

## Partimento formulas and musical meaning in Bellini's compositional praxis: an analytical approach

Marco Pollaci

### 1. Analytical approaches in Bellini's «long, long, long melodies»

In one of the rare analytical studies dedicated to Vincenzo Bellini's music, William Rothstein affirms that «Bellini was an important musical innovator, comparable to Schubert».<sup>1</sup> The author recalls a crucial point about research on Bellini: Analysis of the composer's operas has been largely and hastily dismissed, following the tradition of an analytical approach based on German Romantic aesthetics, which is still reflected in twentieth-century methods, and even in recent decades.<sup>2</sup> Rothstein refers to commonplaces related to Bellini's music, and, in doing so, makes some significant observations.<sup>3</sup> Vincenzo Bellini's operas deserve deeper musical analysis, as has been undertaken for other traditionally venerated common-practice European composers. In fact, despite the growing literature on the Italian composer,<sup>4</sup> only a few analytical and theoretical studies on Bellini's music have appeared. In fact, Bellini's operas, along with those of other nineteenth-century Italian composers, have often been overlooked by theorists whose mainstream perception of the opera compositional praxis towards its present form is often fraught with reductionist views.<sup>5</sup> These tend to neglect

---

<sup>1</sup> WILLIAM ROTHSTEIN, *Tonal Structures in Bellini*, «Journal of Music Theory», LVI/2, 2012, pp. 225-283: 225.

<sup>2</sup> An overview of this aspect has been described in the afore-mentioned Rothstein's article: ROTHSTEIN, *Tonal Structures in Bellini* cit. The German-centrism and nineteenth-century Romantic approach to Italian opera studies has been discussed by NICHOLAS BARAGWANATH, *The Italian Traditions & Puccini: Compositional Theory and Practice in Nineteenth-Century Opera*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> The contemptuous attitude towards Bellini's music that influenced twentieth-century criticism is discussed by CECIL GRAY, *Vincenzo Bellini (1802-1835)*, «Music & Letters», VII/1, 1926, pp. 49-62. Significant and powerful critiques from earlier musicians are discussed in FABRIZIO DELLA SETA, *Bellini*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2022, pp. 17-22.

<sup>4</sup> A recent significant contribution is dedicated to the figure of Bellini as a composer within the nineteenth-century dramaturgical context: DELLA SETA, *Bellini* cit., *passim*. The scholar prunes away the myths and anecdotes regarding Bellini's life, reconstructing the figure of the musician in his historical-musical context and in the years during which Bellini emerged as a figure of musical excellence, highly admired for musical masterpieces and for his importance to Italian operatic dramaturgy. Another work focusing on the young Bellini has been published by MARIA ROSA DE LUCA, *Gli spazi del talento. Primizie musicali del giovane Bellini*, Firenze, Olschki, 2020. Further references appear in STEPHEN WILLIER, *Vincenzo Bellini. A Research and Information Guide*, London, Routledge, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Other studies employing these aspects and related methodological approaches include: BARAGWANATH, *The Italian Traditions & Puccini* cit., pp. IX-XI. A significant study on this field describing this relevant historical and theoretical approach has been written by Della Seta, who analysed the heavy influence of prejudices from the Austro-German tradition and the related difficulties in opera analysis: «[...] it is also true that international musicology has only recently accepted Italian opera as unquestionably deserving of attention [...]. [This is probably due to t]he fact that the musical language of Italian opera diverged from the Austro-German tradition just when the latter was being taken as the paradigm for the nascent discipline of

the wider subtleties of an extraordinarily nuanced creative landscape with many different landmarks, influences and threads. The bias of theorists influences the common idea that Bellini's musical language is based on simple and pleasant melodies and, therefore, not worthy of deeper investigation, in comparison to the so-called 'great' nineteenth-century instrumental music or complex harmonies in the works of German composers.

In a recently published volume on the 'Swan of Catania', Della Seta sums up the opinions of different composers such as Rossini, Ravel, Berio and Nono on Bellini's art, critics and commentators who reiterate the common idea of Bellini's music mentioned above. Consider the well-known statement by Stravinsky: «Bellini inherited melody without having even so much as asked for it, as if Heaven had said to him, 'I shall give you the one thing Beethoven lacks'». <sup>6</sup> This encomium representing the *croce e delizia* of Bellini's compositional signature should, therefore, compensate for the lack of complexity in harmony and orchestration with the ingenious invention of «long, long melodies», according to Verdi's famous description. <sup>7</sup>

This study does not intend to defend and investigate all the significant compositional structures in the music of Vincenzo Bellini. Much valuable scholarship has already discussed the charge of assumed harmonic limits, breaking these old-fashioned commonplaces with different kinds of analysis. <sup>8</sup> Instead, this analytical work reconsiders the received idea of

---

musicology; and the difficulty of grasping the dramaturgy of Italian opera in a cultural context moulded by Wagnerian theory and practice (and in part by Shakespeare, Schiller, and so on)», quoted in FABRIZIO DELLA SETA, *Some Difficulties in the Historiography of Italian Opera in Not Without Madness: Perspectives on Opera*, trans. Eng. by Mark Weir, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2013, pp. 119-130: 119. Another study by Harold Powers recalled the problem related to the analytical issue, which is «generally both prospective and Germanic: we look at works as we hear them, and we think of each as a predecessor of all that follows, ultimately of us: furthermore, we approach them with perceptions trained on the analysis and criticism of instrumental music from North of Alps», quoted in HAROLD POWERS, *La "solita forma" and "The Use of Conventions"*, «Acta Musicologica», LIX/1, 1987, pp. 65-90: 76. William Drabkin discusses the analytical problems related to this theoretical approach applied to nineteenth-century Italian opera production: «It is impossible to divorce Wagner's style, which was held to be fundamental for the future course of music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from its dramatic context. [...] There is more to music than what the great German masters are capable of teaching us: to mention just one field, recent analyses of Verdi's operas – whatever their origins as a response to writings about Wagner – have contributed significantly to the breadth of our critical appreciation of opera. Schenker himself seems to have been more aware of this than he is usually credited with his reviews of early Viennese productions of *Falstaff* suggest some of the elusive qualities in Verdi that, he believed, merited the careful critical attention that has only lately received», in WILLIAM DRABKIN, *Analysis*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. by Helen M. Greenwald, New York, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 245-271: 249.

<sup>6</sup> Igor Stravinsky's full comment can be found in IGOR STRAVINSKY, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, English trans. by Arthur Knoled and Ingolf Dahl, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1947, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Verdi's famous praise of Bellini's *melodie lunghe, lunghe, lunghe*, described in a letter to Camille Bellaigue on 2 May 1898, is quoted in FRIEDRICH LIPPMAN - SIMON MCGUIRE, *Bellini, Vincenzo*, in *Grove Dictionary of Opera*, I, ed. by Stanley Sadie, London, Macmillan, 1998, p. 392.

<sup>8</sup> I should mention the fundamental nineteenth-century study on Verdi's operas by Antonio Basevi, who also discusses compositional aspects of Bellini's melodies: ABRAMO BASEVI, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi*, Firenze, Tipografia Tofani, 1859, pp. 17-18, 162. Among theoretical and analytical studies on Bellini's music, see BARAGWANATH, *The Italian Traditions & Puccini* cit., pp. 125-134, 301-306; ROTHSTEIN, *Tonal Structures in Bellini* cit.; MARY ANN SMART, *In Praise of Conventions: Formula and Experiment in Bellini's Self-borrowings*, «Journal

simple melodies born from the inspiration of a talented Bellini ‘without’ his ‘even bothering to ask for it’. On the contrary, attention to compositional pedagogy in early nineteenth-century Neapolitan conservatories,<sup>9</sup> particularly to partimento<sup>10</sup> rules and contrapuntal schemata, reveals significant craftsmanship and rhetorical meaning in Bellini’s melodies.

In this article, I seek to explore Bellini’s partimento legacy, highlighting how the specific contrapuntal and harmonic patterns he learned as a student were incorporated into his compositional activity and exploring how the composer used these formulas and melodic models within the dramaturgical context of his operatic music. Applying methodologies based on the partimento and schemata theories,<sup>11</sup> this study argues that Bellini’s melodies comply with the traditional patterns of voice leading based on the revered pedagogic traditions; but correlations are also suggested between these analytical results and dramaturgical contexts. This reveals a significant aspect of the roots and dramatic sense of Bellini’s melodies, beyond the simple and genuine tunefulness praised by critics and musicians. The analyses of selected musical examples offered here, utilising an opera analytic approach, are the first of their kind in Bellini scholarship.<sup>12</sup>

---

of the American Musicological Society», LIII, 2000, pp. 25-68; GIORGIO SANGUINETTI, *Casta diva o la soavità delle dissonanze?*, in *...et facciam dolci canti. Studi in onore di Agostino Ziino in occasione del suo 65° compleanno*, a cura di Bianca Maria Antolini, Teresa M. Gialdrone, Annunziato Pugliese, Lucca, Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2003, pp. 1133-1148; ID., *Di una ricorrente reminiscenza beethoveniana in Bellini*, «Bollettino di studi belliniani», v, 2019, pp. 55-65, <http://www.bollettinostudibelliniani.eu/archivio/>. Bellini’s compositional world has also been discussed in the most remarkable recent contribution to musical analysis of Italian opera: WILLIAM ROTHSTEIN, *The Musical Language of Italian Opera, 1813-1859*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> The ongoing re-evaluation of the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Neapolitan school includes much literature published in the last decades. For an overview of the historical context and reconstruction of these pedagogic traditions and institutions, see ROSA CAFIERO, *La didattica del partimento. Studi di storia delle teorie musicali*, Lucca, Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2020; ROBERT O. GJERDINGEN, *Child Composer in the Old Conservatories: How Orphans Became Elite Musicians*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2020; ID., *The Perfection of Craft Training in the Neapolitan Conservatories*, in *Composizione e improvvisazione nella scuola napoletana del Settecento*, «Rivista di Analisi e Teoria Musicale», xv/1, 2009, pp. 29-54; GIORGIO SANGUINETTI, *Decline and Fall of the ‘Celeste Impero’: The Theory of Composition in Naples during the Ottocento*, «Studi Musicali», xxiv/2, 2005, pp. 451-502.

