands careful consideration, because it is easy to lose words or meaning when sustained pitch and a defined rhythmic structure are called for by the music. By focusing on the mechanics of forming the vowels and consonants one will become more involved with one's text and story. Music has a very important role to play in sung text by enabling the audience to process information on several levels. The rhythmic, melodic and orchestral settings all add to the creative process. The singer's aim should be to deliver the text within this structure, not only making sure that he or she sounds realistic, but also to ensure that the audience is able to hear the text.

Hemsley (1998:111) cites the views of eminent voice teachers such as Gaetano Nava, teacher of the English-born opera and oratorio singer Sir Charles Santley (1834-1922), who was adamant that the object of music was to give greater expression and emphasis to the text. He agreed with Gluck's librettist Rainieri de'Calzabigi that to express what arises from the words was the music's only function. This is not meant to reduce the significance of the music, but clearly to reaffirm the binding connection between the text and music and to remind us that the music composed for singing, and the manner in which it is sung, ought to be suitable to the ideas and emotions expressed in the text.

As mentioned earlier, there is also a school of thought that supports the idea of a more-or-less equal balance between text and music. For Hahn (1957:26-27), the final *raison d'être* of singing is the combination, the mixing and the permanent union of sound and thought. A sound, no matter how beautiful, is nothing if it expresses nothing. It is an indication of a certain weakness or vulnerability to the physical to admit that we are biased to the beauty of a voice; true singing requires not only a beautiful voice, but the marriage of vocal and verbal expression.

Hahn (1957:29) believes that in singing, sounds and words have almost equal importance, completing each other through some transcendent process of coordination, aesthetic as well as mechanical, lending each other constant aid and working together in a combined action. The ideal would be that if one carefully thinks about the word, well-articulated, the voice will be placed naturally where it should be, and it will automatically give it the colour that it should have at each exact moment completing a large amount of the task at hand. As soon as the appropriate vocal sound has been created in your thoughts, inspired by the word, that same sound will envelop the word, enhance it, purify it and increase the dimension of that very word which was responsible in the first place for its birth. This unity makes

singing fascinating and creates a special combination of a great many abstract and concrete fragments linked together.

There are great singers who have very particular views on the subject, which somehow define the type of interpretative singer they are. The Spanish soprano, Montserrat Caballé (1933-2018) often considered more of a *Stimmediva* than a *Kunstdiva*, believes in the primacy of the music. In Matheopoulos (1991:70), she explains:

You see, I *need* the music to speak to me in order to discover what a new work is like. I cannot begin my approach from the libretto, through the words. Of course poetry speaks to me, too, but in a different, more limited way. It has to do with words, specifics, whereas music goes beyond that and deals with feelings, with the Infinite. I form my impressions of a new work not according to what the libretto tells me, but according to what the music, the sound, the composer's line, tells me. [...] I, a mere interpreter, a tool in the realization of a masterpiece, *must* be inspired by the music if I am to serve it well, and not divert attention to myself. When a singer truly feels and experiences what the music is all about, the words will *automatically* ring true – it's logical because the meaning of the words is there, in the music, and Maria [Callas] always said so, too.

In direct opposition to this view, Callas believed that once a singer understood the meaning of the words, the music would automatically sound right (Matheopoulos 1991:70).

Once a singer realises that characterization is essential in the operatic context, performance experience will grow the depth of interpretation greatly. Kayes (2000:149) posits that experience plays an important role in interpretation; an experienced singing actress will usually incorporate the musical setting of the text into the interpretative meaning. Those less experienced may fall into the trap of singing well, but not really interpreting the text. The aim is thus to make the text alive to oneself within the musical context as well as connecting to it on an emotional level.

Pahlen (1973:24-25) takes this view even further. He is of the opinion that for the modern actor-singer, singing per se is no longer that important, but rather the welding of dramatic and musical elements into an integrated whole.

In conclusion, there are those who feel that the debate remains unresolved. Adler posits that the question of the relative importance of words and music has no clear-cut answer. He suggests that in singing the text is elevated and dignified by the music and that the music is clarified and intensified

by the text. “[...] singing comes from the heart, but the words must be controlled by the intellect.”, but then goes on to say that both the words and music should come from the heart and be controlled by the mind. Finding this balance would constitute the “aesthetic golden mean.” (Adler, 1965:3).

1.7 Delimitations of this dissertation

I have decided to use Callas and Sutherland as the only two sopranos in this comparative study, as I find them the most obvious representatives of the *Kunstdiva* and the *Stimmediva*. While Tebaldi is often cited as an instance of the *Stimmediva* and certainly has a beautiful voice, her technique, especially in the high register, was less than impeccable, making her a somewhat imperfect exemplar of the type. One can argue that the *Stimmediva* type is not only based on the purity of the voice, but also on technique. In addition, I decided to include the entire *scena* so that the full spectrum of their vocal and dramatic abilities can be showcased.

I will be making use of the literature to support the observations made by the three respondents. As will emerge in the discussion of the interpreters of Norma, it is quite clear that these are the two who, at least as far as writing in English is concerned, have received the most attention and acclaim

1.8 Research process

My research process contains qualitative research and consists of a literature review around bel canto, then narrowed down to the requirements of the style in general as exemplified in a representative sample. It entailed the drawing up and sending out of a structured interview, the collation and interpretation of the three responses, and the comparison and integration of the latter with the opinions expressed in the literature. As it was impossible to schedule one-on-one interviews with all three respondents, I decided, for the sake of uniformity, to send the interview questions via email to all of them. The respondents comprise South African opera singers, vocal teachers and coaches. I sent them two audio recordings of the *scena* as performed respectively by Callas and Sutherland. I decided to use two studio recordings of the two singers. It should be borne in mind that, while studio recordings tend to produce better results from a technical point of view, they often entail a sacrifice in spontaneity. Callas’s live recordings are usually more exciting than her studio recordings; she can sound almost abstract in the latter. The wonderful communication she had with the audience and the text was to a certain extent lost in the studio and one gets the feeling at times that there is a wall between her and the music. Sutherland, on the other hand, came into her own in the studio perhaps more than on stage.

Together with a contextualisation of Norma and Bellini's intention with the role, an overall summary will be made of the conclusions indicated by these expert opinions. I regard these analyses as very relevant in determining, in the world of opera today, the impact of the measure of integration between singing and acting. In several of the sources, I have opted to quote the words of singers directly, as I believe that this best conveys the authenticity, honesty and dignity of their opinions. In the meantime, I gathered much literature on the two sopranos and my specific field of research, with the aim of combining my findings with the feedback and analysis that I received from the panel of respondents.

1.9 Challenges encountered during the development of the research

While consulting multiple sources, I concluded that many authors wrote brilliantly about this topic. It was therefore very difficult for me to transpose their ideas into my own words.

Deciding on which literature material would contribute to my research field was perhaps the most challenging part of this thesis. The focus of my research changed a few times, but this helped me with narrowing my research field down to a concise topic.

The final topic is subjective and open-ended and requires the researcher to integrate views expressed in the literature with personal opinion.

I had initially considered a wider range of respondents, but this proved unfeasible in the end. I found however, that although the respondents were fewer than I had hoped for, their insights were invaluable and provided sufficient room for elaborating on the issues at stake.

1.10 Definitions of key terms and concepts

Certain Italian words have become so generally accepted that in this dissertation they are not presented in italics. Other words that are not so frequently used are presented in italics.

Belcantista: A singer specialised in the bel canto repertoire.

Bel canto (also belcanto): Literally 'beautiful singing'. "A term associated with singing in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when a beautiful vocal performance was more important than the dramatic. Bel canto composers include Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini" (Matheopoulos, 1998:xiii).

Cabaletta: The fast concluding section of a *scena* in nineteenth-century opera (Matheopoulos, 1998:xiii).

Cadenza: A vocal or instrumental improvisatory passage inserted between the chords of a cadence. It is used particularly in arias and concertos as a vehicle for virtuoso display by the soloist, while the orchestra remains silent. Originally, cadenzas were intended to be improvisations. In time, many composers (perhaps suspicious of the judgement of some soloists) provided their own cadenza. It is now customary for the composer's cadenza, or that of a well-known soloist, to be performed (adapted from Baker, Isaacs & Martin, 1982:61).

Canto spianato: Smooth legato singing, showcasing beauty of tone and phrasing (Baker, Isaacs & Martin, 1982:354). "Manuel Garcia used the term *canto spianato* for the 'broad' style that included *cantabile* and *portamento*. This style required the highest degree of art and training, including legato, smooth register change, shadings of loud and soft, clarity of articulation, tasteful use of timbres, limited but appropriate ornamentation, and 'pathetic' expression. The *canto spianato* category of arias included *largos*, *cantabiles*, and *andantes*" (Stark, 1999:179).

Coloratura: Elaborately embellished singing. The term later came to apply to singers specializing in roles needing great vocal agility" (Matheopoulos, 1998:xiii).

Dramatic coloratura Fach: The dramatic coloratura soprano is one of the rarest voice categories. The characteristics of this voice is the combination of swiftness and agility with volume and power, qualities that usually belong to opposing voice types. Given the structural anatomy of the vocal cords, it is very unusual to find a set capable of performing over this spectrum of sound. The dramatic coloratura must have a supple, pliable voice with an extended upper range, an impressive lyrical line, as well as the weight and volume for dramatic declamation in the low register (adapted from Delos, n.d.).

Fach: Classification/category. At the turn of the 19th century, the Fach system was developed by German opera houses to create unique categories for all the roles in an opera to help with auditions and casting for singers. Singers were placed in a Fach category according to their voice types, and they would only perform the roles that belonged in that category (Banis, 2013:n.p.). The first category of singers in the German Fach system is the soprano. The soprano is then further divided into three sub-categories: the coloratura Fach, the soprano Fach and the mezzo-soprano Fach. The coloratura Fach is then further subdivided into two separate Fachs: coloratura soprano or coloratura soubrette and the dramatic coloratura soprano (Nowik, 2007:n.p.).

Fioritura: Florid vocal embellishment. The decoration of a melody with ornaments commonly used by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century performers. After 1850, *fioritura* fell into disfavour for nearly

a century, until the bel canto revival of the 1950s. It is now commonly employed by singers interested in historically informed performance practice (adapted from Baker, Isaacs & Martin, 1982:127).

Kunstdiva (art diva): A singer who projects fine textual detail and drama through her voice (Weimer, 2000:n.p).

Legato: From the Italian verb “legare”, meaning to bind or tie. Refers to the smooth passage between notes.

Lirico spinto: One of the sub-categories of the soprano Fach. A full-bodied lyric soprano, capable of both sweetness and dramatic power, and with enough volume to be heard over a full orchestra (Banis, 2013:n.p.).

Melisma: More than one note sung to a single syllable.

Messa di voce: When a tone is started very softly (*pp*), gradually swells to loud (*f*) or very loud (*ff*) and again diminishes without loss of quality until it becomes very soft (*pp*) (Fourie, 1986:275). The term is sometimes confused with the term *mezza voce* which means singing with half the power of the voice.

Portamento: From the Italian verb “portare”, meaning to carry. Refers to an unbroken slide between notes.

Roulade: Eighteenth-century vocal melisma.

Stimmediva (voice diva): A singer whose main characteristic is the beauty of her voice (Weimer, 2000:n.p). Whether impeccable technique is a characteristic of the *Kunstdiva* or the *Stimmediva* seems to fall outside Weimer’s definitions, but is regarded as a characteristic of the latter type by the present author.

2 Bel canto

2.1 What is bel canto?

According to Stark (1999:xvii), bel canto is an undefined concept. In English it literally means “beautiful singing”, but the implications range over numerous aspects of vocal history and studies that include “golden ages” of singing, numerous vocal production techniques and a diversity of style-related vocal expressions. Stark (1999:188) broadens his position by adding that well-trained voices have the ability to use bel canto as a medium for dramatic expression like no other instrument can and that the addition of words intensifies this effect. There seems to be no agreement among music historians or voice teachers as to the exact application of the term. There are many reasons for this uncertainty, as a study of the circumstances which led to such diverse ideas of bel canto will show.

Stark (1999:189) further explains that bel canto is a concept that takes two separate but related matters into account. Bel canto is first of all a highly cultivated style of singing. In order to create the qualities of *chiaroscuro*, *appoggio*,⁴ register equalization, malleability of pitch and intensity, and a pleasing vibrato, there should be an interaction between the glottal source, the vocal tract and the respiratory system. Secondly, bel canto has signified its power to astonish and move the listener implementing this kind of singing in a tasteful and expressive way. The elements of bel canto adapted to meet new musical demands as musical eras and styles changed, thereby securing the prolongation of bel canto in our own time.

Levine (2003:136), concurs that a simple translation of the term does not do justice to all that the style entails and clarifies that a beautiful tone and vocal proficiency, enables explicit emotionalism in bel canto which should, however, not disturb the vocal line. He further states that character in bel canto is conveyed by means of vocal melody.

As generally understood today, the term refers to the Italian-originated vocal style that prevailed throughout most of Europe during the 18th and early 19th centuries. The most important composers of bel canto opera are Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868), Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) and Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835). These three composers took the bel canto genre to the highest point of its evolution, but also contributed to its decline through their increasing demands for vocal power and

⁴ *Chiaroscuro* is a traditional Italian term that describes the equilibrium between dark and light timbre in the voice (Miller, 1996:311). *Appoggio* describes the relation between inspiration, phonation and resonance in the singing voice (Miller, 1996:311).

dramatic effect. Nevertheless, in their operas, the vocal line, designed as vehicle for the great singers of the time, has absolute primacy over the orchestra.

Authors differ with regard to the date of origin of bel canto. Reid (1950:13) is of the opinion that the style, or the principles of tone production resulting in that style, originated before the invention of opera in the seventeenth century and can be traced back as far as the fourth century, which saw systematic instruction in the art of singing evolve with the ordaining of singers into the church to perform the musical service.

With regard to the decline of bel canto, Fuchs (1963:161-162) points out that the development of the opera orchestra might be one of the reasons for the decline of bel canto. Johann Adolph Hasse (1699-1783), Niccolo Jomelli (1714-1774) and G.P. Telemann (1681-1767) regarded as advocates of bel canto, already warned in the eighteenth century that the increasing size of the orchestra was being detrimental to the singers' voices. The disappearance of the castrati, who represented the perfect medium for an art which was built round magnificent singing and long breaths seemed to be another important reason for the decline.

The main features of the bel canto style are summarised as follows by (Fourie, 1986:11).

- beauty of sound and pure, resonant tone
- pure intonation
- voice flexibility
- effective breath control
- a sustained legato line
- large vocal range
- pure vowels
- *messa di voce* as an important source of expressive vocality
- convincing interpretation.

Toft (2013:n.p.) provides a more specific list of features:

- the use of vocal and verbal accent to emphasise salient, musical and dramatic aspects
- matching tonal quality of the voice to the emotional content of the words
- a highly articulated manner of phrasing based on the insertion of grammatical and rhetorical pauses
- a delivery varied by several types of legato and *staccato*

- a liberal application of more than one type of *portamento*
- a free use of *rubato*, as a means of enhancing musical and emotional expression
- the ability to execute both written and improvised *fioriture* in the recitatives and arias.

With regard to the modern application of bel canto principles in voice training, Reid (1950:96-97) believes it is important to remember that allowance must be made for the condition of each individual voice and cites the view of the American composer, conductor and arranger, Henry Mancini (1924-1994) that, while a method may be good in itself, it cannot be applied in every singer's case as there is a different remedy to each origin of a vocal fault in a voice.

2.2 The two pillars of bel canto

A quick look at the vocal literature will reveal that the two pillars that consistently form the basis of all good bel canto singing and that are essential for a perfect vocal technique are a sustained legato line (with *messa di voce* as an important source of expressive vocality) and vocal agility. This is reflected in the compound structure of the traditional *scena* which consists of two arias with recitative and bridge material. The two arias, known as the cavatina and the cabaletta, respectively showcase the two main technical facets of proficient singing, namely legato and agility.

