Casta Diva from Norma by Vincenzo Bellini

Fromental Halévy, French composer of the opera *La Juive*, claimed he would have given away all his works if he could have composed just one aria, 'Casta diva'. The aria has been a signature piece for famous sopranos such as Maria Callas, Joan Sutherland, Renee Fleming, Anna Netrebko and Angela Gheorgiu. It is one of the most exquisite gems in the *bel canto* repertoire.

Casta Diva

*Norma* is a tragedia lirica or opera in two acts by **Vincenzo Bellini** with libretto by Felice Romani after *Norma, ossia L'infanticidio (Norma, or The Infanticide)* by Alexandre Soumet.

Vincenzo Bellini
Bellini insisted on spending a few months on the composition of his works. At the time of his sudden death in 1835, Bellini had composed a mere ten operas. Nonetheless, the last of Bellini's operas, *La Sonnambula*, *Norma*, and *I Puritani* are undisputed masterpieces, with Norma being more renowned due to its famous aria ‘Casta Diva.’

**Casta Diva**

**Synopsis**

**Place:** Gaul.

**Time:** Early times of Roman conquest of Gaul.

**Act 1**
The grove.

A secret love unites the seeress Norma with Pollione, the Roman proconsul, by whom she has borne two children. But Pollione has grown tired of the aging druidess and has fallen in love with Adalgisa, a young temple virgin. Despite Adalgisa’s piety and virtue, she agrees to flee to Rome with Pollione. Adalgisa innocently tells Norma of her love, and Norma curses Pollione for his treachery.

Act 2

Norma’s apartment.

Norma is about to kill her children, but her love for her children finally confides them to the care of Adalgisa. When Pollione comes to take Adalgisa from the temple, Norma denounces him and he is seized by the Druids, after having refused to give up Adalgisa. Norma proclaims herself equally guilty with him. The pyre is lighted, and ascending it, Norma dies with her lover.
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The aria "Casta Diva" is one of the most famous arias in opera history. It was written by Vincenzo Bellini for his opera Norma, which was premiered in 1831. The aria is sung by the character Norma, a Druidess, and it expresses her dedication to the goddess of love, Venus.

The aria begins in the low-medium range of the soprano voice on an A natural. The melody is in the key of G minor and is characterized by chromatic descent once again covering the complete ambitus of the voice, in a time frame spanning less than a measure.

The third section repeats the same music as the first, this time with the choir striking the pulse together with the lower strings. The aria ends with an impressive out-of-tempo cadenza, a repeating the complete text of the first section. Norma joins them two measures later with the main melody sung solo by Norma. The choir also participates in the performance, creating a dramatic effect.

It is also important to emphasize the remarkable command with which Bellini has planned his music. The short notes of the aria serve as elegant ornaments, allowing the energy contained in the melismas, which inescapably carry the listener to the next tonic accent on the following long note values to finally be released. They also enable the line to land leisurely on the next long note, thus better projecting the following tonic accent. Bellini has therefore realized a successful marriage between notated music and the natural musicality of the Italian language.

The aria's musicality is further enhanced by the composer's attention to prosody. The syllables "Ca," "Di," and "gen" are each given a long note on the first beat of the measure. Such awareness of prosody is certainly not exclusive to Bellini. However, the composer distinguishes himself from his contemporaries and his predecessors by the discreet meandering strong beat.

In the phrase "a noi volgi il bel sembiante," the short notes are again used as elegant ornaments. The last note is a longer note, thus better projecting the following tonic accent. Bellini has therefore realized a successful marriage between notated music and the natural musicality of the Italian language.

The famous aria, "Casta Diva," score

The aria is performed by the greatest female voice of all time, Maria Callas. It is performed with great success by many other opera singers as well. The opera Norma, which includes the aria, is performed by many opera companies around the world, and it is a staple of the operatic repertoire.

The aria is a testament to Bellini's musical genius and his ability to create music that is both beautiful and expressive. It is a work that continues to be performed and enjoyed by opera lovers around the world.
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