<sup>10</sup> Sanguinetti defines the partimento’s tool: «Like a continuity draft, a partimento is a single-staff notational shorthand with elements of continuo figures. Its purpose is to set up a firm outline for all the aspects of the finished piece: length, tonal plan, harmony, texture, and style. [...]. A partimento is a sketch, written on a single staff, whose main purpose is to be a guide for improvisation of a composition at the keyboard». GIORGIO SANGUINETTI, *The Art of Partimento. History, Theory and Practice*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> According to Gjerdingen, schemata are «stock musical phrases», from ROBERT O. GJERDINGEN, *Music in the Galant Style*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 6. A schema is a contrapuntal skeleton that serves as a prototype of a common pattern, an exemplar which can be applied with a theoretical explanation of specific passages of music. These schemata are often named based on earlier sources and theorists, such as the Fonte, Monte, Romanesca; or they are named after theorists themselves, like the Meyer (from Leonard Meyer).

<sup>12</sup> An introduction to Bellini’s training and partimento tradition in Bellini’s studies has been described in MARCO POLLACI, «Spero che il mio nome rimanga impresso in quest’epoca». *Vincenzo Bellini and the significance of his compositional practice in the early 19th century opera season*, in *Music, individuals and contexts, dialectical interaction*, a cura di Nadia Amendola, Alessandro Cosentino, Giacomo Sciommeri, Roma, Società Editrice di Musicologia, 2019, pp. 171-184 (collana UniverItalia).

## 2. *Partimento legacy in Bellini's tonal language: music formula and artistic cliché*

The aim of this study is not to carry out a deep investigation into the theory and practice of partimenti, solfeggio and all axioms of the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Neapolitan compositional school. The pillars of the Neapolitan pedagogic tradition have been examined thoroughly in important works by other scholars.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the compositional schemata to which I will refer in my analytical method have been described in schemata theory by Robert Gjerdingen, and in other studies referred to throughout this article. Rather, I give the reader a brief introduction to Bellini's training in Naples, to establish the role of his musical education in his professional activities, thus better understanding the compositional context, which I examine further using the analytical approach. Schemata theory and partimento patterns taken from Bellini's operatic and sacred works will be then applied to selected examples as case studies.

The illustrious eighteenth-century traditions of the Neapolitan school of composition, in which the partimento and its teaching techniques played significant roles, were still present in Italian music education in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> In the eighteenth-century and into the early nineteenth, Naples was a cultural magnet that attracted all the young musicians of Italy who aspired to have careers as composers, regardless of their

<sup>13</sup> An essential guide to the partimento's tradition has been published by SANGUINETTI, *The Art of Partimento* cit. The influential schemata theory has been coined by GJERDINGEN, *Music in the Galant Style* cit. The partimento's rules and schemata patterns based on these works have been applied in music analysis studies such as MATTHEW BOYLE - PAUL SHERRILL, *Galant Recitative Schemata*, «Journal of Music Theory», LIX, 2015, pp. 1-61; VASILY BYROS, *Topics and Harmonic Schemata: A Case from Beethoven*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. by Mirka Daruka, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 381-414; OLGA SÁNCHEZ KISILEWSKA, *Interactions between Topics and Schemata: The Case of the Sacred Romanesca*, «Theory and Practice», XLI, 2016, pp. 47-80; JOHN A. RICE, *The Morte: A Galant Schema as Emblem of Lament and Compositional Building-Block*, «Eighteenth-Century Music», XI/2, 2015, pp. 157-181; ID., *The Heartz: A Galant Schema from Corelli to Mozart*, «Music Theory Spectrum», XXXVI/2, 2014, pp. 315-332; GIORGIO SANGUINETTI, *Galanterie romantiche: la 'Quiescenza' nell'Ottocento*, in *Musica come pensiero e come azione. Studi in onore di Guido Salvetti*, a cura di Andrea Estero, Maria Grazia Sitá, Marina Vaccarini, Lucca, Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2015, pp. 345-361; ID., *Gli schemi di partimento in alcune composizioni sacre di Pergolesi: modelli, materiali e trasformazioni*, in «Studi pergolesiani», IX, a cura di Francesco Cotticelli and Paologiovanni Maione, Bern, Lang, 2015, pp. 457-484. Further works investigate partimento and counterpoint methods in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century traditions: VASILY BYROS, *Towards an 'Archeology' of Hearing: Schemata and Eighteenth-Century Consciousness*, «Musica Humana», I/2, pp. 235-306; FELIX DIERGARTEN, *The True Fundamentals of Composition: Haydn's Partimento Counterpoint*, «Eighteenth-Century Music», Cambridge University Press, VIII/1, pp. 53-75; *Studies in Historical Improvisation: From Cantare super Librum to Partimenti*, ed. by Massimiliano Guido, London, Routledge, 2019; GILAD RABINOVITCH, JOHN ANDREW SLOMINSKI, *Towards a Galant Pedagogy: Partimenti and Schemata as Tools in the Pedagogy of Eighteenth-Century Style Improvisation*, «Music Theory Online», XXI/3, 2015; PETER VAN TOUR, *Counterpoint and Partimento: Methods of Teaching Composition in Late Eighteenth-Century Naples*, Uppsala, Uppsala Universitet («Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Studia Musicologica Upsaliensia Nova»), 2015; ID., «Taking a walk at the Molo»: *Partimento and Improvised Fugue*, in *Musical Improvisation in the Baroque Era*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2019, pp. 371-382. An important database for partimento studies has been created by Peter van Tour: *UUPART, The Uppsala Partimento Database*, Uppsala, 2015, <http://www2.musik.uu.se/UUPart/php>.

<sup>14</sup> See SANGUINETTI, *The Art of Partimento* cit., pp. 88-92.



specialised professions and musical paths.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Naples was the musical centre of the opera network, having the royal theatre, the San Carlo, as the headquarters of Italian music.

Bellini's biographers often remark that Vincenzo came, in fact, from a musical family in Sicily;<sup>16</sup> and he was well prepared for his studies when he arrived in Naples. The young Vincenzo was trained by his grandfather, Vincenzo Tobia Bellini (1744-1829), who studied music following the rigours of the Neapolitan school at the Conservatorio Sant'Onofrio a Capuana, and the grandchild was heavily influenced by methods that were essential in eighteenth-century pedagogic traditions: voice leading and contrapuntal models, which became part of his musical language. In fact, the methods of Bellini's musical training in Catania had remained essentially unchanged since the eighteenth century, following the pedagogic traditions based on partimento, solfeggio<sup>17</sup> and counterpoint rules he learned from his grandfather.

Bellini was then admitted as a student in the Collegio di S. Sebastiano in Naples. As Florimo writes, «Giovanni Furno<sup>18</sup> was his first harmony and partimento teacher and as

<sup>15</sup> Despite the discrepancies and biased anecdotes, Florimo's writings on Neapolitan music school are still a historical reference: FRANCESCO FLORIMO, *La scuola musicale di Napoli e i suoi conservatori*, Napoli, Morano, 1881-1883, reprint Bologna, Forni, 2002. See also: SALVATORE DI GIACOMO, *I quattro antichi Conservatori di musica di Napoli. Il conservatorio di Sant'Onofrio a Capuana e quello di S. Maria della Pietà dei Turchini*, Palermo, Sandron, 1924; ID., *I quattro antichi Conservatori di musica di Napoli. Il conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Christo e quello di S. Maria di Loreto*, Palermo, Sandron, 1928. Neapolitan school traditions in the early nineteenth century are described in the mentioned BARAGWANATH, *The Italian Traditions & Puccini* cit., pp. 1-48; GJERDINGEN, *Child Composer in the Old Conservatories* cit., pp. 19-82; SANGUINETTI, *The Art of Partimento* cit., pp. 19-94.

