

Performance diary: *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Gaetano Donizetti from the perspective of stage director Cătălin Ionescu-Arbore

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ABSTRACT

The Opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* composed by Gaetano Donizetti, inspired by the historical novel of Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, with a libretto by Salvatore Cammarano, premiered on 26 of September, 1835 at Teatro San Carlo in Naples. Most musicologists consider it a masterpiece of the romantic lyric genre and, although the subject of the libretto does not excel in originality, the ingenuity of the musical speech fully covers this drawback. The extreme difficulty of the music score for this role, as well as the problem of interpretation imposed by the necessity of artistic expression of suffering that the character is experiencing due to symptoms of mental illness, supports possible scenic revaluations. We have proposed to analyze the associative status of the acoustic component and of a whole ensemble of well-defined theatrical gestures that can render visually the state of Lucia's soul. Solely the attention given to the musicality of composer's melodic lines, which covers the shortcomings of a quite precarious libretto, cannot be sufficiently convincing in an interpretation. We intend to emphasise that, for this role, the difficulty of its construction consists precisely in masterfully obtaining a succes vector from a dramaturgical point of view.

KEYWORDS

Music, dramaturgical role, mental affliction, directing, interpretation

INTRODUCTION

Although lacking in subject originality (Krauss, 1973, pp. 464-470), the sheer romanticism of music and dramaturgy in the opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* was the starting point for the stage director and set designer Cătălin Ionescu-Arbore while searching for an original vision, to be already noticed at page 14 in the program booklet of the 1999-2000 season of the Romanian National Opera of Timisoara (RNOT):

Walter Scott's novel clearly marks the literary romanticism, Donizetti brilliantly represents the musical romanticism. The elements specific to romanticism in the literature, such as the storm, the ruins, the thunders, the rain, the forest, the fogs, the madness, the cemetery, are steadily taken up by the composer and librettist. In the description of the hurricane, all meet and emphasize the state of mind, the tumult, the experiences of the characters, this being the core of the paper, the climax of the dramatic conflict" (RNOT 1999, p.14).

While preparing the performance, Cătălin Ionescu-Arbore thoroughly studied the novel, the libretto and the score, finding that there are certain contradictions that undermine the credibility of the subject. With reference to the librettist Cammarano, the stage director believes that he had committed a “blunder,” historically speaking, by setting with almost a century earlier, the action taken from Walter Scott:

For Scott, the tumultuous social-political context of the 15th–16th centuries (the Bourgeois Revolution, the conflict between Protestants and Catholics, the Parliament abrogation, the enthronement of a Dutchman, etc.) makes the behavior of Lord Ashton character quite credible. . . . Instead, one hundred years earlier, during the reign of Queen Elisabeth (a stable, blooming, peaceful time, the period of the great geographical discoveries), such events are inexistent and Ashton’s attitude seems unfounded. Moreover, Cammarano does not give Donizetti the chance for a very detailed characterization of the characters. Except for the three main characters, which are vocally and dramatically very colored, the other parts are presented as episodal and even unfinished. Dramatic confrontations take place only between Lucia and her brother, between Edgardo and Enrico; otherwise, the situations that might lead to the creation of a special musical dramaturgy, are only outlined.

This is a critical stage director’s point of view, who also signed the scenography, the light design and the ornamentation of the performance, although in the program booklet the stage director mentioned is Daniel Prallea-Bлага (at page 2 of the same program booklet), the one who subsequently took over an already staged production.

Enrico Cannata, a musician interested in the operatic musicology and the instrumental philological practice of music, discovering an old libretto of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, studied with great attention the popular *Ricordi* edition, the libretto that was consolidated in the tradition of staging, and finds a series of differences which visibly influence the relation between the musical and the dramaturgical discourse, also changing the performance and the reception of this masterpiece:

I realized that, in my libretto, the poetic flux is more precise and more homogenous, the rhymes are always observed, I also found lyrics that Dozinetti did not set to music. My first thought was that there is another Lucia ..., a Lucia ... whom today we call <philological>, related to the text, about whom very little is known. I have tried to isolate the textual differences and to write them down in the score, taking care not to modify at all the original musical conception. The result is astonishing: not only many situations become intelligible without any extra listening effort but, moreover, the characters’ behavior and emotions are put forth in a new light” (Enrico Cannata in RNOT, 1999, p.8).