While many bel canto operas feature the use of coloratura, which demands great vocal agility, especially in the high register, Bellini's *Norma* is revered above all for its *canto spianato*, long legato melodies that seem to spin out into eternity. The aria "Casta diva" from *Norma* is considered by many to epitomise this style of singing (Toft, 2013:n.p.).

2.2.1 Legato

Legato is synonymous with line in the voice and with smooth phrasing. The Italian proverb says, "Chi non lega, non canta." or "He who does not join his notes, cannot sing." (Fourie, 1986:134).

According to Toft (2013:58) García expressed his thoughts on legato the clearest:

[T]o sing *legato* means to pass from one sound to another in a neat, sudden, and smooth manner, without interrupting the flow of voice...the air must be subjected to a regular and continuous pressure, so as intimately to unite all the notes with each other.

Legato is considered the foundation of singing technique as legato singing is only possible when the singing mechanism is free and functions on a balanced and coordinated base. The ability to sing legato is the result of correct note attacks and a singing mechanism that functions properly (Fourie, 1986:132-133).

Franca (1959:82) points out that *canto spianato* requires complete beauty of tone, while Fuchs (1963:104) maintains that a pure legato cannot be achieved without proper breath control and head resonance. Franca (1959:39) feels that if a voice is well-placed, a good legato is an inevitable result which requires no special study. However, Baldy (2010:32) warns that the concept of placing the voice can be misleading, not because it is wrong, but because it can be misinterpreted. Generally it refers to where we prefer the voice to resonate. Since our bodies incorporate many cavities and resonating chambers, we have a variety of viable areas in which to locate the voice and generally we favour to derive as much resonance as possible from all of these chambers. Resonance helps our voices to project. As a result we can limit our reliance on the breath. Precise placing additionally helps to guide the sound. As with all aspects of vocal production, this method needs to be natural and free.

2.2.2 *Messa di voce*

Fuchs is of the opinion that if a singer has mastered *messa di voce*, he can achieve any effect in singing that he wishes. No singer should attempt working on *messa di voce* if he is not supported by the “two guardian angels” of the voice – head resonance and breath control. It is much easier said than done, but as Schiøtz (1970:24) put it: “it will help you attain a living tone.” Ideally all voices should be able to do *messa di voce*, even though with the heavier and more dramatic voices it is less expected (Fuchs, 1963:114-115).

Fourie (1986:277-279) lists the following requirements to sing the *messa di voce* correctly:

- Relaxation of the singing mechanism is essential.
- Well-developed breath control – the breath must flow evenly and constantly.
- Head resonance must dominate in each tone on which the *messa di voce* is performed.
- The note attack must be precise and agile immediately and fearless to avoid nervousness and half-heartedness.
- The core of the initial note attack must be retained.
- The registers must coordinate absolutely balanced and the resonance must be precisely adjusted.
- Vocal quality must be kept constant. There may in no way be deviated from the pure vowel.
- The singer should never try to force the tone volume.

- Initially, *messa di voce* exercises should be sung over a very small range and never sung too high.

2.3 Components of bel canto

According to Punt (1952:25) the three attributes of a tone are fundamental pitch, intensity and quality (timbre). When a given note is sung (or sounded):

- its fundamental pitch determines its position in the musical scale;
- its intensity determines how loud we hear it; and
- its quality (timbre) determines whether it affects us as being rich, bright, clear, fluty, dark, lyrical, dramatic, tender, thin, shrill, etc.

According to Reid (1950:201-202) there are great many talented people who want to become great artists, but few will succeed due to the type of teaching they have received. It is vital for teachers to refer to those first principals of tone production implemented by the teachers of bel canto during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The only way singers will be able to express fully and freely, is if they fully master and apply the principles and techniques of bel canto (Reid, 1950:19).

The following headings look at three salient characteristics of the style in more detail:

- Beauty of sound and pure, resonant tone
- Effective breath control
- Pure vowels.

2.3.1 *Beauty of sound and pure, resonant tone*

The primary tone is created in the larynx transported by the airstream and received in the resonant cavities of the body where it is amplified in order to resonate (Fourie, 1986:161). Resonance is the strengthening of the tone; without resonance the tone is dead. The soprano Lehmann is quoted in Fourie (1986:161) as saying:

It were well if pupils, yes and professional singers, too, were conscious of just one thing, that the singing tone is to be found in the resonance of one's own body, in the chest and head resonances, and not in the auditorium into which the singer strives solely to project his breath to produce big tones.

For Reid (1950:25), all the aesthetic principles involved in singing are finally solved when the tone selected for the development of the voice is actually purer and thus better represented. When the aesthetic judgment is correct, the voice will respond by a gradual increase in power, resonance, range and flexibility. Bel canto not only indicates that the tone is beautiful, but that the full resources of the vocal mechanism are used.

When a tone is really beautiful, it indicates that the vocal mechanism functions correctly and that there is a complete balance between aesthetic principles and the laws of nature. A beautiful, pure singing tone is free from throatiness, sharpness, nasality or any other forced artificiality. Bel canto singing is impossible without vocal freedom and true vocal freedom finds its expression in vital resonant tone covering a wide range of pitches (Reid, 1950:19).

Caruso addresses a very important aspect which is called “attack of the tone” in singing. This may be described in general as the quality of the voice as the tone is begun. Caruso believes that many singers attack the tone either from the chest or the throat rather than consciously trying to open the throat not only in front, but from behind. For him, it is the most serious error they can commit, and even in best health the finest voice cannot survive it. Because of it, many singers make a brilliant debut and then disappear into second-rank careers (Caruso & Tetrizzini, 1975:52).

Reid (1950:49-50) pointed out that Caruso was one who believed in the importance of intelligent listening. Caruso was self-taught and this is an example of the progress that can be made in exceptional cases alone on having talent and a good ear. Caruso was asked in an interview with Harriette Brower, what in his opinion constituted the first requirement for vocal success, and he replied, “Intelligence and a good ear. Listen to yourself and your ear will tell you what kind of sounds you have been making.”

2.3.2 Effective breath control

For Franca (1959:9), mastery of the singing and speaking voice depends on keeping the voice “above” the breath.

Foster (1998:53) is of the opinion that breath has been considered the primary factor in singing for the better part of the last three centuries because it is the immediate, physical, on-site activating agent of the voice. This opinion is shared by Malde, Allen & Zeller (2009:47) who consider well-mapped breathing, capable of expressing every emotional nuance, the core of the singer’s artistry.

Fourie (1986:68) cites Randegger's dictum that "the fundamental law which principally regulates the healthy production of the voice is the skilful management of the breath," and questions the opinion of many voice teachers who assume that breathing in humans is a natural process and must remain that, and that too much emphasis is placed on breath control. He makes the important point that singing requires more of a breathing technique than normal because it is not only necessary to perform the primary function, namely to provide the body of oxygen, but also to activate the vocal cords to match the different pitch, note values, tone intensity and length of phrases. Normally we do not use our full breathing capacity, but for singing, the singer needs all the breath at his disposal.

According to Fourie (1986:69-70), breathing and breath control are important as the first stage of the development of singing for the following reasons:

- It promotes correct posture. The correct posture is essential for correct, effective breathing and the correct functioning of the singing mechanism.
- The muscles of the respiratory organ are much larger and stronger than those of the larynx and throat, and therefore have to control the outflowing breath.
- Phrasing, one of the most important elements of a musical interpretation, is also largely based on breath management.
- Relaxation plays an essential role in singing. It is very important for the singer to directly reach the key to relaxation and that is breathing.
- Deep breathing is essential for good health. Health is one of the most precious possessions of the singer. The sounder the physique the finer the instrument.

Fourie (1986:70) stresses the psychological aspect of voice development. For any person who deals with something new, it is essential to see progress. Singing is a slow and laborious process and progress is not made or noticed soon. However, if the singer concentrates on promoting posture exercises as well as breathing exercises, there may be noticeable progress that can serve as an incentive for the future.

Overemphasis of the importance of breathing can, however, also be detrimental. Hemsley (1998:108) gives a word of advice to young artists: If you have no issue with breathing, if your breathing apparatus reacts automatically to the requests made upon it by your natural instinct for singing, then there should be no interference with that normal coordination by creating undesirable habits. He says: "we do not breathe in order to sing; we breathe because we sing. And we sing because our imaginations, our feelings, and our souls demand it."

Tetrazzini's case illustrates that these two positions are not necessarily irreconcilable. She was of the opinion that the whole breathing apparatus must be understood by the singer, because the foundation of singing is breathing and breath control. The singer's breath must be as secure as the ground beneath his feet. Nothing can be built on an unstable foundation, and until that foundation has been developed and strengthened the singer cannot expect satisfactory results. Her masterly breath control, which she describes as completely "natural" apparently confounded the experts. Her breathing strategy seems to centre on a grounded inhalation and efficient exhalation planned according to the requirements of the music. She elucidates that as her experience increased; her understanding of her breath grew. She adds that being adaptable gave her new insights into previous strategies in singing. The essence of her thinking about singing centres on a holistic and natural approach that reaches its zenith in the appearance of following no method at all (Caruso & Tetrazzini, 1975:9-11).

2.3.3 Pure vowels

"A tone was considered beautiful when pure, and purity of intonation was known to be inseparable from pronouncing the vowel distinctly." (Reid, 1950:42).

Fourie (1986:332-339) believes that good diction is indispensable for well-rounded singing. Certainly no singer can be called a great artist unless his diction is good, for a beautiful voice alone will not make up for other deficiencies. In singing, the melody and rhythm alone are not enough. Words are needed to express ideas and emotions. The ingredients of words are vowels and consonants. As vowels, the transporters of tone, are formed during speech and singing, singing and speech have an effect on each other. A well-spoken voice will benefit the singing voice, just like a well-trained singing voice will enhance the spoken voice. He lists the factors which influence the singing of vowels as the thought-process of the singer, relaxation, resonance and registration, the mouth opening and lip position, the position of the tongue and the jaw (Fourie 1986:349-351).

Also for Fuchs (1963:51), clear diction and enunciation of the vowels are paramount. The singer robs the audience of an important part of the charm (and, one might add, of the pathos and drama) which words give to songs if the pronunciation is not satisfactory. The audience will simply find no difference between the human voice and the sound of an instrument if the words are not clearly spoken. "Singers should not forget that they have words which elevate them above instrumentalists."

While Caruso places great emphasis on pure vowels as a remedy for vocal problems (Caruso, 1801:29), Reid (1950:199) argues that it is impossible to transform the technique by the practice of singing pure vowels alone, but claims that vowels will preserve the voice and keep it in fine condition. Moreover,

it is only possible to produce pure vowels in that part of the voice which does not strain the student's technical capacity or produce unpleasing results, for example singing a pure "i" vowel above the staff is impractical and challenging for the soprano, as the result tends to be shrill and piercing.

2.4 Singers on bel canto

Various singers have expressed their views on bel canto, both as a style of singing and as an operatic genre. Many feel that as a style of singing it can be applied universally. An instance is the English dramatic soprano Jane Eaglen (1960-), who was accepted at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester at the age of eighteen. Her teacher there was Joseph Ward. Her remarks on his approach to singing are quoted by Matheopoulos (1998:22):

His basic method of teaching is bel canto. Bel canto literally means beautiful singing, but it also describes a particular singing style. But he thinks, as I now do, that *all* singing is bel canto. (This is a view with which Placido Domingo, for one, is known to agree wholeheartedly.) I sing Wagner exactly as I sing Norma. There is no difference. A technique is a technique and you shouldn't change it according to what music you are singing. There is *supposed* to be an Italian and a German way of singing but I don't believe that's true. I think there's just singing, full stop. You must sing whatever you happen to be singing as beautifully as you can.

The views of American soprano, Renée Fleming (1959-) on bel canto opera as a genre are also related by Matheopoulos (1998:53-54):

These operas are real technique testers. But more than that, they are the most liberally expressive pieces in the soprano repertoire. There's more freedom for the singer in this repertoire than any other kind of opera. [...]. Bel canto is the most purely vocal repertoire, and I adore the opportunity to perform it. It's much more of a vocal tester than Mozart. [...] Of course, the real challenge is to turn these operas into something more than just a virtuosic display of vocal fireworks and invest them with dramatic meaning, the way only Callas managed to do. People always complain about the flimsiness of the libretti, yet this didn't stop *her* from extracting every ounce of dramatic truth from the often farfetched stories. [...] If something about the story captures my imagination, I find it really wonderful to dig into the emotion behind it.

In Matheopoulos (1991:31), the American dramatic coloratura soprano, June Anderson (1952-) shares her sentiments on the genre saying that it is about much more than making beautiful sounds when singing operas of the bel canto era. It should be about what the characters are experiencing through the text and through their emotions. Callas's bel canto interpretations are an excellent example of this, and first attracted Anderson to the genre.

In this regard Galatopoulos (1998:426) states that Callas considered herself fortunate as she began singing lessons at the age of fifteen with Spanish coloratura soprano, Elvira di Hidalgo (1891-1980), who she considered "perhaps the last to have had the real vocal training, the great discipline of bel canto." For Callas, bel canto is the complete and most efficient schooling without which a singer cannot sing any opera really well. Callas describes bel canto as climbing into a "strait-jacket", taking into account that the method of bel canto requires most importantly excellent breath control and an established legato. Singing is a language and one cannot acquire good technique without these basic qualities just as one has to learn how to read and write in order to form a language.

In an interview with Hofmeyr (2016a), he expressed the following with regard to Callas and bel canto: Although it was her lifelong aspiration to emulate her teacher, Callas cannot truly be seen as a *belcantista*. From a vocal point of view, studying Callas in roles like Cherubini's *Medea*, Puccini's *Tosca* and Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* reveals that these roles, which rely largely on dark, powerful and dramatic singing, fit her voice like a glove; she is convincing on every level. There is a certain freedom and ease in her approach to this kind of vocality which is lacking in her interpretation of bel canto roles such as *Norma*. On the other hand, it is also possible that a less than perfect mastery of bel canto can satisfy an audience if the soprano can convey the dramatic and interpretative aspects of the role with great conviction.

3 Bellini and *Norma*

3.1 Bellini's compositional style

Italian operatic composer Vincenzo Salvatore Carmelo Francesco Bellini (1801-1835) was born in Catania. He originated from a line of musicians and was somewhat of a child prodigy, writing his first composition at the age of six. His father was originally his main teacher. Later he studied at the Naples Conservatory. His career as an operatic composer was launched from the conservatory with his opera *Adelson e Salvini*. He composed more than 30 operas and is considered to be one of the greatest Italian opera composers (Gosset, Ashbrook, Budden, Lippmann, Porter & Carner, 1983:155-164).

Bellini had very distinctive concepts with regard to the purpose of opera. He believed that opera should be able to evoke deep and passionate emotions in the audience, to the point of making them “die by song”. To achieve this purpose he used the strategy of aligning and constructing the numbers in his operas with simple clarity so as to be fully expressive and thus readily assimilated by the public. He believed that using musical or dramatic ploys rob the situation of its power to astonish, and declared, “Poetry and music require naturalness and nothing else” (Dreyer, 1978:15).

With regard to melody, Bellini does not pursue the bel canto ideal of Rossini, which aims solely for a melodious sound and virtuosity, but instead he creates a profound, expressive tonal language. His style can be summarised as being natural and simple (Dreyer, 1978:15).

The composer, Richard Wagner (1813-1883), creator of the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, had the highest regard for Bellini's vocal writing, asserting that

it had nothing in common with the “usual Italian sing-song”. [...] Each and every emotional moment stands out vividly, nothing has been blurred together, and an outstanding interpreter of *Norma*, in every respect, should provide inspiring models for protagonists of the fine arts for a long time (Kesting, n.d.:83).

In his admiration for the Italian composer, Wagner also stresses his delight in “the clear melody, the simple, noble and beautiful singing” (Dreyer, 1978:15-16).