Another eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century musical centre, the Italian city of Bologna, developed an important and influential partimento tradition and counterpoint school. Bolognese counterpoint masters such as Padre Giambattista Martini and his pupil Stanislao Mattei became celebrated theorists and teachers who moulded generations of musicians such as Johann Christian Bach, Niccolò Jommelli, Gaetano Donizetti, Francesco Morlacchi, Gioachino Rossini. The partimento collections compiled by these masters, and the historical contexts of those collections, are described in SANGUINETTI, *The Art of Partimento* cit., pp. 23-26; See also: ELISABETTA PASQUINI, *Giambattista Martini*, Palermo, L'Epos, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> See DE LUCA, *Gli spazi del talento* cit., pp. 27-33. De Luca provides further historical and cultural context in the eighteenth-century Catania in MARIA ROSA DE LUCA, *Musica e cultura urbana nel Settecento a Catania*, Firenze, Olschki, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> This work does not investigate the important solfeggio tradition of the Bellini's student years. Details regarding this pedagogic method are fully described in NICHOLAS BARAGWANATH, *The Solfeggio Tradition: A Forgotten Art of Melody in the Long Eighteenth Century*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2020. Further references can be found in PAOLO SULLO, *I solfeggi nella scuola di Nicola Zingarelli*, «I Quaderni del Conservatorio Umberto Giordano di Foggia», II, 2014, a cura di Antonio Carocchia and Francesco Di Lernia, pp. 173-198; ID., *Lo studio del solfeggio nella scuola napoletana del Settecento*, in *Ars Sacra 2012, Cappelle Musicali, Suoni di Fede: Storia, Contesto e Liturgia*, Atti delle giornate di studi musicologici (Anagni, 30-31 marzo 2012), a cura di Luciano Rossi, Roma, UniversItalia, 2013, pp. 37-54. The Solfeggio Database created by Peter van Tour is a relevant tool to facilitate the identification of concordant sources within the solfeggio repertoire between 1730 and 1830: UUSolf, *The Uppsala Solfeggio Database*, ed. by Peter van Tour, 2016. <https://www2.musik.uu.se/UUSolf/UUSolf.php>.

<sup>18</sup> Giovanni Furno (1748-1837), was a composer and a famous master in Naples, considered one of the best teachers in the Neapolitan institutions. His textbooks *Metodo facile, breve e chiara ed essenziali regole per accompagnare* (1817) and *Movimenti del partimento del Maestro Furno*, were reprinted many times. Bellini and Francesco Saverio Mercadante, among other names, were Furno's students.

maestrino,<sup>19</sup> he had Carlo Conti.<sup>20</sup> As a counterpoint student, he was a pupil of Giacomo Tritto<sup>21</sup>[...], and after a few years in 1822, he became a pupil in the Zingarelli<sup>22</sup> school».<sup>23</sup>

This preliminary introduction reveals a *cursus studiorum* in which the partimenti and counterpoint rules, following the traditions of Neapolitan school masters such as Furno, Conti and Tritto and the esteemed Zingarelli,<sup>24</sup> were an integral part of Bellini's music education.<sup>25</sup> Under Zingarelli's guidance, the young Bellini developed one of his musical strengths as a future composer, the 'long, long melodies', which I will discuss further from an analytical perspective.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Maestrini were students of especially high skill who acted as teaching assistants.

<sup>20</sup> Carlo Conti (1796-1868) was trained at the Real Collegio di S. Sebastiano with Furno, Tritto, Fedele Fenaroli (1730-1818) and Zingarelli.

<sup>21</sup> Giacomo Tritto (1733-1824) studied under Pasquale Cafaro (1715-1787) at the Conservatorio della Pietà de' Turchini. Bellini, Mercadante, Spontini, Conti and Meyerbeer were his pupils. His teaching methods are documented in his textbooks, *Partimento e regole generali per conoscere quale numerica dar si deve ai vari movimenti del basso* (1821) and the extremely popular *Scuola di contrapunto, ossia Teoria musicale* (1823).

<sup>22</sup> Nicola Antonio (o Niccolò) Zingarelli (1752-1837) had been a pupil at S. Maria di Loreto with his contemporary Domenico Cimarosa. He studied under Fenaroli and Alessandro Speranza (1724-1797). His partimenti's books are the largest corpus of partimenti after those of Fenaroli: *Partimenti/del Signor Maestro don Nicolò Zingarelli*, Milano, Ricordi, 1830-1833.

<sup>23</sup> The quote, translated by the author of this study, is taken from FLORIMO, *Cenno storico sulla scuola musicale di Napoli*, II, p. 714: «Nel luglio 1819 venne ammesso come alunno nel Collegio di S. Sebastiano in Napoli, e scorsi appena sei mesi ottenne un posto gratuito per concorso. Ebbe a primi istitutori per lo studio dell'armonia e partimenti Giovanni Furno, ed il suo maestrino fu Carlo Conti: pel contrapunto, a suo tempo, fu posto sotto la savia scorta di Giacomo Tritto, [...]; dopo, qualche anno, nel 1822, mutò maestro, e passò ad apprendere alla scuola dello Zingarelli».

<sup>24</sup> Further details regarding Zingarelli's teaching and partimento traditions can be found in MARCO POLLACI, *Nicola Zingarelli and Neapolitan Didactic Tradition in the 19th Century Italy: An Investigation*, in *Nicola Zingarelli. Il maestro, il compositore e il suo tempo*, a cura di Giovanna Carugno and Paolo Sullo, Napoli, Editoriale Scientifica, 2023, pp. 281-303.

<sup>25</sup> Further investigation on Bellini's Neapolitan years is highlighted in DE LUCA, *Gli spazi del talento* cit., pp. 44-55, JOHN ROSSELLI, *The Life of Bellini*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 14-35.

<sup>26</sup> Florimo's writings are rich in anecdotes and facts whose truthfulness cannot be taken for granted, given his almost hagiographic, hyperbolic tendencies and partiality towards his friend. However, the methods described by Florimo highlight one significant aspect of Bellini's training and of his continuous interest in melodies as a strength of his musical signature, following the suggestions of his revered master: «If you sing in your compositions, be assured that your music will be appreciated. On the other hand, if you compose only harmonies, double counterpoints, fugues, canons, notes, counter-notes, etc. maybe the musical world will applaud you after half a century, but the public will certainly disapprove of you. The public wants melodies, melodies, always melodies. If your heart can create them, try to refine them as simply as possible, and you will be a successful composer [...]. Learn the musical grammar from my teachings, the simple and bare art, and once you know it as master, study how to hide it». Florimo's suggestions are quoted in MARIA ROSARIA ADAMO, FRIEDRICH LIPPMANN, *Vincenzo Bellini*, Torino, Edizioni Rai Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1981, p. 32: «Se canterete nelle vostre Composizioni, siate pur certo che la vostra musica piacerà. Se invece ammasserete armonie, contropunti doppi, fughe, canoni, note, contronote, ecc. ecc. forse sì e forse no, il mondo musicale vi applaudirà dopo mezzo secolo, ma certo il pubblico vi disapproverà. Egli vuole melodie,

My brief excursion into Bellini's training clarifies the syllabus of the composer's student years and the context of the pedagogic legacy which informed that syllabus.<sup>27</sup> The study of harmony and counterpoint during the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century was, in fact, based on the previously mentioned partimento tradition, the study of counterpoint, solfeggio methods, and thoroughbass approach, to learn singing, composition and the art of improvising. A great quantity of contrapuntal guidelines are musical rules that allow musicians to produce their music efficiently, using melodic cells and compositional patterns. Because of its foundations in a conservative craft, musical education in Italy tended to be traditional. Teachings based on partimenti, musical schemata and contrapuntal exercises were carefully passed down through generations, as is the case in Bellini's family.

One of the main principles of eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Neapolitan didactic methods was learning through the practical working out of exemplars or models common to any opera composer of that period: the study of cadences and scales, the Rule of the Octave (RDO),<sup>28</sup> *moti del basso* (bass motions), partimento schemata, in addition to other compositional tools. Eighteenth-century partimento schemata were often used as part of a compositional *zibaldone* (a notebook with various exercises, rules and counterpoint exercises), where the composers – often automatically – could take advantage of their training. Practice and theory were unified in these pedagogic traditions; composers could use these schemata as part of their craft. These methods consisted of a particular repertoire of standardised musical phrases for use in certain conventional sequences, and these compositional features

---

melodie, sempre melodie. Se il vostro cuore saprà dettarvele, studiatevi di esporle il più semplicemente possibile, e la vostra riuscita sarà sicura, voi sarete compositore [...]. Da me imparate la grammatica, la semplice e nuda arte, e una volta conosciutala, e divenuti maestri, studierete il modo di nasconderla».