The stage director’s vision and the key of the entire performance emphasizes the *sore spot* represented by romanticism in its entirety, through a *dream* as the main element of the romantic story woven around Lucia’s tragic destiny.

Lucia di Lammermoor, a masterpiece of the Italian romanticism, unites the vocal expression of belcanto with the melodramatic, sometimes melancholic sounds of the

orchestra, in accordance with the conflictual situations, present mainly on a psychological plane, its probing into the deepest states and convulsions, predicting motifs specific to the modernism era, as reflected by naturalism and expressionism. Donizetti cultivates foremost the melody, in the tradition of his predecessors, however leaves the excessive ornamentation adopting an aesthetic of simplicity which explains “the singability of his arias, the freedom of rhythmic cursiveness – less dominated by the syllabic periodicity of the text” (Stoianov & Marinescu, 2009, p. 153).

Characteristics of my interpretation of Lucia’s part

Lucia’s part is perhaps the one that brought me the greatest satisfactions in my entire career. The famous score of this fascinating character may be classified as a true milestone for any soft-lyrical soprano, a vocal type where the specificity of my voice also belongs.

Donizetti left a certain freedom of vocal expression to the performer of Lucia, taking into account the performer’s vocal abilities, giving her the freedom, at the end of a phrase as well as the end of an aria or a duet, to bring her contribution with a personal cadenza. Thus, the performer can emphasize on her technical-vocal skills, depending on her personal vocal abilities. The romantic opera audience would witness different versions of an aria, from one performer to another, depending on the way she manages to express and transmit the character’s emotions.

The power of music is superior to other sounds, because it enables access to our inner, emotional world and in this fundamental expressive dimension "the gesture is no longer a mere clue, it relies on music, the only one able to resonate with the inner being. The rhythm of emotional life is different from that of the actual, incidental life and the actor's drive is to lead the gesture toward an inextricable correspondence to the feelings translated through music" (Crisan, 2004, p. 30).

The landmark in the realization of the most difficult moment of the role, namely the madness area with its psychology was, for me, the character *Ofelia* from William Shakespeare's Hamlet.

There is no need to emphasize the extreme difficulty of the musical score of this part, being sufficient to recall that the famous aria of "madness" at the end of the opera lasts about 19 minutes, which implies, in addition to the acoustic component, a whole set of well-defined theatrical gestures (Miklós, 2012, p. 18), which visualize this state of mind.

What particularly distinguishes this opera is that, although the musicality of the melodies generally covers the shortcomings of a rather precarious libretto, the difficulty in constructing this part lays precisely the ability to build an authentic character from a dramatic standpoint.

I performed *Lucia*, in several staging visions. My first encounter with this role was during the 1995-1996 season in Marina Emandi’s vision, in which I interpreted a “classical” *Lucia* where the audience is not generally interested in the action but only in how the singer manages to meet the demands of the musical score. The second performance with *Lucia di Lammermoor*, was under the skillful the directing leadership of Cătălin Ionescu-Arbore, carried out under totally different auspices.

My first encounter with *Lucia* was an act of courage on my side as a young lyrical artist, due to the especially high technical and interpretative level necessary, a real “milestone” for any soprano who dares to approach the special emotional load of this role. The music lover who participates in a performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor* knows that

he/she is going to witness a true avalanche of emotions, all transposed on musical notes and visualized through stage corporeality (Miklós, 2012, p. 16).

It is recognized that the libretto written by Salvatore Cammarano, intended to be a "*dramma tragico in tre atti*" (tragic drama in three acts), does not have the dramaturgical quality necessary to keep the audience in suspense, the action of the opera being extremely monotonous and predictable. This is precisely why the mission of *Lucia's* performer is even more difficult in her attempt to give life to this character also from a dramatic point of view. The musicality of the musical discourse, deeply romantic, suggests for sure a leading line in creating the female character *Lucia*; however, for the contemporary opera auditor, this performing approach will be insufficient without the actor's contribution to the wonderful melody that continuously pours from the opera. The structure of the part can be seen best by following *Lucia's* journey through the three acts, highlighting the key moments in the musical and the dramaturgical discourse, taking into account that the story is mainly carried out in a mental and psychic labyrinth (Jacobshagen, 2005, p. 123), a particular world of the heroine, haunted by dreams, fantasies and chimeras.