Orrey (1969:127-129) adds that while Bellini has persistently been praised as a melodist, there has been little close analysis of his style. He points out that Bellini's melodies often reach their cadences through a chain of appoggiaturas, as in the aria “Casta diva”. Many other composers have employed such chains, but Bellini's use is remarkably effective.

Hofmeyr (2016b) pointed out that an outstanding property of Bellini's style is his use of two devices to enhance the "endlessness" of his melodies:

- the avoidance of melodic cadences onto the tonic until the end of a section, which makes internal phrases "open-ended", linking them to each other to form a longer whole;
- the sparing use of rhythmically identical measures/phrases in his lyrical vocal lines, which inhibits the ear's tendency to subdivide ideas into structural subunits.

Bellini exploited these mechanisms to create "seamlessness" very effectively and systematically, whether intentionally or instinctively.

3.2 Norma

The libretto of *Norma* by Romani was based on a play of the same name by Alexandre Soumet (1788-1845), a French poet.

Bellini composed *Norma* for Pasta between September and November 1831, writing no fewer than nine versions of the celebrated aria "Casta diva". The premiere took place at La Scala in Milan on 26 December 1831. This performance, however, was slated to the great disappointment of the successful composer. Bellini wrote to his friend Francesco Florimo that the opera was a complete failure – "Fiasco!!! fiasco!!! solenne fiasco!!!" to put it in Bellini's own words. *Norma* was not approved by the audience. Not for the music, which in itself could have made it the success of all time, but because certain members of the audience were outraged by the "impropriety" of the plot. In the course of the season, the opera did nevertheless gain acceptance among opera-goers and was performed another 32 times (Dreyer, 1978:16).

The Italian director and producer of operas, films and television, Franco Zeffirelli (1923-) concedes that Romani's libretto for *Norma* was a very daring subject for Bellini to have chosen. At the premiere, the public was shocked to witness as the heroine a holy priestess who lies, sins and has illegitimate children. In 1831, such stories were not yet accepted in the theatre, despite the fact that Bellini had put "Casta diva" into the score to give some measure of purity to the character of Norma (Ardoin, 1974:236).

The opera nonetheless soon came to be regarded as Bellini's supreme achievement. Wagner praised the music of *Norma* for its real emotional content, and its suitability to the dramatic situation (Kesting,

n.d.:83). “Of all Bellini’s creations *Norma* is that which unites the richest flow of melody with the deepest glow of truth.” (Orrey, 1969:115).

For Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), French poet, dramatist, novelist, journalist, art and literary critic, “[t]he conclusion, from the moment when Norma confesses her guilt, is one of the finest things in all musico-dramatic literature. The thought is sublime, the layout for voice and orchestra equally admirable. Its restrained and masterly writing has been surpassed by no composers whatever” (Orrey, 1969:116).

Ardoin (1974:11) is more guarded in his appraisal: “Whatever we think of the libretto and music of *Norma* in our time, Bellini believed in them as drama and wrote every line, each embellishment for an expressive purpose.”

For Dreyer (1978:16-17), in this work “Bellini’s music ascended to a level of dramatic unity and characteristic meaningfulness matched thereafter only by *I puritani*.”

Stassinopoulos (1980:60-61) posits that *Norma*, the greatest of Bellini’s operas, gave the Italians much more than the simple pleasures of beautiful sounds and sustained high notes. He asserts that, in agreement with Bellini’s own compositional ideas, each aria adds tremendously to the development of the action, and the way the arias blend with the recitatives contributes to the unique power of *Norma* among Bellini’s operas.

3.2.1 The challenges of the role of *Norma*

While Dreyer (1978: 16-17) regards *Norma* as the principal classic of the bel canto genre, he concedes that the powerful and dramatic vocality required at times of the protagonist would lead via the late works of Donizetti and the early works of Verdi to the demise of the pure bel canto style.

For Stassinopoulos (1980:61), the most difficult demands of the role of Norma relate to a singer having sufficient stamina to sustain the breath and emotions through Bellini’s “endless” melodies and dramatic outbursts.

According to Levine (2003:136), the title role, in addition to being the perfect example of bel canto, is also among the most difficult, musically and dramatically, ever written.

Ardoin (1974:10) goes even further by postulating that Norma is to a soprano what King Lear is to an actor; the final challenge of heart and mind. Not only is it the most demanding role created by Bellini; it is also one of the most complex in all opera, because Norma has to portray many women in one:

mother, warrior, lover, priestess and leader. It is a great challenge to convey the full range of human emotions from tenderness to passion, hatred, and vengeance. Ardoin (1974:252) elaborates that Norma as a character is a fascinating woman because she has a split personality; she is both a high priestess of great perfection and a fallible human being. “She was daring for her time – the time of the Druids – and also for the time of Bellini. A woman of enormous position and authority who maintains a secret, scandalous life”.

Galatopoulos (1998:85-86) asserts that if the protagonist cannot master the challenges of the role, Norma will fall apart. He postulates that the inherent requirements of the character must be within the reach of the performer: she must be a dramatic soprano with enormous agility and be able to sing cantilena without distorting Bellini’s very personal melodic line. “Moreover, she must have enough in reserve for sheer dramatic impact through both the medium of her voice and her physical presence.”

Bonyngne believes *Norma* to be the pinnacle of Bellini’s works and thus argues that the singers for *Norma* must be superb. He defends his opinion by stating that “Bellini, of all composers, understood the human voice” and that the role was written for Pasta and Grisi, the best singers of his time (Adams, 1981:211). The role of Norma places particularly high demands on its performer with regard to the extremes of dramatic emotion inherent in the character and the technically rigorous requirements of bel canto singing, and that an outstanding voice is paramount. Given these requirements, it is his opinion that the perfect Norma probably does not exist (Kesting, n.d.:81).

These comments are contained in the notes accompanying his 1965 recording of Bellini’s *Norma* in which Sutherland sang the title role. This recording was released while Callas was giving the last five of her total of eighty-nine performances of *Norma* in Paris. Sutherland had sung the less important role of Clotilde at Callas’s *Norma* debut in London thirteen years previously.

4 Interpreters of Norma

4.1 Interpreters of Norma before Callas

Callas was seen as a prima donna *assolutissima*, heir to a distinguished lineage which includes Pasta, Grisi, Patti, Malibran and her sister Viardot, the German sopranos Gertrud Mara (1749-1833) and Henriette Sontag (1806-1854), and Lind. While it is impossible to judge whether they were the greatest singers of their time, they were, by all accounts, the most spellbinding. They possessed the ability to captivate their listeners to such an extent that it was out of the question to judge them from an objective point of view. This was also the case with Callas. She captivated audiences like no one else in her age. She possessed “hypnotic power” which is difficult to put in words and for which a distinguished voice and a perfect technique were only a means to an end (Pahlen, 1973:205).

Before Callas, the role of Norma had been interpreted by an impressive list of divas. The premiere at La Scala in 1831 was sung by Pasta, and the role was taken up by, among others, Malibran, Grisi, Viardot, Lehmann, Muzio, Ponselle and Cigna. For Kesting (n.d.:84), Pasta, Bellini’s first Norma, seemed to be revived in Callas. He cites the author Stendhal’s comments that, despite her relatively egregious vocal faults, Pasta was the first important female singer to win the hearts of her listeners and Bellini’s admiration. According to the singer and vocal history expert Stephen Zucker, Bellini “put up with the deficits in her vocal technique and musical faults for the benefit of dramatic expression” (Kesting (n.d.:84). When Malibran took over the role in 1834, she was met with ecstatic approbation. A perfect singer is needed to fulfil the demands of the role, but such an artist would not be human. The vocal flaws of Pasta and Malibran, as recorded by their contemporaries, were very similar. Despite these flaws, Bellini declared that the former sang “no less like an angel,” and Verdi’s pronouncement on the latter was that “[i]n spite of everything, Malibran is marvellous – a very great artist indeed” (Galatopoulos, 1998:433-434). In this regard, they may be compared to Callas. Callas’s vocal and dramatic skill enabled her to use her imperfections for expressive purposes and to achieve results as close to the ideal as nature allowed.

While vocality had moved away from the ideals of bel canto in the century after the creation of *Norma*, *Norma* remained a favourite with great prima donnas, as is attested by Sandved (1954:1470), who informs us that it had been performed more than 300 times at Covent Garden alone in that time.

In comparing Pasta’s performance to that of Grisi, the English literary, art and music critic, writer and editor, Henry Fothergill Chorley (1808-1872), commented that “Grisi had sung with more animal passion [...] Her interpretation had the fierce wildness of a tigress[,] but also a desperate, feverish

charm.” It is notable that the epithet “tigress” would also be applied a century later to Callas. Singers who could meet the requirements of the role would be few and far between over the remainder of the nineteenth century, with Lind and Lehmann being perhaps the most prominent. Lehmann, who sang the first Norma at the Met in 1890, and had started out as a coloratura soprano, but went on to sing dramatic and even Wagnerian roles, said, according to Annachini (1974:n.p.) that it would be less tiring to sing three Brünnhildes on one night than one Norma. The same author finds it highly significant that the Wagnerian soprano, Kirsten Flagstad (1895-1962) abandoned the idea of singing Norma after two years’ investigation of the role.

Ponselle took on the role in the first half of the twentieth century. Her two recordings of “Casta diva” and “Mira o Norma” sung in a flexible and thrilling way with a beautiful sound, bring back memories of a great performance. Her cabaletta, on the other hand, shows that the Italo-American by no means possessed the first-class coloratura technique of Callas, and her impact was also relatively small (Kesting, n.d.:83).

Many acclaimed sopranos brought their best attributes to the role, but almost all the interpretations remained problematic. Landini (2016:1088) mentions the shortcomings of some of the sopranos. Ponselle lacked the virtuoso skills, while Lehmann and Cigna had strong voices, but their coloratura was not in line with the requirements of bel canto. Ardoin (1977:9-10) agrees that Cigna and Muzio imbued the part with dramatic substance, but feels that they often lacked the schooling to do full justice to the role’s elaborate vocal lines. Those who could master the complexities of Norma’s music, did so with a composure which left much of the character unexpressed. For Ardoin (1974:11), Bellini’s Norma became Gluck’s Norma later in the nineteenth century, and would be transformed into Verdi’s Norma in the early decades of the twentieth century and even into Mascagni’s Norma. It is indicative of the paucity of truly great Normas that the role had not been sung in London for 22 years – Ponselle had sung it there in 1929 – when Callas was first invited to sing it at Covent Garden in June of 1952 (Galatopoulos, 1998:124-125).

4.2 Callas

4.2.1 Background

Callas was born in New York to Greek immigrants. At the age of fifteen she moved back to Greece and made her stage debut. Her ascent to stardom commenced when she replaced an indisposed singer at Venice’s Teatro La Fenice in 1949. Blessed with dramatic power, considerable coloratura agility

and a tremendous range, Callas excelled in various roles in the Italian and French repertoire, from the bel canto era up to Puccini. Her 1953 recording of Puccini's *Tosca* with conductor Victor de Sabata, for example, has acquired iconic status. Galatopoulos (1998:441-442) summarises the general consent amongst scholars that Callas's greatest period, during which she reached the pinnacle of her art, was undoubtedly between 1954 and 1958. Callas ended her stage career in the role of *Tosca* at the Royal Opera House on July 5, 1965, in a production designed for her by Zeffirelli and featuring her friend and colleague, Italian baritone Tito Gobbi (1913-1984). She made her final appearance on stage in Japan in 1974 (Blain, 2014:n.p.).

Callas is a leading example of a singer who rose to great fame despite an imperfect vocal technique.

Levine (2003:133) posits that it is not very often that one would find a great actress as well as a good singer in one person on the opera stage. When a voice is always even, given any situation, and flawlessly exact all through its range, the timbre cannot in any way be varied. Such flawlessness must be obtained at the expense of musical expression. Callas is famous for frequently utilizing a slurred high note as a sublime articulation of despondency or loneliness. The debate about the measure of integration required between a soprano's singing and acting ability is an ongoing one.

Galatopoulos (1963:23) asserts that what enabled Callas to sweep aside an audience's concern about vocal imperfections was her exceptional ability to combine both her dramatic and musical talents, when placed in the context of the overall effect and final achievement dispelled the importance of faults. He asserts that to say that Callas had a beautiful voice is a vague observation. What is more important is that she had the intelligence and imagination to apply what she had studied to any given piece of music.

He reminds us that the great singers of the past also had individual shortcomings. In many cases, we are fortunate in having recordings that more or less demonstrate their voices, style and technique. In other cases we can only speculate about them. We will never really know what tone and colouring Pasta or Malibran employed. It is true that contemporary descriptions can tell us much, but the impediment here is that we again cannot establish with enough accuracy exactly what the highest standards of the time were (Galatopoulos, 1963:173).

Ardoin (1974:84) believes that mere skill and technical achievement are not sufficient, and declares, "The public must believe an artist is lost in his portrayal. To do this, one needs more than technique; one must be born with a special gift. Callas was."

Pahlen (1973:205) echoes these sentiments by offering that Callas is a majestic actress, in the highest class as a tragedian. Every character she portrays on the stage, she lives so intensively, that in each role she is literally a completely new and different persona. With Callas, it is hard to decide on one role which has been more successful or more “hers” than any other because she has taken a very wide variety of operatic roles.

Galatopoulos (1963:23) admits that Callas occasionally faced difficulties, like all singers, and that in her case they were mainly on a technical level. There was always a general sense of unevenness in colour and tone. These faults were naturally more evident on nights when she was not vocally in good shape. The irony is that when Callas was in good shape she herself sets the audience such high standards that they inevitably criticized her when she fell short of these standards. Callas was intelligent enough to be aware of these technical shortcomings and compensated for them. If she found she could not correct a fault, she made use of it instead, investing it with a subtle significance, thus making it an integral part of the music and the character.

Nicola Rescigno (1916-2008), the Italian-American conductor particularly associated with the Italian opera repertory, agrees with Galatopoulos that Callas never accepted the limitation that singers usually inflict on their acting. She felt professionally bound not to surrender acting to singing or vice versa, and she committed herself fully to the wishes of the composer (Ardoin, 1988:xiii).

Pahlen (1973:203) acknowledges that consistency and continual growth in excellence made Callas an international star: “In the fifties and sixties – if a questionnaire had been submitted to a random selection of people without any musical education, giving a dozen names of singers and asking them to mark the names of those they knew – all over the civilised world one name would have left the others far behind; Maria Callas.” Callas was more than just a name, it was a symbol. Unlike any of the other inspiring musical personalities of our time, Callas’s name often appeared on the front pages of the world’s press. “She was the last prima donna,” and her impact extended beyond the confines of the opera house.

For Major (1987:25), Callas became this prima donna because she was largely instrumental in transforming opera from concerts in costume, where all that was required of a singer was to stand and deliver, to live theatre.

According to Levine (2003:133) she is admired in the world of opera by laymen and experts alike, in spite of the fact that most of today’s opera lovers have only encountered her artistry through audio recordings, since her stage performances were very few toward the end of her life. While the few

remaining audio-visual materials are impressive indeed, and even her photographs testify to a powerfully dramatic personality, and give one some inkling of what her stage presence must have been like, her fame and position are kept alive mainly by her audio recordings. For Levine, they do not present an incomplete picture of her art, as she was “first and foremost an opera singer.”

Nevertheless, one has to agree with Galatopoulos (1963:174) that Callas’s recordings do not do her full justice. Often her assets are not shown to full advantage and more often still her flaws are exaggerated. “However, this does not always apply, for although half the joy lies in watching this great lady, it is possible within the limitations of recorded sound to feel that one is not only hearing her, but actually feeling her presence.” On the other hand, Callas’s outstanding gift of acting with her voice is shown best through the gramophone, where we have to rely on the singing alone as interpretative vehicle.