<sup>27</sup> A manuscript of partimenti collections preserved in the library of the Conservatory Giuseppe Verdi in Milan testifies to a notebook of Francesco Durante's partimenti presumably used by Vincenzo Bellini. The manuscript source contains a series of *partimenti diminuiti* in which we can read the musician's name, "Vincenzo Bellini padrone" ("owner") on the title page. The name appears again on page 54 with a partimento in D major, I-Mc Noseda Th. c. 107. A counterpoint study attributed to Vincenzo Bellini, *Studio del Contrappunto, fatto da Vincenzo Bellini, Napoli, 1819, Autografo* has been analysed in MARCO POLLACI, *Vincenzo Bellini's Studio del Contrappunto Notebook: An Investigation of a New Source of Partimento and Counterpoint in Early Nineteenth-Century Italy*, in *Basso Continuo in Italy: Sources, Pedagogy and Performance*, ed. by Marcello Mazzetti, Turnhout, Brepols, 2023, pp. 247-261. The notebook testifies a pedagogic approach around 1819 in Naples. Friedrich Lippman briefly mentioned this *Studio* in FRIEDRICH LIPPMANN, *Belliniana: Nuovi documenti*, in *Il Melodramma italiano dell'Ottocento. Studi e ricerche per Massimo Mila*, a cura di Giorgio Pestelli. Torino, Einaudi, 1977, pp. 281-317: 317. Further references to this manuscript are mentioned in WILLIER, *Vincenzo Bellini. A Research and Information Guide* cit., p. 73; DE LUCA, *Gli spazi del talento* cit., p. 53. The manuscript is preserved in a private collection. Furthermore, the library of the Naples Conservatoire preserves counterpoint exercises by Florimo under Zingarelli's supervision, confirming pedagogic methods that testify to a similar approach of the *Studio di Contrappunto* attributed to Bellini: *Studio di Contrappunto composto da me Francesco Florimo sotto la direzione del Sig. r D. Nicolò Zingarelli, Gran maestro e Direttore del Real Collegio di Musica di S. Sebastiano*, I-Nc, Ra.31.1.19. Selected Bellini's sketches and *studi giornalieri* (daily studies) have been exploited in CANDIDA MANTICA, *Gli studi giornalieri di Vincenzo Bellini. Indagine filologica ed analitica dei manoscritti conservati presso il Museo Civico Belliniano di Catania*, tesi di laurea, Università degli studi di Pavia, Facoltà di Musicologia, 2006-2007. See also ID., *Alle radici del processo creativo. Gli 'studi giornalieri' di Bellini 'sviluppati con effetto' nei Puritani*, «Bollettino di studi belliniani», VI, 2020, pp. 29-73, <http://www.bollettinostudibelliniani.eu.archivio/>.

<sup>28</sup> From this point, I shall use the abbreviation of RDO.

expanded their influences beyond Italy. The word *composition* was then taken in its literal meaning (in Latin, *cum ponere*, which means ‘to put together’), referring exactly to the music production system of the eighteenth century and part of the nineteenth century. The question arises then how a nineteenth-century opera composer such as Vincenzo Bellini might have chosen and used these partimento idioms in his musical creations, perhaps referring to the conventional and artistic use of the formulas, similar to a musical reminiscence, a rhetorical figure evocative of the past tradition.

Thus, partimento schemata, such as The Romanesca, The Meyer, Do-Re-Mi, the Fenaroli<sup>29</sup> and many others on which students could elaborate a melody, constituted a tonal vocabulary that the student or the professional musician could use with a melodic and harmonic combination such as specific cadences, bass sequences and segments of the RDO.<sup>30</sup> As previously described, Bellini’s training in partimento lays out the theoretical justification and approach for this analytical method. Recalling the influential methods of three masters, one of whom was one of Bellini’s teachers, Gjerdingen describes the pedagogic tradition and schemata employment thus:

Like commedia dell’arte actors memorising all the scenes and “business” in their troupe’s zibaldone, so young composers memorised all the schemata in the partimenti of their masters. [...] Three such “well-established” maestros were Giacomo Tritto (1733-1824), and Giovanni Paisiello (1740-1816), both of Naples, and Stanislao Mattei (1750-1825) of Bologna. Paisiello, of course, was among the most famous opera composers of the eighteenth century, and the students of Tritto and Mattei included giants like Spontini, Donizetti, Bellini, and Rossini, who dominated early nineteenth-century opera.<sup>31</sup>

I now proceed to analyse some excerpts by Bellini, showing the partimento legacy in selected passages from his musical output, and suggesting the expressive use of a specific schema as an analytical tool.

## 2.1 The Romanesca

The Romanesca scheme was used primarily for important musical melodic themes, often as an opening gambit, and became so common as to constitute something of a musical *cliché*, an evocation of the past, specifically the early nineteenth-century compositional pat-

<sup>29</sup> All these schemata are fully described and exploited in the mentioned GJERDINGEN, *Music in the Galant Style* cit.

<sup>30</sup> Examples of musical *topoi* in eighteenth-century music are described, albeit with a different methodological approach from this analytical method, in RAYMOND MONELLE, *The musical topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006. See also: CATHAL TWOMEY, *The Five Canons of Rhetoric*, «Dublin Musicology Collective Zine», July 2023. Available at: <https://dublinmusicologyco.wixsite.com/dubmusco/post/the-five-canons-of-rhetoric>.

<sup>31</sup> GJERDINGEN, *Music in the Galant Style* cit., pp. 25-26. A full description of the Romanesca pattern can be found in *ivi*, pp. 25-44.



terns. This pattern is a presentation schema, such as the Do-Re-Mi and the Meyer, which can be found in the Bellini musical passages that will be discussed later. In some musical passages from operas by nineteenth-century Italian opera composers, such as Rossini and Verdi, the melody and bass that formed the Romanesca's opening contrapuntal gesture were a signature trait of a courtier and noble *milieu*. Fig. 1 shows an analytical reduction of the symphony from *Il Pirata*,<sup>32</sup> in which Bellini seems to use the conventional musical formula (the stepwise descending scale, here presented in the bass) as an archaic musical gesture evoking a courtly atmosphere, emphasising that of the Sicilian Castle of Candora and the courtly era in which the opera is set.

Fig. 1. *Il Pirata*, *Sinfonia*, bb. 1-18.

Fig. 2 is taken from Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, and is followed by my analytical reduction (Fig. 3). Here again, the Romanesca schema is readily identifiable by its descending stepwise scale (this time in the melody with typical bass support of falling fourths and rising seconds), and again seems intended to recall a courtly *milieu*. The scene, in the third act, is set in a courtyard in the palace of Capellio, where the Guelphs celebrate the imminent wedding of Giulietta and Tebaldo, and the main theme based on this ancient formula underlies the festive and jubilant atmosphere with nobles and courtiers dancing and singing in the palace.

<sup>32</sup> All selected examples are presented and transcribed from the vocal score.

a)

**Allegro moderato**

b)

17 Tenori *ff*  
 Lie - ta not - te, av - ven - tu - ro - sa

Bassi *ff*  
 Lie - ta not - te, av - ven - tu - ro - sa

Fig. 2. *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Act III, scene 3.  
 Introduction and Chorus, «Lieta notte», bb. 1-4 (a), bb. 17-20 (b).

Fig. 3. Analytical Reduction, bb. 1-4, bb. 17-20.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> From this point, all Arabic numbers with carats refer to the melodic lines.

Another example is taken from the second act of *La Straniera*, when the bridesmaids announce that Arturo is returning to Isoletta to lead her to the altar. Bellini's application of the Romanesca formula, which may be seen from the reduced score in Fig. 4 and its further reduction in Fig. 5, would presumably have been regarded as an archaic rhetorical figure referencing a jovial atmosphere with a wedding procession surrounded by palace ladies and knights.

All<sup>o</sup>. Maestoso

Fig. 4. *La Straniera*, Act II, scene 10, Introduction and Chorus, «È dolce la vergine», bb. 1-14.

Fig. 5. Analytical Reduction, bb. 1-6, bb. 1-9.

## 2.2 *The Do-Re-Mi*

Bellini seems to have incorporated several elements of old-fashioned formulas, such as the Romanesca pattern and other contrapuntal partimento schemes, in his melodies and bass lines throughout his operatic work. A rising figure to introduce an important musical theme is described by Gjerdingen as Do-Re-Mi<sup>34</sup> in its basic type, with the scale degrees 1-2-3 ascending in the melody and 1-7/5-1 in the bass line. Like the melodic and harmonic pattern of the Romanesca, the Do-Re-Mi was another popular and favourite eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century partimento pattern, applying a presentation scheme to emphasise a vocal line or a musical theme.

<sup>34</sup> This pattern is fully exploited in GJERDINGEN, *Music in the Galant Style* cit., pp. 77-88.

In the third act of *I Puritani*, Arturo launches the concertato beginning of the famous «Credeasi misera» by elaborating the basic Do-Re-Mi scheme into a melody of great beauty and dramatic force. D-flat, E-flat and F, the three notes of the conventional pattern, act as landmarks in Arturo's impassioned melody as he prays for Elvira's innocence (Fig. 6 and 7), and the pattern is followed by a typical partimento sequence consisting of a bass rising by fourth and falling by fifth.<sup>35</sup>

**Largo Maestoso** (♩ = 58)

ARTURO

Cre - dea - si, mi - se - ra -

da me tra - di - ta, tra - ea sua

vi - - ta in tal mar - tir!

*pp*

Fig. 6. *I Puritani*, Act III, scene 3, «Credeasi misera», bb. 1-9.

<sup>35</sup> *I moti del basso* (bass motions), whether conjunct or disjunct, diatonic or chromatic, were essential to partimento rules, with students being asked to identify bass motions and choose appropriate chords to add over them. Further references in SANGUINETTI, *The Art of Partimento* cit., pp. 99-166.

Fig. 7. *I Puritani*, Analytical Reduction, bb. 2-9.

The old Neapolitan schema Do-Re-Mi also underpins the beginning of *Norma*'s Symphony, as illustrated in Fig. 8 (a). My analysis in Fig. 9 highlights the conventional Do-Re-Mi pattern's combination with another old-fashioned Romanesca that returns in bars 17-20 (Fig. 8 b and 10).