The dramatic action of the work reflected by the filter of technical level and interpretative sensitivity

Act I starts in a metaphorical setting, with the intervention of *Lord Enrico Asthon*, *Lucia's* brother who, for political reasons, forces his sister into marrying a political ally in the person of *Lord Arthur Burklaw*. However, *Lucia's* heart has been given to the young *Sir Edgardo di Ravenswood*, although without her brother's consent. This is where the drama arises from, as *Lucia* cannot accept the idea of losing her love and, thus, against a background of psychical instability, she finally goes insane. This is the dramatic nucleus on whose matrix the entire story is carried out, observing the canon that structures the dramatic action (Crişan, 2007, p. 140).

The function of the *cavatina* that opens *Lucia's* part, is to describe the behavior of this feminine character, deeply unstable from a psychological standpoint. *Lucia's cavatina* begins with a harp solo, an innovation in orchestral introductions to an aria. Those arpeggios, with a harp-specific sound, seem to give the sensation of whispering waving streams, the crystalline waves of the fountain *Lucia* speaks about. Just a few bars after the aria's debut, *Lucia* tells her companion *Alisa*: "*Quella fonte, ah senza tremar non veggo...*" (This fountain gives me chills when I see it). Long time ago, in this place, a young woman found her tragic end, the wife of a knight of the noble family *Ravenswood* who was killed by her jealous husband: "*ed infelice, cade nell'ona, ed ivi rimaneva sepolta*" (and the poor girl fell into the water, which became her tomb). This legend about the tragic end of a young wife is an obsession for *Lucia* because, as she says in the aria: "*m'apparve l'ombra sua*" (this phantasm always appears to me). The libretto actually anticipates the apparition of the spectre: "*Ed ecco, ecco su quel margine l'ombra mostrarsi a me, ah.*" (And there, on the verge, ah! the spectre appeared to me... Ah!). *Lucia* notices that this ghost is trying to tell her something and, because she cannot understand the message, the ghost extends its arms toward her, as if calling *Lucia* to accompany it into her world. The ghost disappears into that fountain, but the clear waves of water suddenly become red, as if it were the blood of that unfortunate woman who found her end there, a long time ago: "*e l'onda pria sì limpida di sangue rosseggiò*" (and the waters, so clear before, reddened with

blood). The dramatic elements of the libretto are rendered in gestures (Gier, 1999, p. 52), just sketched; instead, the inner turmoil is mirrored in the mimic of the protagonist.

After this first dark part of the aria follows a second part in a more vivid tempo (*vivace*), in full agreement with the textual content of the aria, objectified in a love message to *Edgardo*, with whom *Lucia* is in love and whom she is waiting for in that unfortunate place. The end of the *cavatina* gives the performer of *Lucia* the chance to show her acute notes, as the aria ends with a “D” pitch from the third octave, a sound maintained for more than four measures, that ends at the signal of the conductor's baton, so that the entire orchestra and the vocalist perform the final of the aria at a precisely-defined moment. The steady tempo from *Larghetto*, by the specific form of the romantic aria from the first part of it, changes in the second part, this time under the sign of the technical-vocal bravura. The difficulty of this *cavatina* lays exactly in this alternation, in the first part of the aria requiring a vocal “silence,” while the second part of the aria found under the sign of Lucia’s unhappy soul’s struggle and turmoil. The steady phrase will permanently alternate with the vocal “grace-notes” specific to the romantic period the composer belongs to. The technical-vocal challenges have to be performed without the audience being aware of the performer's physical and vocal effort, remaining the one who enjoys the musicality of the deeply romantic musical discourse. Throughout the *cavatina*, the composer proposed a musical excursion where the melodic line is accompanied by a multitude of vocal ornaments, trills, vocal cadenza stretched over more than a ninth interval, chromatisms, *staccato* notes and syncopated accents, all of which are found in the *bravura* cadences, linear phrase, but with accents of interpretation under the sign of the expression *legato*, the nuances changing from one bar to another.