Ardoin (1977:200-201) points out that a large number of other outstanding singers of long ago demonstrated how easily an obvious defect might be transformed into a source of great beauty, and how it might be used to expose a most fascinating touch of individuality. “In fact, the history of the art might tend to suggest that it is not the perfectly pure, silvery voice, impeccably accurate in tone throughout every note of its compass, which lends itself to the greatest achievements of impassioned singing.” While Callas’s voice “had less going for it than any other voice that has achieved international celebrity via the phonograph,” it was a voice that did have something more to it than just being beautiful. “It was a voice which once heard could not be easily forgotten. It haunted and disturbed as many as it thrilled and inspired, and it was the very personal colours of her voice, combined with its deficiencies, which made her sound so strikingly individual.” Even to this day that is definitely true and every young aspiring opera singer should be inspired by this to strive for his/her individual sound.

The press, however, was always divided in their opinion of Callas.

Kesting (n.d:85) quotes a glowing assessment by Gualtiero Frangini, writing in the newspaper *La Nazione* on 30 September 1948:

Maria Callas possesses a powerful voice with a timbre that is steady and attractive, able to be penetrating in loud passages and sweet in more delicate moments. Her technique is secure and perfectly controlled. The voice has a most unusual colour and the way in which she applies it – even if quite different from what we are used to – has an undeniable quality.

On the other hand, the Australian journalist, theatre and opera critic, poet and novelist, Charles Osborne (1927-2017), stated that he grew tired of constantly being told that he should let Callas's bad singing go unnoticed due to her being such a great actress (Major, 1987:138).

Blain (2014:n.p.) quotes the following words of the American composer, conductor, author, music lecturer and pianist, Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990), shortly after Callas died at the tragically early age of 53 in 1977, regarding what might be considered her greatest legacy: "She was for me the uniquely great singer of bel canto in the mid-20th century and has for some years been irreplaceable." Major (1987:23) further points out that Callas drove herself to the point of exhaustion in her constant striving for perfection. She expected the same from those with whom she worked, but she remained an inspiration to any young singer.

Her stylistic and technical range encompassed everything from Mozart and Cherubini to Wagner and Puccini, and her understanding of the bel canto style and her instincts for drama led, according to Major (1987:46), to renewed interest in the bel canto operas of the first part of the nineteenth century.

Her finest roles were perhaps Medea, Norma and Violetta in *La Traviata*, but her greatest monument is the wide public acceptance of a repertoire that she opened up, allowing many of the great singers who followed her, including Sutherland, to explore and present many operas from the whole sweep of the nineteenth century that otherwise might have remained gathering dust in museums and archives." (Adams, 1981:249).

According to Blain (2014:n.p.), before Callas, the operas of the nineteenth-century Italian composers such as Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini were part of a moribund tradition – excessively troublesome, making it impossible to sing precisely, it was argued, and brimming with senselessly decorative vocal writing impossible to square with the notion of living music drama for a present-day audience. Callas destroyed those arguments by performing the music of these "museum pieces" with an amazing if eccentric specialised capacity and possessing the characters completely. In terms of rescuing neglected repertoire, Callas was undoubtedly a pioneer. She was also an iconoclast, conveying to every one of the roles she sang a uniquely fiery temperament, and what might be termed an immersive form of vocal method acting. She put significance on the word "interpretation" in opera, giving her successors – as one of them, Caballé, so relevantly put it – "the chance to do things that were hardly possible before her."

For Galatopoulos (1998:442), Callas's achievement depended on her ability and talent to reach exceptional artistic heights and not on the criterion that she was merely the best of her time. He expounds his opinion by arguing that Callas's artistic accomplishment effortlessly parallels the renowned singers of the past such as Malibran and Pasta and surpasses them because her achievements do not only include the Classical and Romantic roles but also later musical styles such as those of Verdi, Wagner and the composers of verismo.

Callas had a significant influence on several of her contemporaries and successors, and the development of the operatic repertoire and its interpretation gained significantly from Callas's example. The careers of Italian soprano and opera director Renata Scottò (1934-), Greek soprano Elena Souliotis (1943-2004), American soprano Beverly Sills (1929-2007), Sutherland, Caballé, Slovak coloratura soprano, Edita Gruberová (1946-), Italian soprano, Cecilia Gasdia (1960-), Anderson and others would otherwise have been limited, as the renewal of the repertoire might not have happened (Galatopoulos, 1998:442).

Italian soprano Barbara Frittoli (1967-), shares her views on what Callas meant to her as a singer, and adds, "My dream, which is doomed to remain unfulfilled forever, would be to sing Lady Macbeth. But my voice has neither the steel nor the right 'ping' for it. Callas, for whom I have a passion, ruined the profession for us all in this sense because she could do everything." As brief as Callas's career was, Frittoli considers that decade as "a beacon of light, which endures to this day and inspires all of us." Frittoli explains that Callas through her voice and passion had the ability to make one actually envisage the character she was interpreting. She acknowledges that due to the level of intensity in her characterisation, beautiful tone was sometimes sacrificed, but prefers the depth of communication she brought to music to a shallow interpretation (Matheopoulos 1998:70-71).

The Spanish mezzo-soprano, Teresa Berganza (1935-), remembered working with Callas in Dallas (Matheopoulos, 1991:251). The first thing she gleaned from Callas was her superb work ethic; she observed the effort Callas took to make everything look easy and natural. She proposes that Callas brought opera into the world of "real" theatre which genuinely elevated the power of the music. "No one since has ever touched her".

Callas had the ability to become the roles that she played and to be completely credible to the audience. This is what raised her work "above the level of mere skill, to the divine heights of eloquent poetry" and made her "La Divina" (Galatopoulos, 1963:25).

To my mind, Levine defines the essence of what Callas was about as an artist: she could draw a complete portrait in a matter of moments through the sounds she made and through her identification with the character and the music. Callas managed to overcome any vocal limitations when a role interested her. In my opinion, the following two quotes by Callas represent perhaps the quintessential expression of her ethos: “When you interpret a role, you have to have a thousand colours to portray happiness, joy, sorrow, fear. How can you do this with only a beautiful voice?” (Levine, 2003:133-134) and “To sing is an expression of your being, a being which is becoming” (Stassinopoulos, 1980:n.p.).

4.2.2 Callas’s *Norma*

Callas sang *Norma* on stage more than 90 times between 1948 and 1965 (Levine, 2003:136).

Her first experience with *Norma* was a performance of “Mira, o Norma” in her broadcasting début in 1940 from the Zappion Hall in Athens at the tender age of 17. She sang “Casta diva” at musical soirées in di Hildalgo’s home on two or three occasions in 1942-43, and performed “Casta diva” for the first time with orchestra on 30 March 1945 with the Orchestra of the Greek National Opera. Subsequently she performed extracts from *Norma* in concert, until she auditioned with “Casta diva” at La Scala in 1947, without success (Hamilton, 1996:17-77).

She made her début as *Norma* on 5 May 1948 at the Teatro Communale in Firenze. Performances of *Norma* followed in Buenos Aires with Italian conductor Tullio Serafin (1878-1968) in June 1949, and then a concert version with the same cast in September of that year. Thereafter she sang *Norma* for the first time in Italy on 13 January 1950 in Venice. Rome followed in February of that year and her début in México at the Ópera Nacional in May. In 1951, Callas sang *Norma* in Palermo in February, in Rio de Janeiro in September and then in Catania in November. Finally on 16 January 1952 she made her *Norma* début at La Scala (Hamilton, 1996:17-77).

Serafin had been closely associated with Puccini and Toscanini; his life had been devoted to the theatre and as a conductor of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi he was unparalleled. “His influence on the early career of Callas cannot be overestimated; Gobbi described him as an infallible judge of voice and character.” Serafin coached Ponselle for her first performance of *Norma* and she alluded to his ability to draw the most noteworthy reaction from all who performed under his baton as “a divinely inspired gift.” (Major, 1987:47). According to Stassinopoulos (1980:60-61), Callas put in a large amount of effort into recitatives. Serafin had told her, “Find the rhythm and proportion, by singing them over to yourself as if you are talking.” Callas had a fine structural sense which told her just which

word in a musical sentence to accentuate and just what syllable to stress within that word. However, the technical demands of Norma went far beyond the recitative. Callas was determined to meet all these demands.

Galatopoulos (1998:86-87) states that Serafin provided him with the most constructive evaluation of Callas's first Norma in 1960. Callas accomplished her portrayal both musically and dramatically from the beginning. According to Serafin there were in general some vocal inconsistencies in the recitatives and the audience did not really respond to the "Casta diva" as they should have. Serafin was of the opinion that most people in the late forties only appreciated pure lyricism without taking the dramatic situation into account. He also believed that the impact of Callas's first Norma, was such that it ultimately altered audiences' approach to opera.

Both Serafin and Italian composer Francesco Siciliani (1911-1996) were convinced that in Callas they had found a soprano *drammatico d'agilità*, an artist who could sing coloratura dramatically and integrate it in her portrayal of a character – the voice of legendary singers such as Pasta and Malibran. More importantly, Callas's first Norma revived a vocal dimension to the approach of opera that had previously been practically absent from the theatres for many years (Galatopoulos, 1998:87).

Of her debut in the role, Frangini of *La Nazione* wrote

her schooling is rather different from what we are accustomed to hearing, as indeed her vocal colour is unusual. Nevertheless, her merits are undeniable; her highly accomplished portrayal of Norma is rich in subtle and moving accents of femininity – she is the woman in love, the woman betrayed, the mother, the friend and in the end the implacable priestess. (Galatopoulos, 1998:86-87).

Giuseppe Pugliese's review in *Il gazzettino* of 14 January 1950, the morning after the 1950 *Norma* at La Fenice, is less effusive. He warns that Callas's expressive singing and uninhibited restraint could lead to imprecisions in the bel canto style of Bellini. He continues to criticize her use of *portamenti* and feels that her voice is unequal and weakened by her vocal characterization. He does however acknowledge that Callas is an exceptional singer and artist (Landini, 2016:1088-1089).

Callas made her London debut in *Norma* at the Royal Opera House in 1952 under Italian conductor, composer, musicologist and critic Vittorio Gui (1885-1975) with Italian mezzo-soprano, Ebe Stignani (1903-1974) as Adalgisa. This was a performance which survives on record, and also features the young Sutherland in the small role of Clotilde.

Stassinopoulos (1980:93) posits that Callas's unique skill set was perhaps the only reason for the revival of *Norma* at Covent Garden in 1952, where it had not been heard since Ponselle sang it in 1930. The first night, 8 November 1952, was seen as a double revelation. "The first was Callas to the audience. The second, and in many ways more important, was the audience to itself and there were hundreds present at Covent Garden on 8 November for whom Callas's *Norma* was a self-revelation." Callas stimulated emotions and inspired a depth and intensity of feeling that went beyond anything they had previously experienced in this work. It is little wonder that so many adored and to an extent worshipped her.

According to Galatopoulos (1998:124-125), in evaluating Callas's first *Norma* in London, Andrew Porter (*Musical Times*, January 1953) describes her as "the most exciting singer on the stage today". He continues by comparing Callas' portrayal of *Norma* to those of Pasta and Grisi. He lavishes praise on her achievements in the role, arguing that she possesses the vocal authority and magnificent range which he considers as absolute necessities for the role. He also finds that her grasp of the drama together with superb vocal colouring, led to exciting and moving tones. As an actress he found that she emanated an arresting presence that found its realisation in her gestures, physicality and complete dominion of the stage. He has some minor critique regarding some less attractive tones in her voice, but nevertheless declares, "Callas is the *Norma* of our day."

For Blain (2014:n.p.) *Norma* was one of Callas's most hypnotizing acts of re-creation. Her performance of the aria "Casta diva" has a mesmeric quality and an undercurrent of tormented tension approached only by a couple of singers. Callas restored a heroic attitude to the part without sacrificing musical values. It is believed that her balance between drama and agility came the closest in modern terms to the qualities possessed by Pasta which had inspired Bellini to create *Norma* especially for that unique artist (Ardoin, 1977:9-10).

For the Italian musicologist, critic, voice teacher and novelist, Rodolfo Celletti (1917-2004), during the two decades that preceded Callas's *Norma*, the role was sung as if the music had been taken from *La Gioconda* or *Cavalleria rusticana*. Kesting (n.d.:84) postulates that the effect of Callas's interpretation of the role was revolutionary. He defends his opinion by citing Friedrich Lippmann (1932-), a foremost Bellini specialist, who asserts that Callas far exceeded both the great interpreters of *Norma* of the past and those who would follow her.

However, Kesting (n.d.:86) cites the reservations of English music and theatre critic, Philip Hope-Wallace (1911-1979,) about Callas in this London performance, which some regard as her best all-round performance of the role. Hope-Wallace praises many fine elements of Callas's *Norma*,

especially her musicality and her dramatization of the role, and concedes that her technique dazzled the audience, but proceeds to find her wanting in what he terms “classical dimension” and therefore concludes that her Norma is not exceptional.

In Galatopoulos (1998:429), Callas quotes the dictum: “Music begins where words stop.”⁵ She states that she always strove for truth in the music without making the words seem redundant. She extended Serafin’s advice concerning the words in recitatives to the rhythm of the text and how she could find balance between the music and the natural accents, pauses and proportions of the text. Serafin knew that she had mastered the music, he wanted her to realise that if she was going to be convincing, she had to express the related emotion through music rather than through the words. Callas confirmed her understanding by saying: “Music creates a world on a higher level, but opera needs words to accomplish this. That is why I, an interpreter, a performer, begin with the music. The composer has already found truth in the libretto.”

Galatopoulos comments that Callas, considering Norma’s musical style as the benchmark of the bel canto method, shared her thoughts on the role and revealed some of the intimate emotion she shared with the character. She describes Norma as a “grumbling woman”, who is reluctant to reveal her emotions, but a woman who cannot act in an unjust or malicious way in the situation which she created herself. She touchingly adds, “My tears in Norma were real”.

Ardoin (1974:10) quotes Callas on the same subject, in a moment of self-analysis, “Norma resembles me in a way. She seems very strong, very ferocious at times. Actually, she is not, even though she roars like a lion.” Kesting (n.d.:84) adds that the role of Norma was linked to Callas’s own destiny. She once said that she would retire from stage if she is no longer able to sing the part of Bellini’s heroine. The hypercritical Callas, always being dissatisfied with her “Casta diva” perhaps depended on other portions of the role to sustain her interpretation (Annachini (1974:n.p.).

Callas had tremendous psychological insight into the role. She explains to Galatopoulos (1998:443) that she uses the melody line of Bellini as the foundation of her characterisation of Norma, yet she is adamant that beautiful sound on its own is not the criterion of characterization. She argues that the most dominant part of Norma’s character is in fact the temporal woman and mother, as opposed to the divinatory demigoddess which she represents publically. She feels that Norma actually does not believe herself to be a demigoddess, especially once she falls in love, breaks her vows and secretly has children with Pollione. Callas believes that Norma achieves victory over the druids and in the aria

⁵ The dictum by Heinrich Heine is misattributed to ETA Hoffmann.

“Casta Diva,” appeals to the Chaste Goddess for assistance and direction. She asserts that Norma loses emotional control in the last act, but remains honourable and that this is her purification.

Ardoin (1974:252) is of the opinion that Callas was at her greatest in these final moments of Norma’s purification, as alluded to above. He found this intensely moving, maybe due to the fact that there were many similarities with Callas’s own story. She was perceived as a high priestess of her art, yet she was very fallible in her humanity.