The rhythmic figures that Bellini developed from these two old-fashioned contrapuntal patterns convey a sense of marching, recalling a military parade and thus perfectly matching with the musical topic of the symphony introduction.

a)

b)

Fig. 8. *Norma*, *Sinfonia*, bb. a) 1-4, b) 17-20.



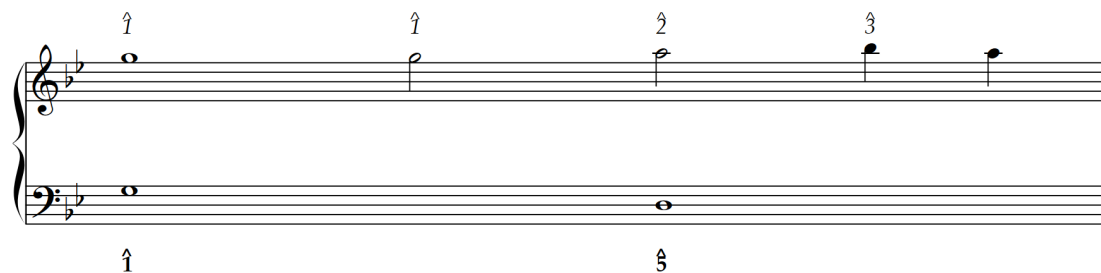


Fig. 9. Analytical Reduction, bb. 1-4.

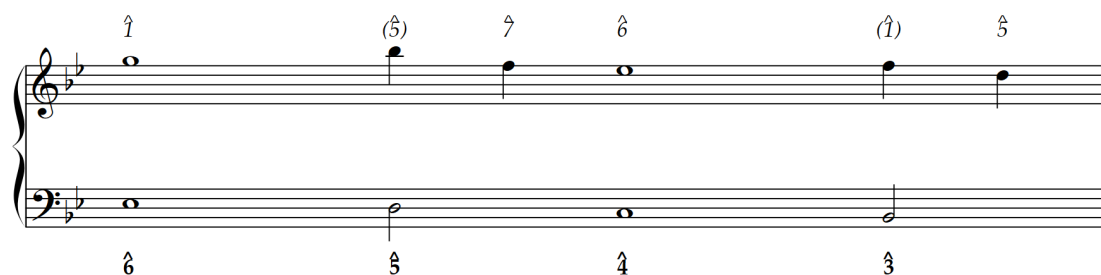


Fig. 10. Analytical Reduction, bb. 17-20.

Further analysis of *Norma* will demonstrate even more clearly how the composer applied his Neapolitan compositional skills (acquired through repetitive exercises in cadences, scales, partimento’s formulas and other bass motions) to the professional world of composition in a variety of styles. Such analysis forms the main argument of the next section.

### 2.3 The Meyer

One of the most well-known presentation schemes, The Meyer<sup>36</sup> was used by Mozart, Hasse, Pergolesi, Cimarosa, Paisiello and many other composers. This bass motion segment was introduced by Giacomo Tritto in his *Scuola di Contrappunto*,<sup>37</sup> and this pattern became very common in the nineteenth-century pedagogic tradition. An old-fashioned scheme born from partimento practice, The Meyer involves a 1-6-4-2 melody (all motions except 6-4 descending), over a 1-2-7-5-1 bass (all ascending, except 2-7/5).

Bellini’s ability to create a melody with dramaturgical purpose in a clever and subtly suggestive way is evident at the beginning of the second act of *Norma*, one of the composer’s masterpieces. Bellini composes one of his most famous musical passages with a sense of scope in the scene where Norma contemplates the murder of her children, «Teneri, teneri figli» (reproduced in Fig. 11). This is one of the most touching melodies in the Italian operatic repertoire. The mentioned partimento’s scheme, the Meyer opening pattern, is founded on a bass with a typical ascending step 1-2, answered by a 7-1 ascent. The melody’s core is based on a descending scale model, following the teachings of Tritto and others, with a *scala*

<sup>36</sup> This is Gjerdingen’s name for the schema. See GJERDINGEN, *Music in the Galant Style* cit., pp. 111-128.

<sup>37</sup> See the full description and musical example in *ivi*, p. 111.

*nell'acuto* (scale in the upper voice) for the soprano. The bass melody below intensifies the sense of melancholy, creating the tonal stability that is the «preferred choice for important themes»<sup>38</sup> such as Norma's apparent decision to kill her children. But tonal stability in a minor key seems to suggest Norma's persistent anguish and anxiety, while Bellini's frequent suspensions produce an instability that reveals her decision as merely apparent, not on that she intends to carry out. All of these musical features are illustrated in Fig. 12.

[NORMA]

90

Te - ne - ri, te - ne - ri fi - gli... es - si, pur

94

dian - zi de - - li - zia mi - - a... es - si nel

99

cui sor - ri - so li per -

102

do - no del ciel mi - rar cre - de - i...

Fig. 11. *Norma*, Act II, scene 1, «Teneri, teneri figli», bb. 90-104.

<sup>38</sup> *Ivi*, p. 112.

Fig. 12. Analytical Reduction, bb. 90-104.

*Norma* also offers another example in which Bellini applied this tonal prototype: the famous duet «In mia man alfin tu sei; Niun potria spezzar tuoi nodi», where the woman demands that her lover Pollione repudiate forever her rival in love, the handmaid Adalgisa (Fig. 13, with analytical reduction in Fig. 14). Rather than a simple melodic gift, this duet demonstrates the strength of Bellini’s ability to elaborate on conventional patterns to convey dramatic situations. The vocal line gradually rises to the climax of the scene, repeating the initial melodic statement «Pel tuo Dio, pei figli tuoi, Giurar dei che d’ora in poi», when Norma tries to establish the power of her dominance, articulating the melody over the Meyer bass line. The contrapuntal combination of standard partimento schemata would not be out of place in a Tritto exercise; but much more remarkable than Bellini’s assured grasp of conventional schematic counterpoint is the affective and evocative potency of the schema’s deployment in this operatic context. The tonally stable formula supports the unmoving power of Norma, who claims to control Pollione’s life when she confronts him, warning that this is his last chance to live with her. Once again, Norma’s emotional insecurities are implied by the suspension of the 6<sup>th</sup> when the protagonist sings «tu sei», recalling her inner vulnerability even in an authoritative moment of stable power. Bellini’s treatment of the scene shows great skill and craftsmanship, as well as great dramaturgical sense; hardly mere melodic outpourings that he did not need to ask for (or think about).

5

9 [NORMA]  
In mia man al fin tu

12  
se - i niun po - tria spez - zar tuoi no - di. Io pos

Fig. 13. *Norma*, Act II, scene 10, «In mia man al fin tu sei», bb. 1-14.

1 2 3 4

7 - 6 6 4 - 3

4 5 5

3

1 2 3 1

Fig. 14. Analytical Reduction, bb. 10-14, bb. 18-22.

The expressive use of the Meyer bass line can be found in the second part of the duet as well, «Sì, sov'r'essi alzai la punta. Vedi, vedi a che son giunta» (reproduced in reduced score in Fig. 15, analytical reduction in Fig. 16), when Norma affirms her power and conflicting feelings about her attempt to kill her children as revenge for Pollione's betrayal. Once again, Bellini incorporates a conventional technique of the past for important opening themes with strong tonal stability, colouring Norma's desire to control Pollione and the dramaturgical situation portrayed in the duet.

(con pianto moderato)

42 [NORMA]  
 Si, so - vr'es - si al - zai la

[POLLIONE]  
 ten - do? Oh Dio! che in-

44  
 pun - ta Ve - di... ve - di a che son giun - ta!

ten - do?

Fig. 15. *Norma*, Act II, scene 10, «Si, sovr'essi alzai la punta. Vedi, vedi a che son giunta».

$\hat{1}$                        $\hat{2}$                        $\hat{4}$                        $\hat{3}$   
 $\hat{1}$                        $\hat{2}$                        $\hat{5}$                        $\hat{1}$

Fig. 16. *Norma*, Analytical Reduction, bb. 42-46.

The legacy of Bellini's education, and its strong ties to Neapolitan contrapuntal formulas, shows through in one of his earliest student compositions as well: the sacred work *Salve Regina* in A major, composed between 1819 and 1825. Bellini's training in the early nineteenth



century also involved studying sacred music of the past,<sup>39</sup> including the composition of new sacred works, at which the Neapolitan masters were considered to excel not only the rest of Italy but all of Europe. All students were required to be employed after their training ended, not only as opera composers but, very often, in religious institutions as well.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, outmoded conventional formulas were preserved through their inclusion in standard lessons and compositions for the church. Similarly, patterns, such as the Meyer were employed in many young composers' non-liturgical sacred works, like Bellini's above-mentioned *Salve Regina*. Bellini's use of the Meyer pattern may be seen in the analytical reduction (Fig. 18) of the original score (reproduced in Fig. 17). Bellini based this musical passage, which is centred on the theological core of this religious hymn, on the old-fashioned Meyer formula, and followed it (in clichéd Neapolitan partimento fashion) with an ascending chromatic scalar melody in oblique motion against a rising chromatic bass.<sup>41</sup>

The image shows a musical score for a vocal ensemble and piano. It consists of five staves. The top four staves are for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass, respectively. The piano part is on the bottom staff. The score is in common time (C) and begins at measure 67. The lyrics are: "er - go ad-vo - ca - ta no-stra il - los tu - os mi - se - ri-cor - des". The vocal parts feature a chromatic ascending melody in oblique motion, with dynamics ranging from *f* (forte) to *p* (piano). The piano accompaniment features a rising chromatic bass line.