In Catalin Ionescu-Arbore's staging, Lucia's musical discourse is visualized first on the background of a metaphorical setting, suggesting a romantic, semi-metaphysical atmosphere by the presence of angels and of a transparent coffin, placed near the real fountain mentioned in the score. At the beginning of the scene, Lucia is walking cheerful in this area, admiring the bushes of white roses, playing with the waterjet of the artesian fountain, up to the appearance of the ghost/spectre of the young woman whose dramatic story she had heard, in fact a foretelling of her own destiny. At the end of the scene, after recovering from a shock while accompanied by her ghostly visions Lucia seems to have regained her psychological balance and, with gentle gestures, spreads petals around the well, images of an impressive simplicity in accord with the melodic line of the aria. However, this euphoric moment is interrupted by Edgardo's ghostly appearance, another vision of the heroine, the ghost she takes as real and to which she dedicates her entire love. When *Alice* tells Lucia “*Egli s'avanza*” (Here it comes), we understand that *Edgardo*, *Lucia's* secret lover is approaching. After a short recitative, where it is suggested the direction of the opera's action, there follows perhaps the most romantic duet, tenor-soprano, of the entire musical literature: “*Veranno a te sull'laure i miei sospiri ardenti*” (On the breeze will come to you my ardent sighs). In this duet, the two reinforce their (imaginary) love vows, promising to one another that their love will continue beyond death.

From a technical-vocal point of view, the most significant issue was regarding the fact that the same literary phrase is repeated several times within the same musical moment, bringing into discussion the repeated interpretation of the same musical phrase, however, each time with a different connotation. The same musical fragment can be

performed in different nuances (piano, mezzo-piano, forte etc.) or it may be interpreted with a particular agogic that can give it another meaning.

It is the moment, here, to emphasize the complexity of the lyrical soloist's performing approach, in that she has the responsibility to constantly manage two ways of expression that never separate throughout a musical performance, namely the music and the word. With reference to the difficulty of concordance between music and word in extreme performing situations, the lyrical artist has the difficult mission of achieving a permanent balance between sound and word (Liebscher, 1999, p. 58), having the permanent responsibility of deciding which of the two performing modalities comes first in each artistic moment.

Returning to the moment of this duet in which the dramatic phrase repeats itself many times, this is performed by two characters who must synchronize in terms of tempo, nuances, ending of musical sentences as well as the end of the musical moment itself. The final moment of an ensemble, whether it is a duet or a triplet, with a chorus, when one of the soloists, negatively insists on being "noticed" above all other artists on the stage and does not conclude the musical moment together with everyone else, leaves an unpleasant impression.

Act II starts with the scene: "*Il contratto nuziale*" and, as the title suggests, *Lucia* will be determined by her brother *Enrico* to believe that her boyfriend *Edgardo* would have taken an oath to someone else, the fake deed shown to *Lucia* doing nothing but accentuating her psychological instability. The duet with *Enrico* is under this auspice, where *Lucia* desperately cries: "*la tomba, la tomba ame s'apresta...*" (The tomb, the tomb opens for me...). For this duet, it is annotated by Donizetti himself, on top of the musical notes, that the moment must be performed by *Lucia* as follows: "*Volgendo gli occhi al cielo gonfi di lagrime*" (raising her tearful eyes towards the heavens).

The moment which follows is known as the most famous sextet in entire opera literature, recognized by many music lovers as being of an unreal beauty: "*chimi frena in tal momento*" (Who can stop me in these moments). Six characters with different melodic lines and dramatic-musical discourse, having as a common ground just the physical time where this music ensemble takes place, follow the procedural-artistic recipe according to which simultaneous parts of the action are given to the construction of music's polyphonic moments. Regarding this wonderful musical discourse, I notice a certain static strategy of various directing visions even at the most modern stagings of *Lucia di Lamermoor*. It can be assumed that this sextet is thought of as a *freeze-frame* on what each of the characters involved in this artistic moment thinks. It should be emphasized the difficult situation for a stage-manager regarding this musical moment where the experiences of each character has to be managed separately and where each performer has a completely different dramaturgic discourse. All of the six performers, along with the choral ensemble and the orchestra, are, in fact, brought together solely by the same musical discourse. This moment is placed in the wedding scene of *Lucia's* forced marriage, the joy of the guests present at the party contrasting with the bride's turmoil and sadness. In order to emphasize the grandeur and the tension of this moment, the direction provides the entrance of the *Edgardo's* spectre on the background of lightnings, riding on a pure white and imposing horse-model, accompanied by angels, an allegory of the desperate heroin's hallucinations and whose mental state worsens continuously.