For Galatopoulos (1963:109) Callas is magnificent from the moment of her first appearance on stage; she is what the audience expects a demi-goddess to look like and sound like. He succinctly describes the scene:

She begins her recitative “Sediziose voci” (Seditious words) just before her prayer, the celebrated aria “Casta diva” (Chaste Goddess), most authoritatively: her people are completely subjected to her. There is an unusual beauty in her singing of “E il sacro vischio io mieto” (Behold Heaven opening his Portals), to a splendid diminuendo on “io mieto” just before the “Casta diva”. “Casta Diva” is at once lyrical and full of mystery. The veiled tone in Madame Callas’ voice is sensitively used to begin this aria. But the real mystery of her sacred nature is expressed when she reaches the passaggio in F; by some mystifying alchemy the voice seems to become effortless in the coloratura part of the aria, and even more so in the vocally formidable cadenza at the end. In the short recitative between the aria and the cabaletta, Madame Callas gives us a glimpse of the more mortal side of Norma’s character as she dismisses the Druids from the sacred ritual with “Cadrà? punirlo io posso; Ma punirlo il cor non sa” (He fall? Yes I can kill him, but my heart cannot). The cabaletta which follows with its chromatic glissandi, holds no terrors for Madame Callas; the coloratura singing is not only breathtaking but also, as it should be, an integral part of the dramatic expression in the music (Galatopoulos, 1963:109).

Blyth (2004:53) records that Callas returned in the role of Norma for the 1953 Coronation season and again in 1957 with a more slender figure, giving interpretations of greater delicacy and vocal expertise, thus attesting to the fact that she did not stagnate in her interpretation of a role. He does however point out that the 1952 rendering was perhaps the most remarkable because of its originality – “the arrival at Covent Garden of one who was to become an icon to so many as she gave a new dimension to the art of acting with the voice.”

For Ardoin (1974:11), as for many others, it was only with Callas that Bellini's original was restored. He considers her "not just a singer but a musician whose instrument was the voice" (Ardoin, 1988:xv) and says that she had a greater influence on the Italian operatic repertory and style of performance than any other singer of the century. Even the most forceful critics of her voice recognized this influence and the extraordinary range of her musicality. He asserts that Callas's *Norma* was unsurpassed. "Callas created the maximum of what opera can be." He feels that Callas became the highest standard against which many singers would be compared. He argues that the comparisons have to be drawn not only on the vocal aspect of singing, but also on the dramatic and interpretative aspect thereof and how the listener is impacted (Ardoin, 1974:252).

Landini (2016:1088-1089) argues that Callas's role in the revival of *bel canto*, reminded people of the magnificence of Pasta and Malibran, and marked a definitive critical moment in the historic approach to *Norma*. She shone a light on the long-neglected glories of *bel canto*. However, it is not to say that Callas received nothing but praise from the public.

Galatopoulos (1963:111), while praising Callas's interpretation of the tragic Druid priestess as the major achievement of a genius, posits that no singer could be perfect in this role, and admits that the vocal flaws listed earlier are also in evidence here.

In a later book, Galatopoulos (1998:435-436) refers to an instant where he asked Serafin, perhaps the only person who could put the Callas case to rest, whether he thought Callas's voice was beautiful or ugly. Serafin's immediate response was

Which voice, that of *Norma*, *Violetta*, *Lucia*? Then there was *Medea*, *Isolde*, *Amina* – I can go on.. You see, she had different voices for different roles. I have known many of Callas's voices. Do you know, I have never really considered whether her voice was ugly or beautiful. I only know that it was always the right one, and this is more than beautiful.

This insightful comment is of considerable significance because it confirms that art, both on an aesthetic and technical level, cannot be defined in absolute terms.

It came to be believed that *Norma*'s complex loyalties, her nobility, her shame, her rage and her eventual sacrifice suited Callas's sense of tragedy and drama, both on a personal and professional level. For Galatopoulos (1963:22-23), only those who have seen Callas in the role of *Norma* can truly comprehend this. Her range is demonstrated by comparing the way she sings the melodious "Casta

diva,” where Norma shows up as a demi-goddess to her people, to her depiction of the scorned woman, who is outraged with Pollione in the “unbridled scales” of “Oh non tremare”.

Hofmeyr (2016a) posits that Callas had an advantage in having a voice and personality for which the characteristics of the warrior queen came naturally and which other sopranos find hard to emulate. Callas mastered bel canto well enough to balance this fierceness with moments of lyricism and tenderness, but her “Casta diva” will never be an object lesson in bel canto singing. One can say, however, that her vision of Norma as communicated through her interpretative intentions is unmatched and remains a standard against which all others are judged.

It is interesting to note that according to Ardoin (1974:233), “Casta diva” had always been a source of aggravation for Callas on a vocal level, even in the early days of her career. Her approach to the music was dramatic, never detached. He declares that Sutherland or Caballé sing sublimely, but there is little input of individual character in the role and they do not act with their voices as Callas does.

Galatopoulos (1963:22-23) nevertheless considers Callas a great technician and offers an in-depth analysis of the role her technical prowess played in her interpretative genius. He argues that Callas’s coloratura was not just a display of technique, but it was always part of the dramatic context of the music showing how expressively she made use of the unique tone colour in her voice.

Galatopoulos (1998:436-437) explains that Callas possessed the rare gift of colouring every musical passage appropriately with imagination and skill. In Callas’s singing, the words acted as a vehicle for the coloration. She demonstrated that true virtuosity is not built upon vocalising only. She could effortlessly sing very softly while having control over tempo and colouring simultaneously. It was this accomplishment that enabled her to discover the secret of speaking through music with impeccable intuition.

He recounts that Ernest Newman, perhaps the oldest music critic in London at the time, and one who had heard some of the great Normas of the past, found himself surrounded after the performance by a crowd of people who wanted to hear his opinion. Newman said very little: “She [Callas] is wonderful, truly wonderful.” And then, raising his umbrella, he added in a rather high-pitched voice, “But she is not a Ponselle!” (Galatopoulos 1998:125).

While Callas did not possess the vocal beauty and suavity of Tebaldi, the resounding high notes of Sutherland or, in the latter part of her career, the volume and steadiness of Swedish dramatic soprano Birgit Nilsson (1918-2005), she possessed a good measure of each of these qualities, in addition to her

genius and artistry. These other singers did not possess these latter qualities to the extent that Callas did.

4.3 Sutherland

4.3.1 *Background*

One of Callas's most immediate successors was Sutherland. She was born in the Eastern suburbs of Sydney and her father was a Scottish tailor. She loved her father, like Callas loved hers, but sadly Sutherland's father died when she was only six. Her mother, a trained mezzo, had studied with a pupil of German mezzo-soprano Mathilde Marchesi (1821-1913) from whom she had acquired a fine breathing technique. Her mother noticed that her daughter not only enjoyed singing from her earliest childhood, but could also produce quite an appealing sound, and felt this was something to be encouraged (Matheopoulos, 1991:197-198).

In this, she differed from Callas's mother, who saw Callas more as a vehicle through which she could gain attention, and did not always attend to Callas's emotional needs, such as having a relationship with her father. One can only speculate on the effect these different upbringings could have had on the personalities of these great artists.

Sutherland, whose vocal endurance was as remarkable as her artistry, was fortunate in her first voice teacher. In her own words, “[T]he acquisition of a healthy breathing technique at an early age is crucial. Without it, I wouldn't have still been singing at the ripe old age of 65. Because the voice is a physical thing, a part of the body. Unlike other musical instruments which, if destroyed, can be replaced, a voice, once ruined, is gone forever. Even though, like most bodily ailments, it can be treated, it can never be restored to its previous condition.”

Major (1987:143) singles out Sutherland's “immediately recognizable personal timbre”, which he describes as distinctive amongst coloratura sopranos, especially the honeyed tones of her highest notes. He praises her superb coloratura abilities for their unmatched accuracy and dexterity, and lauds her improvisational skills. He comments that she executed the elongated Bellinian line with clarity and refinement, employing the precision of an instrumentalist. Considering, additionally, the extremities of her range – low G to top E – he considers her unique amongst singers.

Matheopoulos (1991:204-205) relates that Sutherland stressed that a vital thing to remember when interpreting bel canto is not to concentrate merely on the exhibition of vocal bravura but to find the

feelings and emotions behind them. She would say, “Bel canto operas are not just a series of fireworks. They are very expressive music in which you must, nevertheless, maintain an even vocal line. You certainly can’t go groaning and grunting, the way you can, up to a point, in verismo.” Perhaps the following explanation, by Sutherland, explains why she did not always communicate so strongly through the words. While studying bel canto parts, her main difficulty lies not in learning the music, which tends to happen reasonably effortlessly, but the words. Sutherland always ended up knowing the music first, even though she began her study of new roles with the libretto.

According to Matheopoulos (1991:205-206), Sutherland was aware of the fact that her absorption of the music and the vocal line, and her comparative lack of concern with dramatic interpretation in the purely scenic sense, were seen as a shortcoming in her artistic style. In this regard, Sutherland stated that she felt that the composer had imbued the vocal line with the sufficient expression to carry the dramatic intention. As someone who was by nature a *Stimmediva*, she was of the opinion that opera was mainly about singing. She offers that truly dramatic expression belongs in the theatre, in a “straight play.”

When Callas was at the height of her career, Sutherland’s was just beginning. While observing Callas’s applause in the wings, Sutherland pondered her own fame. Working with Callas made Sutherland question whether she would ever attain the status of prima donna. Having been encouraged by Bonyngé, she dared to express to the great diva the hope that she might one day sing a coloratura role. Callas replied that it would be hard work, “but why not?” (Major, 1987:22-23). Sutherland did eventually manage, through extraordinary singing, to bring new dimensions to the role of Norma (Adams, 1981:14).

Braddon (1962:57-58) recalls that in the summer of 1953 Sutherland worked at Covent Garden with assistant director, Lord Harewood (1923-2011). He noted her excellence as a musician and her artistic instinct in singing. He stated that, “being a good musician alone could not make a person a great singer: but the instinctive capacity to make a phrase float or ring could.” After Sutherland was sponsored by Covent Garden to attend acting classes with actor, director and theatre instructor, Norman Ayrton (1924-2017), he also came to realise that singers were simply not trained to act.

In an anecdote narrated by Ayrton, he illustrates the confining nature of the operatic acting repertoire very well and he describes how, together with Sutherland, he developed what he calls her GPE or General Pained Expression that she would put on in any moment of dramatic tension. “Her GPE and a mastery of the art of falling down served as her repertoire of acting gestures” (Joe & Theresa, 2002:45-46).

Sutherland was convinced her voice was more suited to Wagner and her ambition was to become a Wagnerian singer. She decided to pursue a different path after meeting Bonyngé at the Royal College of Music. After winning the financially substantial First Prize at the Mobil Quest Singing Competition in Australia, Sutherland had arrived in London in 1951. By often attending her classes at the RCM, where her Professor of Singing was Clive Carey, Bonyngé felt convinced that she was a potential coloratura soprano when he noticed that, in private, Sutherland sang with a greater sense of freedom and a higher, different voice from the one she used in class. Sutherland was not entirely convinced about this. She had grown accustomed to singing in a lower register and felt that the higher repertoire was not suited to her voice, as she could not sustain the higher tessitura. She felt that this type of singing was contrary to her natural endowment. She relates that “Rickey” (Bonyngé) had consciously tricked her into exploring the higher parts of her vocality, until she eventually saw a different voice evolving, and realised that he had been right (Matheopoulos, 1991:198-199).

Bonyngé has often been attacked for what some see as his exaggerated role in Sutherland’s career, and especially for conducting nearly all her performances and recordings, yet he has also helped his wife with his extensive knowledge of bel canto which extends to writing out embellishments for her. He has also been criticized by the likes of accompanist and recording executive Nina Walker, quoted by Matheopoulos (1991:200-201), for transforming what might have been a great dramatic soprano voice into a coloratura, supposedly to satisfy his own fixation with bel canto. She felt that the expressive core of the voice had been sacrificed on the altar of technique and musicianship.

Sutherland was truly equipped vocally to carry on the bel canto tradition and do justice to the stylistic intentions of these composers. Most importantly, she had Bonyngé who really knew these traditions. In this age of musical curiosity, recordings are quickly covering the entire spectrum of composition, but on stage the financial restraints imposed by rapidly rising costs may limit the future of bel canto. Fortunately, as with Callas, Sutherland has a repertoire with a wider breadth than Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti. But since her rise to international stardom in 1959 few other singers have emerged with the prodigious vocal powers which would guarantee that opera’s future will see as extensive an exploration into the delights of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Italian repertoire as has happened during the Sutherland years (Adams, 1981:17).

Regarding her diction, it would seem that her critics did not always take into account the tessitura of most of the music she sang. She felt that she tended to “iron out the words” to find a beautiful sound, as some of the music was so far out of the spoken register that it was almost not possible to enunciate.

Her final view on this reflects what was expressed above by Reid: “The words cannot always be distinct. If they were one couldn’t sing the notes.”

Sutherland never supported the view that beauty of timbre and smoothness of line should be sacrificed to the drama and the vocal line “mangled in a lather of histrionics.” (Major, 1987:138).

The topic of Sutherland’s enunciation and articulation emerged in several of the press reviews, while the record critics, who are often the same writers, continued to comment about the subject with almost every new release. Covent Garden’s audition report of 1952 commenting on good diction seemed a long time ago. Bonyng expressed his perspectives on the matter saying that the music is to carry on the emotion and not the text. The sounds of the voice act as the vehicle between the score and should convey the emotion that is born from it. It is only in recitative where one should “over-enunciate” the words in order to tell the story (Adams 1981:213).

Adams (1981:156) shares Sutherland’s advice to young professional singers in the light of her own experiences: prospective singers should devote their lives wholly to their art, and their private lives should be in service of their discipline. She proposes that technique must be a given and then each singer must strive to bring their own particular unique sound and interpretation to the stage. She believes that such and individuality is the hallmark of a truly great artist.

4.3.2 *Sutherland’s Norma*

Despite its great success and vast impact, Callas’s approach to Norma was not uncontested. Some sopranos, like Croatian dramatic soprano Zinka Milanov (1906-1989) and Greek soprano Elena Suliotis (1943-2004), simply continued in the verismo vein of the previous decades. The most significant challenge in the next two decades, despite noteworthy interpretations by Turkish soprano Leyla Gencer (1928-2008) and Caballé, came from Sutherland whose debut of Norma was at Vancouver Opera in 1963. Sutherland’s interpretation focused on the softer, more “womanly” aspects of the character. This approach is expressed succinctly by the Italian theatre and film director, Sandro Sequi (1933-1998), who directed *Norma* with Sutherland at Covent Garden in 1967. In Adams (1981:212), he explains that the drama is inherent in the plot, but that a certain structure must be respected. He believes that Bellini’s style is Romantic and tries to direct in the same vein. He characterises Norma in a threefold way, describing her as a priestess, a lover and a mother, and consequently believes that Norma must possess a certain warmth, which he believes Sutherland’s interpretation reflects.

This accords with the views of the conductor of that production, Bonyngé, who asserts that, “Norma is not just a great statue on stage, neither is she a virago; she is a woman who also has her faults and weaknesses” (Adams, 1981:213).

Major (1987:137-138) relates that Bonyngé suggested to Austrian-born opera impresario Sir Rudolf Bing (1902-1997) that Sutherland’s depiction of Norma would be unique. This proved to be true, for she brought a compassionate, “tender” nature to her interpretation. Sutherland chose to express emotions of love, sympathy and despair, rather than hate and anger.

According to Major (1987:137-138), Sequi was impressed by the glow of her stage identity and the focus on the “private side of Norma’s schizophrenic existence”, while Adams (1981:172) predicted that Norma would become one of Sutherland’s most-repeated roles.

She was at first very reluctant to embrace the role of Norma, despite the endeavours of Bonyngé and Bing to persuade her (Major, 1987:104). Nevertheless, in the 1950s Serafin worked with Sutherland on *I puritani*, *La sonnambula*, *Norma* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and was delighted to discover a non-Italian singer who not only had a beautiful voice, with a unique timbre, but who also could handle the demands of the role of Norma (Major, 1987:47).

Norma would become Sutherland’s favourite role, but she was very aware of the complexities and pitfalls it entailed. Sutherland’s shared her opinion with a friend, saying, “...it is a terribly taxing role for anyone and cannot be taken easily in many places. She just never stops.” (Major, 1987:147).