<sup>39</sup> Sacred music continued to form one of the main objects for studies in counterpoint during Bellini's student years at the Neapolitan Conservatoire. The church still provided the main source of employment for musicians in Naples in the nineteenth century.

<sup>40</sup> See ROSA CAFIERO, *La formazione del musicista nel XVIII secolo: il 'modello' dei conservatori napoletani*, in *Composizione e improvvisazione nella scuola napoletana del Settecento*, a cura di Gaetano Stella, «Rivista Italiana di Teoria e Analisi», xv/1, 2009, pp. 5-25.

<sup>41</sup> This pattern, which is typical of Fedele Fenaroli's rules, is fully described in SANGUINETTI, *The Art of Partimento* cit., pp. 136-137.

71

*f* o - cu-los, mi - se - ri - cor - des o - cu-los *p* ad

*f* o - cu-los, mi - se - ri - cor - des o - cu-los *p* ad

*f* o - cu-los, mi - se - ri - cor - des o - cu-los *p* ad

*f* o - cu-los, mi - se - ri - cor - des o - cu-los *p* ad

73

nos con - - - ver - te ad

nos con - - - ver - te ad

nos con - - - ver - te ad

nos con - - - ver - te ad

Fig. 17. *Salve Regina* in *A Major*, bb. 67-78.

Fig. 18. Analytical Reduction, bb. 67-77.

#### 2.4 Other compositional schemes

The model vocal realisations of other Neapolitan schools show similar features as *topoi*, recalling past traditions and musical conventions. The beginning of Norma's act 1 duet «Oh rimembranza» (Fig. 19) features a descending 5-4-3-2-1 melody over a 1-5-1 bass, a pattern derived from exercises upon a given partimento bass called the Ponte by Gjerdingen.<sup>42</sup> We should recall that the Romanesca, the Meyer, as well as the Fonte and the Ponte, were amongst the most well-known partimento patterns in the early nineteenth-century pedagogic and compositional practice tradition, deemed conventional formulas and rhetorically *cliché*.<sup>43</sup> The Italian word *ponte* means «a bridge to cross over»,<sup>44</sup> indicating a scheme that emphasises a melodic line in important musical themes, such as the intense vocal lines of Norma and Adalgisa, which are repeated in the duet, and reproduced in my analytical reduction (Fig. 20). Adalgisa confesses her love for Pollione, and Norma realises that she (Norma) and Adalgisa are both in love with the same man. The duet, in fact, might represent a sort of bridge, a crucial passage within the opera itself. The opening phrase «Oh rimembranza» recalls a critical passage of remembrance for Pollione, but this remembrance will also be the cause of Norma's fury, triggering her realisation that Pollione no longer loves her, an important transition point in the opera's dramaturgical context, events will take a decisive course. Without this duet delineating a significant bridge in the plot, Norma would have known nothing of Adalgisa's love for Pollione. After the introductory Ponte,

<sup>42</sup> The basic pattern and its different types have been explored by GJERDINGEN, *Music in the Galant Style* cit., pp. 177-215.

<sup>43</sup> See *ivi*, p. 61. Gjerdingen describes in detail the significance of these patterns in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as outmoded conventional patterns learned during composers' training.

<sup>44</sup> *Ivi*, p. 197.

a descending melody based on the expressive use of a Romanesca's conventional pattern sets the incipit of the duet's second part: «Ah, si fa core abbracciami», shown in Fig. 21 and 22. The passage's tonicization of A minor – from bar 119 – leads to a 7-1 motion in the bass line, below a vocal line focused on 5-4-3(-1) contours, which are repeated twice («Al caro oggetto unita, vivrai felice ancor»/«Tu rendi a me la vita se non é colpa amor»), as reproduced and analysed in Fig. 23 and 24. This pattern has been described by Gerdingen as the Monte (Mountain),<sup>45</sup> a typical partimento formula from Neapolitan rules taught by Bellini's masters, such as Zingarelli.<sup>46</sup> The expressive use of this formula might suggest an implicit understanding of how to set a passage with specific semantic connotations. Neither woman knows that they are in love with the same man, or what kind of man he really is, and both will have to climb the «mountain» of disillusionment: after breaking her vows to be with him, Norma must realise that he has abandoned her and their children; after giving him her youth and gaining his love, Adalgisa must realise that that love prompted him to abandon his children and their mother.

53 NORMA  
Io fui co - sì io fu - i co - sì ra -

56  
- pi - ta al sol mi - rar - lo in vol - to

Fig. 19. *Norma*, Act I, scene VII, «Oh rimembranza», bb. 53-59.

<sup>45</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 89-106.

<sup>46</sup> Zingarelli's reference can be found in *ivi*, p. 90.

Fig. 20. Analytical Reduction, bb. 55-59.

**Più animato**  
119 [NORMA]

Fig. 21. *Norma*, Act I, scene VII, «Ah si, fa core abbracciami», bb. 119-121.

Fig. 22. Analytical Reduction, bb. 119-121.

[NORMA] 128

Fig. 23. *Norma*, «Ah si, fa core abbracciami», bb. 127-130.



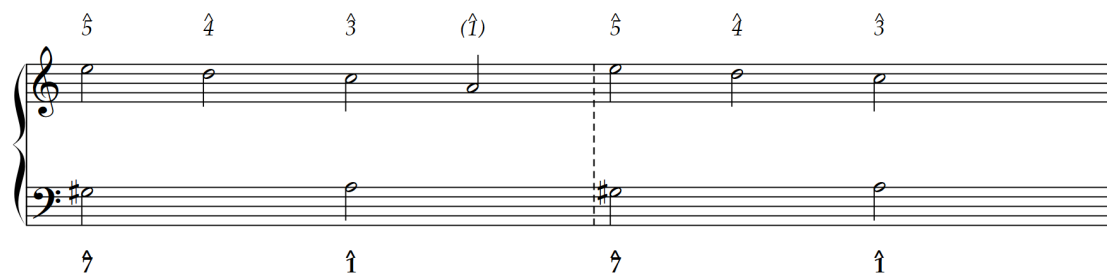


Fig. 24. Analytical Reduction, bb. 127-130.

Other common schemes could be combined to define melodic and bass lines. Example 26 summarises a vocal line based on the Prinner pattern<sup>47</sup> with a bass scheme based on the so-called Jupiter<sup>48</sup> formula, followed by the already mentioned Do-Re-Mi. The example is taken from the first act of *Bianca e Fernando* when the chorus and Uggiero support Fernando («Ov'è il tuo cor intrepido» (Fig. 25). Fernando, son of Carlo, Duke of Agrigento, arrives in his native land under a false name (Adolfo), with a group of loyal followers. Carlo's throne was usurped by Filippo, who locked the old duke Carlo in a secret prison after banishing Fernando. Happiness and anguish alternate in Fernando when he sets foot in his homeland, while his squire Uggiero and the other followers encourage him despite the injustice. It might not be a coincidence that the Prinner-based melodic line is delayed, not aligned with the bass as it should be.<sup>49</sup> This is followed by a sense of return to the initial schematic order with a 1-2-3 bass movement, accompanying the final proper conclusion of the Prinner, as shown in Fig. 26 (bars 39 and 40).

a)

**Allegro assai**

29 [Tenori]

O - v'è il tuo cor in - tre - pi - do? O - v'è il va - lor ma - gna - ni - mo? Non

[Bassi]

O - v'è il tuo cor in - tre - pi - do? O - v'è il va - lor ma - gna - ni - mo? Non

<sup>47</sup> See *ivi*, pp. 45-90.

<sup>48</sup> Gjerdingen illustrates this Jupiter scheme strictly connected with Meyer. Further details can be found in *ivi*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>49</sup> This version of the Prinner usually involves a melodic 6-5-4-3-1 descent against a bass 4-5-1, and while Carlo's aria does contain both of these motions, they overlap rather than coinciding. Bellini does open with 6 over 4, but then sustains that 6 while the bass ascends to 5. The melody only resumes its descent when the bass has already completed its own part of the pattern (which it has done in an unusual way, rising from 5 to 1 by step rather than leaping up or down to it).

b)

37

gui- da? O - v'è il tuo cor in - tre - pi - do? O -

gui- da? O - v'è il tuo cor in - tre - pi - do? O -

*gru*

The musical score for Figure 25 consists of three systems. The top system shows the vocal line in treble clef with lyrics: "gui- da? O - v'è il tuo cor in - tre - pi - do? O -". The middle system shows the vocal line in bass clef with the same lyrics. The bottom system shows the piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand with a *gru* (grace note) marking and a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes.

Fig. 25. *Bianca e Fernando*, Act I, scene I, Chorus, «Ov'è il tuo cor intrepido», a) bb. 29-33, b) 37-39.