The *madness aria* is preceded by a non-verbal scene, with a Lucia whose troubled mind, in full delusion, is visualizing a world of her own where takes place the fantastic encounter between *Ashton* and *Edgardo*, both riding on ghost-horses and prepared, similar to the medieval knights, for a tournament. Frightened by her own phantasms, *Lucia* kills *Arturo* and enters her own fiction, moments highlighting the dramatic tension performed through a range of specific codes for non-verbal language (Esslin, 1989), on the background of orchestral music.

Lucia's entrance in the debut of act III is made after the chorus moment: "*D'imensogiubilo, s'inalzi un grido*" (Let us raise our voices in wild jubilation), where Donizetti writes down above the musical notes: "*Lucia e in succinta e bianca veste; ha le chiome scarmigliate e il volto coperto da uno squallore di morte. E delirante*" (Lucia enters, garbed in simple white clothes; her hair disheveled, a pallor of death on her face. She is delirious). We can observe that the first staging indication comes directly from the composer. In all of the directorial versions I have performed, each one invariably took into consideration this annotation found in the musical score.

The Madness Aria, as this moment is known in the musical literature, is perhaps the most complex aria for a lyrical-soft soprano, where the vocal technique must intertwine with the performing-acting technique. One without the other can take this musical moment into the area of the ridiculous. It is precisely the request postulated by Richard Wagner referring to the harmony between the bodily motion and music, the emotions being the means by which the message of the words is being translated while the gesture is their intensifying factor:

The bodily gesture, determined by an inner emotion that is transmitted to the limbs capable of expression and, finally, the mimicry, represents a perfect inexpressible, which the language can only describe, remaining to the limbs or mimicry to truly express it (Wagner, 1983, p. 344).

The *Madness Aria* is written down in the musical score as *No. 14: Scena ed Aria*. The place of this dramatic scene is right in *Ravenswood* family's palace where, *Lucia's* wedding ceremony took place shortly before, with the husband imposed by her brother. Thus, Lucia makes her appearance on the stage, coming somehow from a parallel world, where she hears a heavenly voice while the choir (the aristocrats participating at the wedding) were in full celebration. *Lucia* is holding a knife and her arms and night shirt are covered in blood. They all understand that the unfortunate *Lucia* lost her mind and, in her madness, she has just killed her husband. Her lost mind belongs now to another world, a parallel one where she hears *Esgardo*, the one to whom she swore eternal faith: "*il dolce suono mi colpi di suavoce...*" (the sweet sound struck me with his voice). It is her lover's voice, whom she had been forced to part with in this world. This wonderful voice she hears is banished by a spectre who parts her from *Edgardo*: "*il fantasma ne separa*" (the spectre parts us). Thus, an arch is created over the two scenes, connecting the *cavatina* in the first act with the *madness aria* where "*the spectre*" appears. From the standpoint of its representation, the spectre, namely the ghost, should remain "an image of the presence of the invisible, by excellence" (Borie, 2007, p. 5).

If, in the *cavatina*, *Lucia* has only a first scary vision of the spectre, in the *madness aria*, this seems to coordinate all of her moves: "*Ohi me, sorge il tremendofantasma, e ne*

separa, il fantasma, ne separa..." (Ah! the tremendous spectre rises, and separates us, the ghost, parts us). Once the spectre is banished, *Lucia* meets *Edgardo* who, in that world of illusions where she is now, finally gives her a wedding ring. "*Ecco il ministro*" (Here is the minister) is the illusory priest who institutionalizes the wedding ceremony, while *Lucia* is hearing the wedding canticle coming from all over the place, in her lost mind. "*O lieto gorno*" (Oh, happy day) and "*Al fin son tuo*" (Finally, I am yours), are moments within the aria, when I have always felt the music-lover audience vibrating, this being firstly because of the particular beauty of the musical discourse fully supported by the sensitive text accompanying the melody. *Lucia* hears the wedding canticle that seems to be sung by angels, however, they seem to want to kidnap *Edgardo* from the unfortunate *Lucia*. Thus, the first part of the aria ends while *Lucia* says: "*A, no, non fuggir Edgardo*" (Oh, no, do not leave me, Edgardo).