Like Caballé, Sutherland considered herself deeply indebted to Callas’s inspiring example and the standards she set. As mentioned earlier, Sutherland first encountered Callas when Sutherland sang Clotilde to Callas’s Norma in 1952. Stignani was singing Adalgisa, and Sutherland remembers what a tremendous impact both these women and especially Callas had on her. Sutherland felt that the way these ladies portrayed their parts was absolutely strikingly. She recounts that she was greatly impressed by Callas’s rendering of “Casta diva”, not only by the quality of Calla’s voice, but also by the passion, power and stamina of her voice. “Those 1952 Normas will remain forever implanted in my memory.” (Matheopoulos 1991:206).

Sutherland heard Callas sing Norma again several years later, but observed that her performances were not vocally on the same level. Being under the spell of the earlier performances, Sutherland shied away from singing Norma for a decade, but finally, in 1962, she decided to do it, in Vancouver with American mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne (1934-) as Adalgisa. She still felt troubled by memories of Callas and her nervousness was provoked by the fact that the performances were not spaced too well.

This Vancouver production, however, taught her a vital lesson, apart from teaching her how to defeat her nerves (something one never heard Callas talk about): never to sing this role again without at least two clear days between performances. Sutherland expresses that the biggest problem in Norma, because of its great length, is learning how to pace yourself. She explains that after the *scena* in Act 1 there is still much to do that the role demands making it evident that Norma requires an enormous amount of stamina and cannot be approached by any soprano who does not bear this in mind (Matheopoulos, 1991:206-207).

The role became much easier for her as her voice matured. Sutherland herself asserts that the fact that the role was more sung in, made parts of Norma a lot easier, given the fact that the voice has acquired a different timbre in certain areas (Matheopoulos 1991:207).

During the early days there were speculations that her voice would not last, but with time it proved the opposite and grew in warmth, agility and dramatic strength (Major, 1987:143).

Dreyer (1978:17) posits that the role of Norma was interpreted in a revolutionary fashion by Sutherland. Her portrayal, which radiated an overwhelming humanness and sense of tenderness, showed that the role could reveal more than just power, stamina and skill.

Major (1987:138-139) quotes the eighteenth-century singing teacher Pier Tosi (c. 1653-1732), who wrote: “I do not know if a perfect singer can at the same time be a perfect actor, for if the mind is at once divided by two different purposes he will incline more to the one than the other. What a joy it would be to possess both to a perfect degree.” Sutherland agreed with Tosi to a certain extent, but she still felt that there were risks involved in submerging oneself in a role as an actor would. She warned, “If you get emotionally involved to the extent of letting the emotions take over, you’ll not get to the end of the opera – and you are restricted by the fact there are only so many beats in a bar.”

Sutherland’s views on the relative importance of dramatic and vocal exigencies show how different her priorities were to those of Callas. Callas always gave primacy to dramatic considerations, whereas Sutherland seemed more committed to the voice. Who was right? Callas did not always take care of her voice as Sutherland did, and the latter’s career certainly lasted longer. Nevertheless, I still believe Callas’s legacy to be the more memorable, and perhaps that is what really matters.

4.4 Other interpreters of Norma after Callas

Callas’s predominance was, up until the end of the 1950s, unquestionable.

As mentioned above, the 1960s produced some noteworthy new interpretations of Norma. Annachini (1974:n.p.) describes the Norma of Gencer as aggressive and the performance by Sutherland at the other extreme, as abstract and ornamental. Each of these, in its own way, was excellent, yet for Annachini neither attacked the problem at its roots. I would imagine Annachini meant the problem was that in Gencer's case her interpretation was still too much in line with Callas's.

He also relates that in 1970, when Caballé, after impressive triumphs in rarely staged works by Donizetti and Bellini, decided to sing the role of the druid priestess, many doubted whether she had a voice suited to the role, or else feared that singing Norma would be too risky a venture for the "delicate" voice of the Spanish soprano. Caballé, like Callas and Sutherland, demonstrated that it is not the voice, but the bel canto technique that solves the problem. And in doing so she affirmed that a mystical, enraptured Norma is not necessarily less Bellinian than a tragic Norma.

Annachini (1974:n.p.) further argues that while Callas had praised the priestly and apocalyptic aspect of a Norma, privately tortured by passion and doubt, Caballé had concluded that her gentle voice and evident humanity could bring out the maternal side of Norma as well as the suffering feminine aspect. This places her psychological approach to Norma closer to that of Sutherland, but she manages to combine this gentler approach with the incisive diction of the Italo-Spanish school.

Matheopoulos (1991:178-179) lists Scotto as a subsequent performer of Norma. Scotto considers *Norma*, like most of her colleagues, as "the perfect bel canto opera." She believes that the title role is one of the most difficult in the soprano repertoire, not only on a vocal level, but also, and especially, on an interpretative level. She summarises the character of Norma by demarcating the diverse facets of Norma. Her designations include "High Priestess", "a woman in love" and "a mother." She carefully contemplates each individual facet and postulates that each of these characteristics and their conflicts need to be carefully scrutinised and assimilated in order to fully express the music in which Bellini has already captured them.

Scotto further finds it intriguing that the drama weighs so heavily in this otherwise typical bel canto opera; and even more interesting that there are hints of early Verdi in its recitatives, which she declares are far more important than any recitatives in any other bel canto opera. Scotto observes that although "Casta diva" is magnificently beautiful, it is not the key to who Norma is. It is only in the recitatives and ultimately in Act III where she become the true tragic heroine that is portrayed in Bellini's music. The interpreter would have missed the essence of the music if she could not understand the tragic element throughout the drama. As Serafin had explained to Callas, when you can match the text to the music of Bellini, you will find the key to Norma. She does not consider Norma as that much of a

challenge to sing, provided you bear in mind the purity of the music and have an excellent technique (Matheopoulos 1991:179).

Another subsequent interpreter of Norma, the English soprano/mezzo-soprano, Rosalind Plowright, (1949-), is of the opinion that Norma is a role that one must approach and execute with intelligence, as it is one of the most demanding roles in the soprano repertoire. She advises that one must pace the role carefully, with “Mozartian discipline”, because of its vocal and dramatic demands in terms of stamina. She suggests remaining especially contained until after the duet with Adalgisa, but even after that employing every bit of technical skill one has (Matheopoulos, 1991:135).

Eaglen sang the role in Scotland, Ravenna, Vienna, Los Angeles and Seattle, as well as at La Scala, Carnegie Hall and the Paris Opéra. According to The New York Times, “Hers was a Norma whose vocal weight and power would have been unimaginable to Bellini and yet a Norma whose sinuous control and musical wisdom might have impressed him” (Matheopoulos, 1998:34). Eaglen emphasises the duality of the character, which is exacerbated by the difficulty of hiding your children for six years, while still performing the rituals of a chaste priestess. When everything is exposed, she believes that Norma has a natural inclination toward vengeance, but lauds her willingness to acknowledge her own weaknesses and to act honourably and graciously by sacrificing herself (Matheopoulos, 1998:32).

June Anderson, described by Matheopoulos (1991:28) as “a highly intelligent woman and a very intelligent singer with a technique that defies description [...] absolutely reminiscent of Sutherland but, in my opinion, more interesting”, expresses her views on Norma by acknowledging that Callas’s Norma is unsurpassed. She feels that her voice is very different from that of Callas and that one needs a certain emotional maturity to sing the role. She adds that even though her voice might in the future be ready to sing the role, it would be pointless if she could not really plumb the depths of the role satisfactorily (Matheopoulos, 1991:30-31).

It is clear that Callas brought about a metamorphosis in the way in which the role of Norma would be viewed and interpreted. Despite the contributions of her successors, her interpretation has remained a standard against which interpretations of Norma are judged.

5 Analysis of the responses to the questionnaire

The questionnaire sent to the three respondents read as follows:

After listening to the two audio recordings of the *scena* from Act 1 of *Norma*, performed respectively by Callas and Sutherland, please address, with regard to each singer, all the issues listed in Section A and answer all the questions in Section B.

5.1 Section A – Technical, musical and interpretative aspects

- 1) Technical aspects:
 - a) placement of voice
 - b) tone colour
 - c) breath control
 - d) diction
 - e) note attack
 - f) To what extent do you believe that the performance reflects the ideals of bel canto singing?
- 2) Musical and stylistic aspects:
 - a) phrasing
 - b) application of dynamic values
 - c) To what extent do you feel that the performer respects the composer's intentions as expressed in the score?
- 3) Dramatic and interpretative aspects
 - a) vocal and verbal inflection
 - b) tone colour as interpretative device
 - c) How well does the performer express the dramatic situation?

5.2 Section B – Comparative questions

- 1) Are the different aspects, mentioned in Section A, successfully integrated, or is the singer stronger in certain aspects than in others?
- 2) Regarding the recitative “Sediziose voci”:
 - a) Which singer do you prefer?
 - b) Why?
 - c) Please point out the strong and weak points of each singer.
- 3) Regarding the aria “Casta diva”:

- a) Which singer do you prefer?
 - b) Why?
 - c) Please point out the strong and weak points of each singer.
- 4) Regarding the cabaletta “Fine al rito, e il sacro bosco...Ah! bello a me ritorna”:
- a) Which singer do you prefer?
 - b) Why?
 - c) Please point out the strong and weak points of each singer.
- 5) Please indicate:
- a) which of the two singers’ entire *scena* you prefer.
 - b) Why?

The responses are listed below. It will be clear that some of the respondents did not answer all of the questions. For the sake of convenience, some remarks are repeated here under different headings where applicable.

Section A – Technical, musical and interpretative aspects

1. Technical aspects

a) Placement of voice		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	[No comment]	
2	Callas’s placement ideal with enough resonance with no interference in diction	Sutherland’s placement in front just behind teeth. I hear that she clings to this placement and therefore interferes with any form of diction. I imagine that she had a stiff jaw. It sounds as if she has a mouth guard in her mouth.
3	[No comment]	The placement of Sutherland’s voice is very much in the frontal area of the face.

b) Tone colour		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	[No comment]	
2	Slight harshness in tone colour.	Beautiful tone and even throughout her range.
3	[No comment]	The tone colour of Sutherland is very unique.

c) Breath control		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	[No comment]	
2	Excellent control.	Excellent breath control. It is obvious that she always breathes completely and never takes snatch breaths.
3	[No comment]	

d) Diction		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	[No comment]	
2	Good diction,	Extremely poor.
3	[No comment]	Sutherland was never known for her diction. However she makes very much sense of the recitative, whilst the aria becomes a vocal instrumentation with some words more clear than others. However this is and was very much acceptable for bel canto singing.

e) Note attack		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	[No comment]	

2	Note attack good. More portamenti than Sutherland but it works in the bel canto style.	Excellent.
3	[No comment]	Sutherland's note attacks are very clear and clean.

f) Question		
To what extent do you believe that the performance reflects the ideals of bel canto singing?		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	While Sutherland's general freedom of tone and voice placement is superior to that of Callas, her diction, attack and breath control are not in the same league. The ideas of bel canto (including legato, clean attack, breath control etc.) are better served by Callas's rendition.	
2	Callas reflects the ideal bel canto singing if you can oversee the harshness that sometimes occurs in her tone.	If only her diction was better, she could be a perfect example of the bel canto style.
3	It most certainly reflects the ideals of bel canto, given that the role of Norma became one of Sutherland's most famous roles to this day.	

2. Musical and stylistic aspects

a) Phrasing		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	[No comment]	
2	Callas's phrasing honours the score and is very pleasing. She relaxes every phrase in feminine ending.	She honours the score with beautiful phrasing and transports you in the ideas of musical projection.
3	[No comment]	Sutherland has incredible phrasing as written in the score.

b) Application of dynamic values		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	[No comment]	
2	She is true to what Bellini wrote and dictates.	She sings the written score completely and use what is written with care and portrays the emotions in the score.
3	[No comment]	Sutherland sometimes loses the dynamic values of the phrasings, but given it is bel canto, she is forgiven.

c) Question		
To what extent do you feel that the performer respects the composer's intentions as expressed in the score?		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	Maria Callas stays true to the intentions of the composer almost religiously, while Sutherland takes more liberties. I also found the recit tempi chosen by Sutherland (and of course the conductor!) less satisfactory; too fast. Dynamic variation is lacking in Ms Sutherland's performance, while Callas varies tone colour and dynamics most effectively.	
2	She totally respects the score and portrays it perfectly.	She sings the score as dictated by Bellini.
3	Both Callas and Sutherland respect the composer's intentions.	

3. Dramatic and interpretative aspects

a) Vocal and verbal inflection		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	[No comment]	
2	Callas's vocal and verbal inflection honours the score and is very pleasing. She	Vocal inflection is good but she often places accents on the last syllable which I do not agree upon and find very disturbing.

	relaxes every phrase in feminine endings.	
3	Both Callas and Sutherland maintain a good balance between vocal and verbal inflection.	

b) Tone colour as interpretative device		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	[No comment]	
2	Callas respects the music and text and therefore brings out all the possible colouring and inflections. Her whole performance is based on the dramatic.	Just by the way she sings, she has a lot of colouring and verbal inflection. She obviously knows what she is singing about although we cannot understand her diction which comes out in the way she performs her character. Because she is true to the score and the dramatic inflections she captures the mood perfectly.
3	[No comment]	

c) Question		
How well does the performer express the dramatic situation?		
Respondent	Maria Callas	Joan Sutherland
1	No comparison, as far as I am concerned – Callas outweighs Sutherland by far in terms of inflection, tone colour, dramatic intensity and emotional power. Her tempo choice also increases the dramatic and emotional power of the overall delivery.	
2	Callas respects the music and text and therefore brings out all the possible colouring and inflections. Her whole performance is based on the dramatic.	Just by the way she sings, she has a lot of colouring and verbal inflection. She obviously knows what she is singing about although we cannot understand her diction which comes out in the way she performs her character. Because she is true to the score and the dramatic inflections she captures the mood perfectly.

3	Both Callas and Sutherland certainly do justice to the recit whereas the aria becomes pure beautiful sounds.
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Section B – Comparative questions

1. Are the different aspects, mentioned in Section A, successfully integrated, or is the singer stronger in certain aspects than in others?	
1	[No comment]
2	I just like Callas's passion and drama more.
3	It is integrated but Sutherland handles the aria with superb vocal control.

2. a) Regarding the recitative "Sediziose voci", which singer do you prefer?	
1	Callas
2	Sutherland
3	Callas

b) Why?	
1	Immediately engaging, in spite of obvious vocal "flaws".
2	Her diction is clear in the recitativo and although she sings it strictly in time her rendition is more convincing.
3	Callas connects meaning to the words whereas Sutherland tries to be dramatic but does not come near Callas.

c) Please point out the strong and weak points of each singer	
1	Sense of drama; rhythm, accents much more powerful in Callas – tone not freely produced and sometimes "pressed"/forced. Sutherland's tone at times superior, but leaves me cold. Sutherland's diction is clear in the recitativo and although she sings it strictly

2	in time her rendition is more convincing. Callas is just singing the notes and lacks pathos in the recit.
3	Callas makes it her role for all eternity with Sutherland behind her.