(1) 6 5 4 3 1

(1) 4 5 6 7 1 2 3 (1)

The analytical reduction in Figure 26 shows scale degrees for the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The top system shows the vocal line with scale degrees: (1), 6, 5, 4, 3, 1. The bottom system shows the piano accompaniment with scale degrees: (1), 4, 5, 6, 7, 1, 2, 3, (1). The piano part is shown in grand staff with treble and bass clefs.

Fig. 26. Analytical Reduction, bb. 30-37, bb. 39-40.

## 2.5 The Rule of the Octave

We have seen examples of the partimento heritage in Bellini's melodic composition, which could also suggest the relationship between these old-fashioned patterns and some compositional *clichés*, sorts of musical *topoi* in an operatic context, to intensify the musical meaning of the drama under the tacit principle that some operatic situations could invite conventional musical solutions. The sequences analysed in the previous examples could have worked as a sort of *cantus firmus* for the compositional praxis of melodies, treated in practice as *cantus firmi*, becoming melodically distinctive formulas based on Italian methods, testifying to the centrality of the training received by the composer.

As such, stock melodic formulas were integrated with other partimento rules that were linked to the harmonisation of ascending and descending scales. The afore-mentioned RDO, in fact, embodied the backbone of bass and melodic formulas. This important conventional formula involves a method of harmonising bass lines in which each scale degree is harmonized

with a specific chord.<sup>50</sup> As Sanguinetti describes it,<sup>51</sup> the RDO is an effective and potent tool of tonal coherence and tonal stability, as its assigning of a specific chord to each scale degree removes any room for ambiguity. During the nineteenth century, particularly in Italy and for opera composers anywhere, Fedele Fenaroli's standard version became the favourite harmonisation.<sup>52</sup> As anticipated, the RDO became part of the pedagogic tradition, such as in Bellini's training in Naples, and could have been used as a segment for a specific musical context and expressive musical idiom for a musical passage.<sup>53</sup> RDO-like features, elaborated by Bellini both as operatic melody and bass movement, are particularly noticeable when the composer bases a scene on formulaic musical elements identifiable with a strong sense of tonal solidity, but deploys that element in specific dramaturgical contexts concerned with a sense of uncertainty. Perhaps this matching of schema to topic is a Bellinian *topos* unto itself, recalling the need for emotional stability: a discomfiting reminder of the past, a nostalgic (often bittersweet) memory, dreams that create a sense of estrangement or even a mad scene. A conventional technique from Bellini's training might evoke a dramaturgic reminiscence.

Below, I present further evidence for the concurrence of schema and topic, and discuss some musical examples. Suggestive in this regard is the touching melody «Oh, quante volte, oh quante», from *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (Fig. 27 a and b). Fig. 28 presents a reduction of the aria's beginning, showing it to be based on a segment of the RDO in the bass line with a subsequent descending melody presenting a Prinner pattern in which the scale degrees 6-5-4-3 are preceded by appoggiature that reinforce the melancholy of the melodic line.

a)

74 [GIULIETTA]  
Oh! quan - te vol - te oh! quan - - te ti

<sup>50</sup> References can be found in THOMAS CHRISTENSEN, *The 'Regle de l'Octave' in Through-Bass Theory and Practice*, «Acta Musicologica», LXIV/2, 1992, pp. 91-117; GIORGIO SANGUINETTI, *La Scala come Modello per la Composizione*, in *Composizione e improvvisazione nella scuola napoletana del Settecento*, «Rivista di Analisi e Teoria Musicale», XV/1, 2009, pp. 68-96. There are different versions of the Rule of the Octave harmonisation. The version used here is closely based on that of Fedele Fenaroli (Naples, 1775), which became a standard version in the nineteenth-century pedagogic tradition.

<sup>51</sup> «The RDO is more than an ingenious tool for accompaniment of a scale; it is a powerful means of tonal coherence. In fact, it determines a specific chord for each scale degree that in only a few cases is the same as for another scale degree [...]; but even in those cases, any tonal ambiguity is avoided by the fact that the chord assigned to each scale degree has a unique relationship with the preceding or following chord» (SANGUINETTI, *The Art of Partimento* cit., pp. 113). Sanguinetti points out that, «The RDO does not need a complete scale, from tonic to tonic, in order to become effective. In fact, one of the great advantages of the RDO is that it can be used even for short segments, provided one is able to locate them correctly within the appropriate scale».

<sup>52</sup> See *ivi*, p. 120.

<sup>53</sup> Baragwanath describes similar functions of the RDO rule for late-nineteenth-century composers such as Boito and Puccini in the previously mentioned *The Italian Traditions & Puccini* cit., pp. 148-160.

b)

76  
 chie - do al ciel pian - gen - do! con

Fig. 27. *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Act I, scene 4, «Oh! quante volte, oh! Quante», bb. 74-78.

(4) 6 6 5 5 6 6 5  
 2  
 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1

Fig. 28. Analytical Reduction, bb. 75-78.

The technique of the RDO is profitably used by the composer in another musical passage from *Il Pirata*, in which the protagonist, Imogene, is the victim of a nightmare that destabilises reality (the dream that her love Gualtiero had been killed by her husband). When singing «Era sorda la natura al mio pianto, al mio dolor» in her act 1 scene «Lo sognai, ferito, esanime», Imogene tries to regain rational stability after the terrifying and upsetting dream, and ends that attempt with a *cadenza doppia*<sup>54</sup> (as shown in my analytical reduction in Fig. 30, from the original score reproduced in Fig. 29).

77 [IMOGENE]  
 -ce a. E-ra sor - da - la na - tu - ra al mio pian-to, al mio do - lor,  
 rall. col canto a tempo

Fig. 29. *Il Pirata*, «Lo sognai ferito, esanime», Act 1, scene 3, bb. 77-81.

<sup>54</sup> The classification of cadences is essential in Neapolitan pedagogy, in which the *Cadenza doppia* (double cadence) is a typical partimento formula. See SANGUINETTI, *The Art of Partimento* cit., pp. 105-106.





spe - me... o la - scia - te, la - scia - te - mi mo - rir

*pp*

Fig. 31. *I Puritani*, Act II, scene 3, «Oh rendetemi la speme», bb. 1-9.

Cadenza lunga

5 4 6 6 6 7 5

3

↑ 2 3 4 5 ↑ (3) 2 3

R.d.O. Cadence Tritto

Cadenza lunga

5 4 6 6 6 7 5

3

↑ 2 3 4 5 ↑

R.d.O. Cadence

Fig. 32. Analytical Reduction, bb. 1-9.

Destroyed by her lover Arturo's suspected elopement with another woman, Elvira is overwhelmed with grief and descends into delirium, demonstrated by the climax of her sorrowful and touching melodic line. Having the protagonist lose her love, the center of her whole world, the composer recalled a powerful tool of tonal coherence and certainty; the bass line is derived – in good Neapolitan fashion – from the RDO, together with the compositional schema of the tonally stable Meyer to express Elvira's need to embrace and cling to something.

This passage also highlights a *cadenza lunga*, following the partimento's pedagogical rule, which might be considered a cadential progression, in modern harmonic terms.<sup>55</sup> The tonal stability of the conventional pattern, through dramaturgical prolepsis, underlines the

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

protagonist's intense desire for a return to her former life and reality with her love. At the end of the scene, yet again, Elvira reiterates her desire, singing «Ah toglietemi la vita, o rendetemi il mio amore», to which the same partimento's scheme is repeated, thematising again the poetic image with music and text on the stage.

Drawing upon his earlier Neapolitan training, Bellini was also able to use standard techniques such as segments of RDO to emphasise the beginning of important themes even in non-operatic compositions, such as in his early works with sacred themes. A brief analysis of a passage from the *Tecum principium* (a section from the *Dixit Dominus* in A major for soprano and alto, chorus and orchestra, composed between 1819 and 1825) may demonstrate another example of the use of a segment of the RDO rule.

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Tecum principium'. It is written for Soprano and Orchestra. The tempo is 'Andante maestoso' and the dynamic is 'p' (piano). The score is in 3/4 time and A major. The first system shows the piano accompaniment for measures 1-6. The second system shows the vocal line for measures 7-12 with the lyrics: 'Te-cum prin - ci - pi-um in di - e vir-tu-tis tu - ae in splen-do - ri-bus sanc - to-rum ex'. The piano accompaniment continues in the second system.

Fig. 33. *Tecum principium* for Soprano and Orchestra, bb. 1-12.

The analytical reduction, shown in Fig. 34, consists of an RDO progression based on the ascending pattern, with I-II-III bass degrees followed by a VII-I in the second bar. This old-fashioned formula incorporates another eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century pattern, described by Gjerdingen as the Fenaroli,<sup>56</sup> a conventional formula often found in the eighteenth-century sacred works repertoire, aptly termed in honour of the master's significant role in the Neapolitan counterpoint school in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Recall that Fedele Fenaroli was a student of Francesco Durante, whose importance «as a font of galant tradition stems in part from his widely admired works, in part from his many partimenti, and part from the enormous pedagogical reputation of his student

<sup>56</sup> GJERDINGEN, *Music in the Galant Style* cit., pp. 225-240.

