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.
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.
Casta Diva from Norma by Vincenzo Bellini

Written by bluesever
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The famous aria, "Casta Diva," deserves closer inspection in order to grasp its stunning beauty. Written by Vincenzo Bellini, it was composed in 1830 and debuted as part of the opera Norma, during the dress rehearsal on January 16, 1831, at the Teatro Nuovo in Naples. However, the production was canceled due to a fire in the auditorium. The opera was revived on December 26, 1831, at La Scala in Milan, where it was far from being an instantaneous success. Even Bellini considered it a fiasco. Overworked at the dress rehearsal, the Casta Diva was sung by the soprano Leonor Fini. Fortunately, the cast managed to rally together for the following performance. The critics were overwhelmed and the cast was granted thunderous applause. Norma had assumed its rightful place in the repertoire.

In a letter dated September 1, 1831, Bellini wrote to the soprano Giuditta Pasta: "Avec un sourire, même celui d'un dieu, elle embrasse la terre et les pauvres et les malheureux. "Cette pensée est dans les sentiments réunis par la musique. C'est la raison pour laquelle il est si difficile de la chanter."

"Casta Diva" is sung by the Druidess, Norma, and it is written for the soprano voice in C major. The aria is divided into three parts:
1) the main melody sung solo by Norma
2) the choir, which breaks quietly into a chorus and above which Norma passionately sings an ornamented line in the high register; and
3) reprise of the opening solo melody on a new text with the addition of syllabic punctuation by the choir.

Once the low F has been reached again, the choristers begin the second section of the piece, repeating the complete text of the first section. Norma joins them two measures later with the phrase "a noi volgi il bel sembiante," keeping this same D as the highest pitch. The third phrase, "e queste sacre antiche piante," is written in 3/4 time, and the melody is raised by a step, which moves the melody up the staff by almost a whole tone. Bellini stays in the medium range during the second phrase and then releases all this energy with a dramatic descent spanning only two measures, from the apex of the melody, Bellini took a bit less than half of this space to cover the complete register of the voice and smoothly return back to the opening register.

It is also important to emphasize the remarkable command with which Bellini has planned his melodic genius. The famous aria, "Casta Diva," deserves closer inspection in order to grasp its stunning beauty. Written by Vincenzo Bellini, it was composed in 1830 and debuted as part of the opera Norma, during the dress rehearsal on January 16, 1831, at the Teatro Nuovo in Naples. However, the production was canceled due to a fire in the auditorium. The opera was revived on December 26, 1831, at La Scala in Milan, where it was far from being an instantaneous success. Even Bellini considered it a fiasco. Overworked at the dress rehearsal, the Casta Diva was sung by the soprano Leonor Fini. Fortunately, the cast managed to rally together for the following performance. The critics were overwhelmed and the cast was granted thunderous applause. Norma had assumed its rightful place in the repertoire.
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