3. a) Regarding the aria “Casta diva”, which singer do you prefer?	
1	Callas/Sutherland
2	Callas
3	Sutherland

b) Why?	
1	Musically and emotionally Callas; vocally Sutherland at certain points. I prefer Callas because even without a video she captures the pathos of the aria with her excellent colouring and dramatic instincts in her sound and understanding of the text.
2	Sutherland sings with the most beautiful sound, but it leaves me untouched due to her lack of diction. Therefore the whole dramatic effect is lost. Sutherland creates beautiful legato lines, as if she was an instrument and given this is a most beautiful aria it is just pure beauty to allow the sound to wash over one.
3	Callas sings it well too, but totally in a different manner to Sutherland.

c) Please point out the strong and weak points of each singer	
1	Callas infinitely more engaging; from a vocal-technical point of view at times the sound is even disturbingly uneven. Diction far superior to that of Sutherland; it adds to the meticulous rendition of text and score. Also slower tempo adds to dramatic impact. Each syllable imbued with meaning.
2	I prefer Callas because even without a video she captures the pathos of the aria with her excellent colouring and dramatic instincts in her sound and understanding of the text. Sutherland sings with the most beautiful sound, but it leaves me untouched due to her lack of diction. Therefore the whole dramatic effect is lost.
3	Sutherland creates beautiful legato lines, as if she was an instrument and given this is a most beautiful aria it is just pure beauty to allow the sound to wash over one. Callas sings it well too, but totally in a different manner to Sutherland.

4. a) Regarding the cabaletta “Fine al rito, e il sacro bosco...Ah! bello a me ritorna”, which singer do you prefer?	
1	Callas
2	[No comment]
3	[No comment]

b) Why?	
1	Without any visual media, the character comes alive in Callas’s portrayal; tone variation is admirable. Sutherland’s tone colour slightly monotonous (so to speak!)
2	[No comment]
3	[No comment]

c) Please point out the strong and weak points of each singer	
1	Sutherland’s agility and freedom of tone is admirable, but it even appears “glib” and unfeeling at certain points. (Callas’s focus is not exclusively on agility, but imbues every note with significance, despite the fact that Sutherland’s tops are clearly more free and exciting.)
2	[No comment]
3	[No comment]

5. a) Please indicate which of the two singers’ entire <i>scena</i> you prefer	
1	Callas
2	Callas
3	Callas

b) Why?	
1	Would like to hear it again; engaging and intense; loaded with meaning and subtext. While Sutherland sings it more beautifully in the strict sense of the word, it fails to

	move me (and I tried at least four times!) Bel canto ideals better served vocally by Sutherland, but the “theatre” is lacking and makes it less powerful. Quite a bit of scooping as well...Very difficult actually! Would definitely prefer to watch Callas on stage – the character makes sense, whereas Sutherland’s singing is “lovely”, but not (to me)
2	I prefer Callas’s because her singing goes directly to your heart.
3	Callas, given she gives the entire scene meaning and the actual aria is very well sung. Callas makes us aware that she should be a virgin yet she has two children from a Roman with whom they are at war. She is very torn between this.

The remainder of this chapter is made up of a summary and discussion of the questionnaire results in the light of my research, as well as of my own perspectives on the two recordings. It was very interesting for me to observe the differences and similarities in the responses by three different experts in the field of singing. In almost all the answers it emerged that Callas’s interpretation is preferred, despite the fact that it is vocally less beautiful and technically more problematic than Sutherland’s.

Section A – Technical, musical and interpretative aspects

Technical aspects

a) Placement of voice

Respondent 1 did not comment. Respondent 2 commented that Callas’s placement is good in the sense that it does not interfere with her sound and with her diction, while respondent 2 and 3 felt that Sutherland’s placement is very forward, and for respondent 2 this interferes with her diction.

I felt that Callas places the voice in an ideal position for clarity of diction in the recitative. For me, Sutherland places the sound in her throat, causing it to sound muffled throughout the recitative. Her voice is fairly free in the aria and in the cabaletta. She is very comfortable in the higher register, and she is one of a handful of sopranos who perform “Casta diva” a tone higher in the original key of G. She tends to lose the higher placement of her voice when she comes down from the repeated high Bs, which causes the voice to sound opaque in the middle register. Otherwise, the sound is pleasing, but the forays into chest register (for example in bar 50) seem unnecessary.

b) Tone colour

Respondent 1 did not comment. According to respondent 2, Sutherland's tone is even throughout her range while Callas's tone colour has a rough, metal sound which could be distracting. For respondent 3, Sutherland's tone colour is very unique. On the other hand, for me, in the cabaletta "Ah! bello a me ritorna", Sutherland sings with great caution. It sounds as if she is afraid of letting the sound flow freely.

c) Breath control

Respondent 2, being the only one who commented, finds that the breath control is excellent in both the singers.

With Callas, I felt that the tempo in both the recitative and cabaletta is too slow, causing some difficulty in the breathing. Her breath moves more freely in the aria, but one sometimes gets the feeling that she does not think of her breath economically enough. It felt sometimes that she is caught off-guard. Overall it sounds as if Callas struggles with her breathing and this causes her to slow down and fall behind the orchestra at times. Sutherland maintains a good supported legato line in the recitative and excellent breath control throughout the cabaletta. Her sound is not always even in the aria, which might mean that she does not support with enough breath throughout.

d) Diction

Respondent 1 did not comment. Respondent 2 felt that Sutherland's diction is extremely poor throughout, while Callas's is good. Respondent 3 felt that Sutherland's diction, while poor, is acceptable in bel canto style.

For me, Callas's diction is clear, except in the recitative preceding the cabaletta and on the descending chromatic scales. Sutherland's diction is only convincing in the first three bars of recitative and very poor in the aria. Sutherland's muffled sound makes the words very unclear. She also has tendency to chop off the words when she ends a phrase, instead of making the word ring in the sound. In the aria, the biggest problem is that she makes almost all the vowels too dark, which results in both poor diction and poor projection. It appears that she does not quite understand the placement and pronunciation of the Italian language. For example, in the aria, the word "queste" (bar 75) the first "e" is too open.

e) Note attack

Respondent 1 did not comment. According to respondents 2 and 3, Sutherland's note attacks are very clear and clean. Respondent 2 however comments that Callas uses more *portamenti* and I agree with

respondent 2 that it works in the bel canto style. On the other hand, in the aria, I hear that Sutherland scoops on the words “volgi” and “sembiante” (bar 79), which I feel is unacceptable, especially in bel canto.

Callas’s note attacks on the descending chromatic scales in the aria are excellent (bar 92). Her note attack on the word “mieto” in the recitative is poor (bar 54), but she makes up for it with the *mesa di voce* towards the end of the word.

Callas’s onset of the first “a” in “Casta diva” is close to perfection. She places a silent “h” before every top repeated A. Sutherland manages to avoid this on the top Bs in her G major version and the sound is free and effortless.

Sutherland attacks the high C at the end of the cabaletta beautifully, while Callas sounds as if she has to work really hard for it.

f) To what extent do you believe that the performance reflects the ideals of bel canto singing?

In the view of Respondent 1, Sutherland’s general freedom of tone and voice placement is better than Callas’s, but Sutherland’s diction, note attack and breath control is not on par with that of Callas. Sutherland’s voice is more agile in the aria with the embellishments in bars (87-93). It would be good for the sake of comparison to have heard Sutherland also go up to the A flat on “mieto”. Callas’s descending chromatic scales in bars 173-175 of the cabaletta have a light, agile texture to it that is very pleasing on the ear. Respondent 2 felt that both singers could reflect the perfect example of bel canto singing if in Callas’s case one can oversee the harshness in tone and in Sutherland’s case if only her diction was better. Respondent 3 felt that both singers definitely reflect the ideals of bel canto.

However, in the second half of the recitative, on the words “Io ne’ volumi arcani” (bar 37) Callas sings with greater vocal freedom. Her intonation is questionable in the recitative and aria, especially when she ends a phrase in the aria. On “inargenti” the pitch drops at the end of the word (bar 74). This happens again, strangely enough, in the second verse on the word “ardenti” (bar 99). On the word “audace” (bar 103) she is quite flat at the onset of the note. In the recitative, Callas’s legato is not always exemplary.

Musical and stylistic aspects

a) Phrasing

Respondent 1 did not comment. According to respondents 2 and 3, both singers' phrasing honours the score. Callas shows acute awareness of the direction in which the vocal line is moving, and sings with a pure and stylistically appropriate legato line in the aria.

In my view, Sutherland at times seems unsure of the direction of the line. In the recitative I would, like Respondent 1, like to hear what Sutherland can do in going up to the A flat on the word "mieto" (bar 54). With Callas I felt that the tempo of the recitative is a little too slow, and that this affects her energy throughout the entire *scena*. The long fermata she takes on the word "mieto" sounds stylistically inappropriate, although it might be considered as introductory to the aria. Callas adheres strictly to the dynamic instructions in the recitative. Sutherland tends to remain on a constant dynamic level not adhering closely to the indications in the score. As a result she is at times at variance with the orchestra.

In the aria, Callas's use of rubato is masterful. Sutherland makes use of rubato, but somehow loses contact with the general atmosphere created by the orchestra at the beginning of the aria, where she somewhat lags behind. In the descending passages in bars 87-89, she rushes slightly, with the result that she is a fraction ahead of the chorus. It seems as if she is too liberal in her *rubati* and *accelerandi*. Sutherland has not yet mastered the compositional style of Bellini, and lacks Callas's ability to immerse herself in the totality of the musical score. Any soprano attempting this aria should be sensitive to the mood created by the flute in the introduction and carry it through into the aria. Despite the fact that it conforms to Bellini's original intentions, I found the aria in the higher key not suitable to the character of Norma and to the atmosphere of the scene. Sutherland is successful in executing the top Bs, but they have the tendency to sound a little hysterical. The F major key in which Callas does it is more reminiscent of a prayer. Sutherland's *messa di voce* at the end of the aria is reasonably good.

Sutherland maintains a good tempo in the recitative of the cabaletta, but in the cabaletta itself, both Callas and Sutherland slow down tremendously on "Ah! riedi ancora" (bar 220) which weakens the energy of the cabaletta. While this is a conventional rubato, it spoils the lively energy of the passage, and is not indicated in the score. Callas should have a lighter approach on the phrase "Ah! bello a me ritorna" (bar 164). Sutherland repeats the "Ah! bello a me ritorna" and adds embellishments which unfortunately seems inappropriate to the style of the *scena*.

b) Application of dynamic values

Respondent 1 did not comment. Respondent 2 felt that Callas remains true to what Bellini wrote and Sutherland uses what is written and portrays the emotions in the score. Respondent 3 felt that Sutherland sometimes loses the dynamic values of the phrasing, but that it can be overlooked, given

that it is bel canto. In my view, Callas imbues the dynamics with individual character throughout, while Sutherland merely sings what is written, an error that I regard as especially unpardonable in bel canto.

c) To what extent do you feel that the performer respects the composer's intentions as expressed in the score?

Respondents 2 and 3 felt that both singers respect the composer's intentions in the score. Respondent 1 felt that Callas uses a wide and effective range of colour and dynamics while Sutherland tends to take more liberty in expression. Sutherland also lacks dynamic variation and in the recitative the choice of tempi by Sutherland (and perhaps the conductor) is unsatisfactory.

Dramatic and interpretative aspects

a) Vocal and verbal inflection

Respondent 1 did not comment. Respondent 2 felt that Sutherland places accents on the last syllable of the words which is distracting, while Callas relaxes every phrase in feminine endings. Respondent 3 felt that the vocal and verbal inflection are very well balanced. In my opinion, this is more the case with Callas than with Sutherland. One can hear that the suggestion provided to Callas by Serafin to speak the text to herself has a major influence on her interpretation of the recitative. Sutherland's recitatives are less passionate, but still satisfactory. Callas creates a wider variety of moods throughout the cabaletta.

b) Tone colour as interpretative device

Respondents 1 and 3 did not comment on this aspect. Respondent 2 felt that Callas's performance is based throughout on the dramatic, bringing out all the possible colouring and inflections. Despite Sutherland's poor diction, she still remains true to the score and conveys the mood successfully. Her rendition is vocally stronger than that of Callas, even if her interpretation is rather one-dimensional in comparison to Callas's.

c) How well does the performer express the dramatic situation?

There was no doubt according to Respondent 1 that Callas's rendition is by far the more convincing one in terms of dramatic expression and emotional intensity. Callas's choice of tempi also contributes to the dramatic and emotional power of the overall performance. Respondent 2 felt that Sutherland's interpretation is satisfactory because she remains true to the score and that Callas's performance contains variety in tone colour and inflection, and is primarily dramatic. Respondent 3 felt that both

singers are strong in the recitative and that the aria contains pure and beautiful sounds. In my opinion, Sutherland's approach to the *scena* is lighter and dramatically less complex, allowing the singing to move into the foreground.

Section B – Comparative questions

1. *Are the different aspects, mentioned in Section A, successfully integrated, or is the singer stronger in certain aspects than in others?*

Respondent 1 did not comment on this question. Respondent 2 prefers Callas's passion, while Respondent 3 felt that both integrate all the different aspects, but stresses that Sutherland's vocal control in the aria is superb. Callas is stronger in the dramatic and interpretative, as well as the musical and stylistic aspects, whereas Sutherland is stronger in the technical aspects.

2. *Regarding the recitative "Sediziose voci"*

a) *Which singer do you prefer?* Respondent 1 and 3 prefers Callas, while Respondent 2 prefers Sutherland.

b) *Why?* Respondent 1 felt that Callas engages the listener immediately, while Respondent 3 felt she connects to the words. Respondent 2 felt that Sutherland's diction is clear and that her rendition is more convincing, despite being strictly in time.

c) *Please point out the strong and weak points of each singer.* Respondent 1 felt that Callas has strong rhythmic intentions although her tone sounds tense, whereas Sutherland's tone is better at times, but there is no dramatic conviction. Interestingly, Respondent 2 felt that Callas only sings the notes and lacks "pathos" in the recitative. This might be a reaction to the somewhat abstracted and constrained air that is notable in some of Callas's studio performances.

3. *Regarding the aria "Casta diva":*

a) *Which singer do you prefer?* Respondent 1 chose Callas and Sutherland. Respondent 2 chose Callas and Respondent 3 chose Sutherland.

b) *Why?* Respondent 1 felt that Callas is better on a musical and emotional level and Sutherland sometimes better on a vocal level. Respondent 2 prefers Callas because even without visual material she captures the poignancy of the aria in her variety of tone colour. Sutherland only creates beautiful sound, but the dramatic effect is lost due to her poor diction. Callas is clear in what she wants to convey through her singing and therefore one wants to listen to her. Respondent 3 felt that Sutherland creates beautiful legato lines.

c) *Please point out the strong and weak points of each singer.* With Callas, even though the tempo is not to my taste, the respondents felt it contributes to the dramatic impact. Respondent 1 felt that Callas's sound is disturbingly uneven, but each syllable carries a different emotion. Callas's diction is also far superior to Sutherland's. Respondent 2 felt that Callas understands the text really well. According to respondent 3, Sutherland's sound can sometimes be compared to that of an instrument.

4. *Regarding the cabaletta "Fine al rito, e il sacro bosco...Ah! bello a me ritorna":*

Only Respondent 1 provided comments on Question 4.

a) *Which singer do you prefer?* Callas

b) *Why?* Even without visual material the character comes alive in Callas's voice. Sutherland's tone colour is slightly monotonous.

c) *Please point out the strong and weak points of each singer.* Sutherland's agility is truly convincing, free and exciting. Callas does not focus exclusively on agility, but she brings out individuality in every single note.

Please indicate:

a) *Which of the two singers' entire scena you prefer.* All three respondents chose Callas.

b) *Why?* Respondent 1 felt that it is worth listening to Callas's rendition again because it is loaded with intensity and subtext. Bel canto is served better by Sutherland, but the dramatic element is lacking in her interpretation. Respondent 2 felt that Callas's rendition speaks to the heart. Respondent 3 felt that Callas gives meaning to the entire *scena* on a dramatic and vocal level. For me, Callas's whole performance with its dramatic authenticity and wealth of interpretative detail has an enormous emotional impact, which Sutherland's does not equal, and which remains with one, despite the obvious technical flaws. While Sutherland indubitably has a technically more perfect instrument, her grasp of bel canto style is also inferior to Callas's. If operatic vocality is primarily the art of conveying dramatic intention through the human voice, Callas's rendition is without doubt the better one.

