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.
The famous aria, "Casta Diva," is the apex of the melody, where Bellini takes a bit less than half of this space to cover the complete register. Throughout the second phrase, the soprano keeps this same D as the highest pitch. The third phrase, "a noi volgi il bel sembiante," and the second measures of the aria provide strong evidence of Bellini's melodic genius.

It is also important to emphasize the remarkable command with which Bellini has planned his melodic lines. 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, to be released. They also enable the line to land leisurely on the next 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.

In contrast to his contemporaries and predecessors, Bellini distinguishes himself with the discreet meandering strong beat. He maintains the martial character of the music, a characteristic he attributes to "the great art of composition and not just the musical, but poetical." The syllables "Ca," "Di," and "gen" are each given a long note on the first beat of the measure. This awareness of prosody is certainly not exclusive to Bellini. However, the composer's skill in integrating the musical text in a way that makes the words effective is one of the hallmarks of his melodic genius.

The short notes and meandering melody belong to the doric style, a style that Bellini adopts in order to express its expressive beauty. The melody is supported by a wide variety of accompaniments, including the added doubling of the outline of the melody, and the use of ornamental lines in the high register.

The famous aria, "Casta Diva," is one of the most celebrated arias in opera. It was first performed in the opera Norma by Vincenzo Bellini in 1831. 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;
3) reprise of the opening solo melody on a new text with the addition of syllabic punctuation by the choir.

The melody begins in the low-medium range of the soprano voice on an A natural. Two measures later, the soloist begins a chromatic descent once again covering the complete ambitus of the voice, in a time frame of four complete degrees of success. The most prolific Norma of the postwar period was Maria Callas, with 89 stage performances along with two studio recordings (made in 1954 and 1960).

There's never any doubling of the vocal line by the orchestra so as to make life easy for the singers. The soloist is supported by the orchestra, which accompanies the melody together with the lower strings. The aria ends with an impressive out-of-tempo cadenza, a chromatic melisma in the high register, the virtuosity of which requires absolute vocal control. 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 a 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.

In a letter dated September 1, 1831, Bellini wrote to the soprano Leonor Fini - Casta Diva - that "Giuditta Pasta is a soprano considered among the greatest of opera singers, to whom the role of Norma has been adapted by someone else. But even if this is the case, this is the kind of character Norma has." Bellini was convinced that "Romani" solved the problem of the role and that the singer is very exposed. This doesn't bother Maria Callas. In the 1960s, two very different degrees of success. The most prolific Norma of the postwar period was Maria Callas, with 89 stage performances along with two studio recordings (made in 1954 and 1960). Bellini doesn't make life easy for the singers. There's never any doubling of the vocal line by the orchestra so as to make life easy for the singers. The soloist is supported by the orchestra, which accompanies the melody together with the lower strings. The aria ends with an impressive out-of-tempo cadenza, a chromatic melisma in the high register, the virtuosity of which requires absolute vocal control. 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 a 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.

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