The first part of the aria includes, at the end, the famous *Lucia's cadenza*, a moment performed through a simple musical dialog between *Lucia* and a *piccolo* without the intervention of the orchestra. The sonic effect of this moment, where only the soprano's voice and the gentle sound of the flute occupy the sonic space, has a special effect on the audience. After this cadenza, the entire orchestra supports, with its intervention, the soprano's *E flat* at the end of this original musical moment. This musical cadenza is a good occasion whereby the soprano can demonstrate her technical-vocal skills. The cadenza may give uniqueness to the entire performance because the melodic line, different from one soprano to another, depending on the degree of difficulty she can demonstrate, generates various performing perspectives. Although the cadenza may have different variants, the final will always include that famous *E flat* which is the business card of *Lucia's* performer.

A second part of the aria follows, where we understand that *Lucia* decides to follow her love beyond the grave: "*Spargi d'amaro pianto, il mio terrestre velo, mentre lassu nel cielo io preghero per te*" (Shed bitter tears on my earthly garment, while in Heaven above I will pray for you). It seems that *Lucia* has finally found her peace and, during several cadences full of virtuosity represented by a melodic line abundant in sustained sounds, vocal chromatism and staccato sounds which end with an *E flat* from the third octave, *Lucia* falls into agony and dies.

Value considerations regarding the construction of the part

Usually, at the end of the madness aria, the soloist remains on the ground. However, in stage-manager Cătălin Ionescu-Arbore's vision, the *scene of madness* is not over, as during the next musical moment, the tenor's aria, *Lucia*, still lying down in the place where she fell, rises with extremely slow movements. While she leaves, as if called by the voice of her lover whom she finds beyond death, she leaves behind her white veil suggesting the detachment from the bodily coil while she seeks her way into the light. The plasticity of the light, present throughout the musical performance, highlights especially the transitions from one state to another and, at the end, the transition from one world to another, a requirement postulated by Appia and Craig, two revolutionary stage-managers who have liberated the performing art from its traditional restraint. Her "idling" footsteps suggest that she is already floating above all the misfortunes of the earthly world and, with light movements, she finally finds her place next to the one she could not be with in the terrestrial life. On her way to another dimension, she encounters a barrier of angels

that suggests the boundary that separates the two dimensions, angels, represented by machinists dressed in white clothes and wearing great wings. Thus, in the metaphysical version of this Romanian stage-manager, the story has a happy ending, even if it is fulfilled beyond death through a "wedding in the sky," reminiscent of the end of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Only the most important moments from the aria of madness were pointed out here, in order to emphasize the dramatic complexity the soloist has to realize. Regardless of how wonderful the musical discourse is, without a dramatic performance to match the beauty of the music, any performing approach remains incomplete.

As far as I am concerned, I have been able to realize how important the acting part is by reviewing the recordings of "*Lucia*" performances from different moments of my career. At the beginning, a permanent concern for sound and voice could be felt, and I looked all too often at the conductor from a desire to have no musical asynchronicities. Although the relationship with the stage partner had many positive sides, it seemed too often that there was no clearly-visible preoccupation for the acting side.

Lucia di Lamermoor, in its classical version, has always been quite successful with the music-loving audience. It was incomprehensible the reaction of our audience to the version of this performance directed by Cătălin Ionescu-Arbore, who produced a version with a variety of elements at a scale specific rather to a movie rather than a classic opera performance (Șerban, 2006, pp. 257-263). Andrei Șerban, remembering "*his Lucias*", refers to the "filmic" décor of the exceptional British decorator Bill Dudley, certifying the possibility of their interference. It was a completely different story when we "exported" the performance to the West. There, the performance received an extraordinary welcome from both the audience and the specialized music critics.