6 Conclusion

The *scena* from Act I of Bellini's *Norma* is a very demanding and revealing test of the dramatic and vocal abilities of the bel canto soprano. It was used in this study to highlight the differences in approach between the two singers of the mid-20th century who were most often associated with the role of Norma, namely Callas and Sutherland. These two singers are prime examples of the types respectively known as the *Kunstdiva* and the *Stimmediva*, and the study also aims to draw some conclusions as to the relative merits of the artistic approach implied by these two categories. In order to arrive at the final conclusions, the four sub-questions will need to be considered first:

1. Is Callas's interpretation of the *scena* in every respect the ideal one, and, if not, how does Sutherland surpass Callas in part or in total?

Callas's *Norma* is generally considered a watershed in the interpretation of this role. For the respondents and the author, her interpretation of the *scena* remains the leading example of an accomplished interpretation on a dramatic level, although one respondent found her recitative dramatically less convincing. This may be due to the constraints of a studio recording. At a vocal level, she is surpassed in terms of beauty, uniformity, technical ease, intonation and breath control by Sutherland.

2. What is to be learnt by studying Callas and Sutherland as *belcantistas* as heard in their recordings of the *scena* in Act 1?

The most important thing to realise is that there is no perfect example of a *belcantista*. In this *scena*, which requires everything the soprano voice can do, from dramatic declamation to *canto spianato* and agile coloratura, both singers used their attributes to the best of their abilities, not necessarily focusing on the dramatic interpretation or the vocality of their performances as two separate line of thoughts, but integrating these two entities either instinctively or intentionally.

One tends to forget that these two singers belong to two different Fächer, as they are both intelligent singers who can adapt to the unconscious challenges that they face in singing music that stretches the boundaries of their respective Fächer. One cannot conclude that you need to belong to a specific Fach in order to be a *belcantista*. A *belcantista* is a singer specialised in the bel canto repertoire, regardless of her Fach. She must have the ability to integrate and alternate various aspects of her vocal and interpretative abilities according to the requirements of each passage in a role.

3. To what extent does the soprano belonging to the dramatic coloratura Fach have to be a *belcantista* in order to execute the *scena* successfully?

The dramatic coloratura soprano is, in my opinion, the ideal voice type for this role, as it is the only one that unites the different qualities required of a Norma. These qualities, which can be summarised as dramatic power, refined expressivity and effortless agility, are showcased respectively in the recitative, the aria and the cabaletta of this *scena*. The delicacy required in the aria, as well as the agility demanded by the cabaletta, will be greater challenges to the dramatic coloratura than to a lighter voice, and will test her mastery of bel canto technique to the full.

4. How important is the integration of singing and acting in the interpretation of this *scena* and, by extension, in the bel canto repertoire?

The word interpretation consists of an all-encompassing artistic approach to a piece of music which in this case is the *scena* from *Norma*. A singer must always integrate singing and acting in a role, as opera is not just one or the other. The integration of these two skills will elevate the opera singer from being a good artist to being a great artist. It is especially in a *scena* such as this, which makes huge demands in both areas, that the integration becomes essential in order to arrive at a convincing interpretation.

We come now to the main research question, namely: to what extent do the two interpretations provide us with insight into the ideal balance between interpretative and vocal abilities in a bel canto context?

One might assume that in a bel canto context the scales would tip in favour of the *Stimmediva* rather than the *Kunstdiva*, but the opposite seems to be the case. While Callas's coloratura and bel canto techniques were not at all on the same level as those of Sutherland, her overwhelming dramatic ability, characterised by, among others, insight into what type of phrasing to use, colouring of the voice and interpretation in the full meaning of the word, made her Norma a watershed in the interpretation of the role.

Sutherland was comfortable with the vocality of Norma in a way that Callas could never have achieved, but the intensity of Callas's interpretation is so overwhelming, that the voice becomes merely a vehicle for the dramatic intent. Callas had an advantage in having a voice and personality to which the characteristics of the warrior queen came naturally, and which other sopranos such as Sutherland find hard to emulate. Callas mastered bel canto well enough to balance this fierceness with moments of lyricism and tenderness, but her "Casta diva" will never be an object lesson in bel canto singing. One can say, however, that her vision of Norma as communicated through her interpretative intentions is unmatched, and will remain a standard against which all others are judged.

The question arises then of not only asking what the perfect interpretation of the *scena* would be, but what made Callas's Norma so extraordinary. I think one can simply say that Callas's Norma was not

a triumph due to her mastery of bel canto, but rather to her abilities as a singing actress, and that ultimately interpretation trumps singing ability even in the repertoire where the latter counts most heavily.

It is vitally important to bear in mind that the ideal for an artist is to possess both the characteristics of the *Stimmediva* and the *Kunstdiva*, since it would be impossible to take seriously an opera singer in which the characteristics of one type are completely absent. While the two types reflect a distinction between two fundamentally different views of opera itself as an art form, opera without drama would be as inconceivable as opera without the voice. The *Kunstdiva* must always strive to be as much of a *Stimmediva* as is within her power, and vice versa. Perhaps the reason why Callas's performance ultimately carries greater conviction, is that this striving to embrace what comes less naturally to her is far more evident in her interpretation than in that of Sutherland. It is in the seriousness of this striving to be both *Kunst-* and *Stimmediva* that the secret to a great interpretation ultimately resides.

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8 Appendix A – Vocal score of the *scena* from Act 1 of Bellini's *Norma*

56

SCENA E CAVATINA

«Casta Diva, che inargenti»

(NORMA)

SCENA IX. Norma in mezzo alle sue ministre. Ha scelti i capegli, la fronte circondata di una corona di verbeno, ed armata le mani d'una falce d'oro. Si colloca sulla pietra druidica, e volge gli occhi d'intorno come ispirata.

NORMA

Recitativo

Se di zio se vo, ed, vo, ei di guerra avvicialzarsi.

Recitativo

Largo maestoso

. ten.ta presso all'a . ra del Dio? v'ha chi pre.

Largo maestoso

ff *pp*

Largo maestoso

- sa.me dettar responsi al la veggen.te Nor . ma, e di Roma affret.

f sempre dopo la voce

Largo maestoso

. tar il fato ar . ca . no? Ei non di . pen . de, no, non di . pen . de

ff

13

da po.te - ren - ma - - no.

ROVERSO

E fi - no a quando op.

16

- pres. si ne vor.rai tu? Con.ta.mi.nate as.sa . i non fur le patrie

18

nel - ve e i tem - pia - vi - ti dal. fa - qui. le la .

20

- ti - ne? Omai di Brenno o - xio. sa non può star - si la

58 **NORMA**

22 *Ein. fran. ta ca. da.*

Ten. *sps. da.*

35 *Si brandi. sca u. na vol. ta.*

ff *fp*

25 *Infran. ta, si, se alou di voi sm. dar. la an. xi tempo pre. ten. de.*

28 *Ancor non so. no della so. stra ven. det. ta i di ma.*

meno, assai

31 *- ta. ri. Del. le sicam bre scu. ri sono i pi. li ro. ma. ni ancor più*

pp

34
N
for - ti.

OBOES
E che t'annunzia il Di - o? par - la: qual sor - ti?

Tenori
E che t'annunzia il Di - o? par - la: qual sor - ti?

Bassi
E che t'annunzia il Di - o? par - la: qual sor - ti?

37
N
Io ne' vo - lu - mlar - ca - ni leg - go del cie - lo:

39
N
All.^o mod.^{to}
in pa - gi - ne di mor - te del la super - ba

36 All.^o mod.^{to}
pp sempre

42

Ro, ma ò scritto il nome... el . la un gior . no mor . rà; ma non per

45

vo . i. Morrà per vi . zi suo . i; qual consun . ta mor . rà. L'o - ra aspet -

48

- ta - te, l'o - ra fa - tal che o cca spia il grande cre - to. Pa - ce v'in -

52

- ti - mo... e il sa - cro vischio lo mie . to.

(Falcia il vitello; le Bacchantes lo raccolgono in canestri di vimini, Nerone si avvanza, e stende la braccio al cielo. Lo luna splende in tutta la sua luce. Tutti si prosternono.)

56 **37** *And.^{te} mod.^{to} assai*

59 *pp assai espressivo*

62

65 *Lento*

68 *pp tutto legato*

69 **38**

71 **NORNA**

Ca - sta Di - va, ca - sta Di - va, che i - nar -

74

- gen - ti que - sto sa - cre, que - sto

77

sa - cre, questo sa - cre an - tiche pian - te, a noi vol - gi il bel sem -

80

- bian - te, a noi vol - gi, a noi vol - gi il bel sem - bian -

sempre cresc. sino al....

sempre cresc. sino al.....

84

87

Son - za - va, a noi, deh, pian - te, a noi vol - giil bel - sem - bian - te sen - za nu - be sen - za

87

vel, si, vol - giil bel sem - vel. Ca - sta Di - va, chei - nar - gen - ti que - ste sa - cre anti - cho

91

sen - bian - te, a noi vol - gi il bel - som - pian - te, a noi vol - gi il bel - som - bian - te

92

sen - za - bian - te sen - za nu - be e sen - za - bian - te sen - za nu - be e sen - za - sen - za

73

vel, o sen - za vel.

40

pp

96

Tem - pra, o Di - va, tem - pra tu de' - co - ri ar.

99

- don - ti, tem - pra anoo - ra, tem - pra an.

102

- co - ra, tem - pora - uer lo - re - lo - su - da - co, spar - gi in
Di -

Soprani
Tenori
Bassi

104

ter - ra, ah - quel - la pa - co, spar - gi in
- va, spar - gi in
- va, spar - gi in
- va, spar - gi in
- va, spar - gi in

68

106

opp. sempre cresc. al.

ter - ra, spar. gi in ter - ra quella pa -

ter - - - ra quel - la pa - ce

ter - - - ra quel - la pa - ce

ter - - - ra quel - la pa - ce

ter - - - ra quel - la pa - ce

f sempre cresc. al.

108

pp *dim.*

- - - - - ce che re - gnar, re - gnar tu fai, tu fai nel

p *pp*

che re - - - gnar tu fai nel

p *pp*

che re - - - gnar tu fai nel

p *pp*

che re - - - gnar tu fai nel

p *pp*

che re - - - gnar tu fai nel

ff *enors.*

110 *a piacere* 69

S: ciel, tu fa - i
 A: ciel, tu fa - i
 T1: ciel, tu fa - i
 T2: ciel, tu fa - i
 B: ciel, tu fa - i

112

S: nel ciel.
 A: nel ciel.
 T1: nel ciel.
 T2: nel ciel.
 B: nel ciel.

70
116 Allegro

120

124 MORRA All.^o assai maestoso

Fi - ne al ri - to; e il sa - ero

All.^o assai maestoso

128

bo - sco sia di agom - bro - dai - pro - fa - ni.

131

Quan - do il Nu - me, quan - do il Nu - mei - ra - toe -

134
 fo - seo chiegga il san - gus dei Ro - ma - ni, dal dru -

137
 . i - di - co de - lu - bro - la - mia - vo - ce

140
 tuo - ne - rà.

OROVISO
 Tuo - ni; e un sol del po - pol

Soprani
 Tuo - ni; e un sol del po - pol

Tenori
 Tuo - ni; e un sol del po - pol

Bassi
 Tuo - ni; e un sol del po - pol

41695

143

em - pio non i - sfug - ga al giu - sto scem - pio; e pri -

em - pio non i - sfug - ga al giu - sto scem - pio; e pri -

em - pio non i - sfug - ga al giu - sto scem - pio; e pri -

em - pio non i - sfug - ga al giu - sto scem - pio; e pri -

P cresc.

146

nostra

mier da noi per - con - so il Pro - con - so - le ca -

mier da noi per - con - so il Pro - con - so - le ca -

mier da noi per - con - so il Pro - con - so - le ca -

mier da noi per - con - so il Pro - con - so - le ca -

ff

149 *Poco più lento* 73

- drà... punirlo pos... so... (Ma pa - ntr - lo il

- drà.

- drà.

- drà.

- drà.

Poco più lento

col canto *ppp*

153 *Opp.* *Allegro*

cor non sa.)

43 *Allegro* *vibrato*

mf

157

mf

161

mf

74
164 **NORMA**

(Ah! bel - lo a me ri - tor - na del

167

fi - do a mor pri - mie - ro: e con - tro il mon - do in -

170

- tie - ro di - fe - sa a - te sa - rò. Ah!

173

bel - lo a me - ri - tor - na del

175 *con forza*

rag - gio tuo se - re - no; e vi - ta nel tuo

pp

178 *con abbandono*

no - no e pa - - - - - tris e cie - lo a -

pp

181

- vrò, e cò - - - - - lo a -

186

Mosso

vrò.)

ROVERSO

Sei len - to, sì, sei len - to, o

Sop.

Sei len - to, sì, sei len - to, o

Fin.

Sei len - to, sì, sei len - to, o

Bassi

Sei len - to, sì, sei len - to, o

Mosso

p

187

gior - no di ven - det - ta; mai - ra - to il Dio t'af -

gior - no di ven - det - ta; mai - ra - to il Dio t'af -

gior - no di ven - det - ta; mai - ra - to il Dio t'af -

gior - no di ven - det - ta; mai - ra - to il Dio t'af -

190

0

fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan - nò, ma i -

fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan - nò, ma i -

fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan - nò, ma i -

fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan - nò, ma i -

193

NORMA

Lento stent.

(Ah! — Ah!)

ra - to il Dio v'af - fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan - nò,

ra - to il Dio v'af - fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan - nò.

ra - to il Dio v'af - fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan - nò.

ra - to il Dio v'af - fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan - nò.

51694

78
197
I. Tempo
bel - lo a mo ri - tor - na del fi - do a - mor pri -

45
I. Tempo
p

200
- mie - ro, a con - tro il mon - do in - tie - ro di -

203
- fu - ma a - te sa - ro. Ah!

205
bel - lo a mo ri - tor - na del -

207 *con forza*

rag - gio tuo... no - re - no; e vi - ta nel tuo

pp

216 *con abbandono*

se - no e pa - - - - - tria e cie - lo a.

ppp

213

- vrò, e ciò - - - - - lo a.

80

216 Mosso

-vrò.)
 OROVERSO
 Soprani Mai - ra - to, sì, il Dio t'af -
 Tenori Mai - ra - to, sì, il Dio t'af -
 Bassi Mai - ra - to, sì, il Dio t'af -
 46 Mai - ra - to, sì, il Dio t'af -
 Mosso

218

- fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan -
 - fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan -
 - fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan -
 - fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan -
 - fret - ta che il Te - bro con - dan -

91694

220

(Ah) rio, dian . co. ra qual — e . rial, lo . ra, quan . do, ah,
 - no.
 - no.
 - no.
 - no.

pp

223

quan . do il cor ti die .

225

di al .

ff

82

Soprano
 lo . ra, qual e . rial . lor, ah! riedian . co . ra qual . . . a . rial .

Organo
 O gior - no!

Tenore
 O gior - no!

Basso
 O gior - no!

47

ff *pp*

230

lo . ra, quan - do, ah, quan - do il cor ti die .

233

... dial .

ff

235 Più mosso

lo - ra, qual e - ria! lo - ra, ah, quan - do, ah, quan - do il cor ti die - di, ah,

O gior - no, il Dio t'af - fret - ta

Sop.
O gior - no, il Dio t'af - fret - ta

Ten.
O gior - no, il Dio t'af - fret - ta

Bass.
O gior - no, il Dio t'af - fret - ta

248 Più mosso

ff

239

rie - di, ah, rie - dia

che il Te - bro con - dan -

che il Te - bro con - dan -

che il Te - bro con - dan -

che il Te - bro con - dan -

41654

84 Più mosso assai
(Norma parla, e tutti
la seguono in ordine)

242

no.)
no.
no.
no.
no.

Più mosso assai

246

250

254

258

8

261

8

265

49

pp

269

273

277

ppp

x