The directorial vision realized by Cătălin Ionescu-Arbore, Romanian stage-manager and screenwriter, currently the director of the Romanian National Opera in Bucharest, made me understand that a talented stage-manager can also "rise" the performer through his artistic contribution which comes to increase, by his talent, the vocal-solositic performance as well. As a matter of fact, even the work for this part began in a way different from other directorial versions. Before the meetings held in the rehearsal room, the director organized various meetings, almost casual, in which the subject was the story in which we were about to transpose ourselves. Who is this Lucia? What drama hides her unhappy life? Is she just a victim or not? What history is behind this family? In which historical moment does the action take place? etc. These were just a few of the questions we have been thinking about and for which we found answers together, a specific procedure for preparing a role in theater.

Thus, at the first rehearsal meeting with the piano, we were already familiar with the demands, wishes, as well as the directorial vision. The great question was: could I rise to meet the expectations of this modern stage-manager? In comparison with other work experiences for the construction of a lyrical part, this time the stage-manager was not satisfied to simply show me where to enter the stage, where to play my aria and then where to get out of the stage. The first request of the director/stage-manager became the first major difficulty in performing my part, both in terms of vocal technique as well as mastery of dramaturgical performance. If, until this part, the melodic line was a good-enough "safety belt," this time, with all the beauty of the musical discourse of this wonderful opera, without a performance also supported from a dramaturgical point of view, this part could not have been shaped.

From the previous discussions, we established together with the director that *Lucia*, right from the beginning of the story, had to transmit to the audience some psychological instability, however, at an early stage. Starting from this idea, the director asked that I make a certain repetitive gesture with my hands, to suggest this instability, illustrating that this state will, eventually, lead to madness. The importance of the reproduction of a mental state is reflected in the poetics of the great directors and theorists, concerned with the techniques of transposing such feelings as accurately as possible. Although it seemed easy to achieve it as requested, I actually did this gesture, without realizing it, following the beat of the aria I was performing. So, instead of suggesting a certain mental state, the rhythm of that gesture sometimes led to a comic situation, hardly desirable in a musical drama.

But the most beautiful memory I kept from the lab work done for the creation of this part is the moment after the *madness aria* when, traditionally, *Lucia* who has just died, rises a few seconds later and thanks the audience for their applause, then leaves the stage with elegance. By contrast, in Cătălin Ionescu-Arbore's vision, it is suggested that the soul of *Lucia* leaves the body and finds its way to another dimension, through a simple gesture.

If I were to confess what was most difficult to accomplish for this performance, I would give a possibly surprising answer, namely: the *costume*. *Lucia's* clothes were of exceptional beauty, but extremely difficult to wear. First of all, under the large and very heavy dresses, the costume included a stiff corset, made on "ribs," meaning that this corset was built on a metal skeleton. However, these metal ribs inside the corset were breaking off because of the costal-diaphragmatic breathing that involves a movement of the chest, making the metal inside the corset effectively enter into my flesh with every breath.

CONCLUSIONS

This staging of *Lucia di Lammermoor* was one of the most challenging, exciting and happiest working experiences of my entire career, as participant and a witness in such an artistic event. Thus, I strengthened further my belief that, in the world of opera it is possible to make progress into the delicate register of staging and, above all, that much modernization is required in this special area of the lyrical performance, using techniques specific to the art of theater, requirements especially imposed by stage-managers coming from theater and who hazard themselves to stage lyrical operas in dynamic visions (Miklós, 2012, p. 18).

Cătălin Ionescu-Arbore structured this performance not as the staging of a common opera, but as the accomplishment of a film performance. From a libretto rather lacking in surprises regarding the action taking place throughout the opera, the stage director filled all these action gaps with lights, scenography and magnificent, glamorous costumes, in full accord with the architecture and fashion of those times. The experience of working with stage-manager Cătălin Ionescu-Arbore remains an example good to be replicated, which leads to the conclusion that a modern staging can be shaped on a poor libretto structure, if the stage-manager has a complex scenic vision and an exceptional creative potential.

By realizing this version of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the stage director succeeded to bring at the same level of relevance other ways of artistic expression, so that the beauty of the musical lines is complemented by proper bodily posture and professional acting

performance, where the scenography also brings its contribution to the completion of the whole artistic and performing approach of the soloist.

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