The image shows a musical score for an analytical reduction. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The treble staff contains five measures of music. Above the notes in the treble staff are rhythmic markings: a '3' over the first measure, a '2' over the second, a '1' over the third, a '2' over the fourth, and a '3' over the fifth. The bass staff contains five measures of music, with rhythmic markings below the notes: a '1' under the first, a '2' under the second, a '3' under the third, a '2' under the fourth, and a '1' under the fifth. The notes in the treble staff are mostly quarter notes, while the bass staff has mostly half notes.

Fig. 34. Analytical Reduction, bb. 1-2, bb. 7-8, bb. 11-12.

Fedele Fenaroli». <sup>57</sup> Fenaroli was Zingarelli's teacher, and Zingarelli taught Bellini. <sup>58</sup> The legacy of these stock contrapuntal formulas is another eloquent testimony to the manner in which pedagogic techniques, acquired through repetitive exercises on basses and melodic formulae, transformed into the applied professional skills relevant to the composition's text, recalling, for instance, a musical *cliché* from past repertoires (here, sacred ones).

### 3. Towards a Conclusion

These examples consider the legacy of Bellini's education, testifying to the centrality of the training process that influenced his tonal language and how these ancient compositional traditions could become conventional formulas as part of musical-dramaturgical *cliché*. This study lays the groundwork for further research and raises questions that remain unanswered; for instance, given the inheritance of partimento methods in Bellini's musical vocabulary as an integral part of the compositional process, how might these schemata have been chosen and used within musical production? I began by concentrating on Bellini's operas as a case study rather than by attempting a comprehensive exploration of partimenti in Italian opera, since few scholars hitherto have tried to apply Gjerdingen's methodology to this repertoire. Here, I wish merely to emphasise aspects of partimento's rule in connection with schemata theory, which may have fostered distinctive features of Bellini's operatic production in the early nineteenth century. Other composers of the early nineteenth century also clearly recall this legacy within their operas. <sup>59</sup> Particularly significant is the partimento heritage in composers such as Verdi, <sup>60</sup> whose musical reminiscences are similarly associated with past conventional formulas as *cliché*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ivi*, p. 226.

<sup>58</sup> This specific scheme can be also found in several of Durante's manuscripts of solfeggio, as Gjerdingen recalls, *ivi*, p. 229. As previously pointed out, the solfeggio tradition was another essential part of Bellini's training.

<sup>59</sup> See BARAGWANATH, *The Italian Traditions & Puccini* cit. The author details some Neapolitan patterns in composers such as Rossini. An example is the Romanesca pattern from *Armida* described by the author as an echo from past tradition, *ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>60</sup> Verdi's training was strongly connected with the Neapolitan pedagogic tradition. He studied with Vincenzo Lavigna, a pupil of Fedele Fenaroli. Further details in SANGUINETTI, *Diminution and Harmonic Counterpoint in Late Eighteenth-Century Naples: Vincenzo Lavigna's Studies with Fedele Fenaroli*, in «Journal of Schenkerian Studies», VII, 2013, pp. 31-61. See also ROBERTA MONTEMORRA MARVIN, *Verdi the Student – Verdi the Teacher*, Parma, Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, 2010.

A detailed account of the partimento tradition's influence on Verdi or other nineteenth-century opera composers is beyond the scope of this study.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, I shall mention two examples that appear in the introduction to *Rigoletto's* first act. Typical of the gallant courtly atmosphere is the Romanesca pattern that underlies the first eight bars of the introduction, presenting a bass falling by 4<sup>th</sup> and rising by step, with a descending melody consisting of degrees 3-2-1-7-6-5. The ancient Romanesca is perfectly integrated with the courtly *milieu* when the Duke of Mantua appears surrounded by noble ladies and members of the aristocracy. Exemplifying how to elaborate the RDO in introducing an important musical theme is the celebrated quartet «Bella figlia dell'amore» from *Rigoletto*, whose first eight bars are built upon a bass line which is a segment of the partimento rule.

My analysis should not be taken to suggest that specific partimenti lie behind music by Bellini, Rossini or Verdi, any more than we should try to identify models for Van Gogh paintings. Rather, this study began to investigate and suggest the relationship of Bellini's training, and the inheritance of his eighteenth-century studies, to his compositional practice, and the different uses to which a nineteenth-century composer could (or could choose not to) employ a specific scheme to evoke or underline a memorable moment of an operatic aria or musical passage.

My hypothesis and analytical examples outline a seemingly conscious choice of these patterns because, amongst the several options from which a composer could have selected, he specifically utilised a melodic or harmonic model from the past as part of his musical setting. This suggestion might be somewhat of an interpretation, but it nevertheless leads music theorists to an understanding of how the dramaturgical context and the specific tonal language of the Italian opera may interrelate. This is by no means to suggest that Bellini composed only to elaborate the same patterns from Neapolitan compositional praxis; that is only one aspect of Bellini's compositional practice, and the composer employed various techniques and dramaturgical effects that were congenial to him. Moreover, understanding these overlooked aspects of Bellini's compositional practice helps break down the historical barriers erected on the simple and beloved melodies «created without even bothering to ask», underlining the connection between his training and his gift for creating melodies, which are seemingly simple but extremely effective. Analytical studies of Bellini's music should therefore encompass broader and more significant aspects, avoiding prejudice against Bellini's tonal language. His musical and dramaturgical tools were intensified and refined by what he absorbed in Naples, particularly through Zingarelli's teachings. Zingarelli emphasised the importance of learning music grammar-stating «once you know it as master, study how to hide it».<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> See MARCO POLLACI, Pedagogical traditions and compositional theory in late nineteenth-century Italy: the legacy of Italian teaching methods for Giovane Scuola composers, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2018. This study demonstrates that partimento traditions are a key factor in the compositional practice of late nineteenth-century opera composers such as Francesco Cilea, Umberto Giordano and Alfredo Catalani. Further examples regarding Giacomo Puccini can be found in the afore-mentioned BARAGWANATH, *The Italian Traditions & Puccini* cit.

<sup>62</sup> The mentioned quote is also cited in FRANCESCO PASTURA, *Bellini secondo la storia*, Parma, Guanda, 1959, p. 54: «Da me imparate la grammatica, la semplice e nuda arte; e, una volta conosciutala, e divenuti maestri, studiate il modo di nasconderla».

The *Satzmodelle* theory, the galant schema and the partimento models in early nineteenth-century Italian opera might represent one analytical field that accurately highlights aspects of Bellini's music without disregarding his artistic aim in composition. That aim, that *credo*, was surely to assign expressive value to the melodies and text supported by contrapuntal patterns like basses derived from the Meyer, Prinner, Fenaroli or RDO schemata were assigned; in doing this, part of his originality was the way he could evoke or suggest a musical *topos*. Besides, Bellini himself could answer to commonplaces regarding his melodies, alleged compositional naiveté and his musical mistakes. He wrote: «whoever wants to judge without prejudgement all my works, I would suggest concentrating on my bass lines».<sup>63</sup> It might not come as a surprise that, being known for his fascinating melodies, Bellini suggests the importance of the bass guidelines in the voice leading; as it was during his student years, the same bass lines are complementary to the so-called gifted melodies. Bass and melodic lines are, therefore, both essential in Bellini's tonal language, a language formed on Neapolitan compositional practice. The composer's well-known ability to elaborate stunning melodies is one aspect of his complete and complex knowledge of the compositional rules. While the study of schemata theory and partimento tradition has traditionally and mainly been used to illuminate eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century instrumental music, the analytical approach in this article can offer a new perspective to music analysis and to nineteenth-century opera studies.

---

ABSTRACT - In the early twentieth century, Stravinsky offered a well-known assessment of Bellini, saying that «Bellini received the melody without even bothering to ask for it as if heaven had told him “I'll give you just what Beethoven lacks”». This quote highlights a prominent aspect of the praise afforded Bellini's musical language even today; namely, a focus upon ease and inspiration (especially in composing melodies), born from his creative genius. It also reflects a frequent mistaken conviction that Bellini's musical language relies on long, simple melodies, a conviction that pays inadequate attention to the significance of Bellini's training, as reflected in his compositional praxis. However, the overlooked compositional aspects of these so-called 'simple melodies' shine through under a recently rediscovered critical lens: the ongoing reevaluation of past pedagogic traditions, such as the *partimento* method and other rules of the Neapolitan school. The present article demonstrates not only the constant presence and re-use of compositional patterns from the legacy of the composer's studies, but also why and how the composer elaborated and quoted these formulas to express dramaturgical content. The article explores how reuse of such musical patterns can be read as a constitutive aspect of Bellini's melodies as musical *topoi*, to recall a specific dramaturgical atmosphere, a *tinta* or a musical colour.

---

<sup>63</sup> Significant critics of Bellini's harmonic progressions include Pietro Raimondi (1786-1853), who did not understand contrapuntal passages in *Bianca e Fernando* and *Pirata*. Bellini himself answered this prejudice in the letter to Florimo on 21 June 1828 to the Neapolitan editor Guglielmo Cottrau. This aspect has been discussed in JESSE ROSENBERG, *Il 'leista' Raimondi contro il 'durantista' Bellini*, in *Francesco Florimo e l'Ottocento musicale*, ed. by Rosa Cafiero and Marina Marino, Reggio Calabria, Jason, 1999, pp. 75-97. The quote from this letter can be found in VINCENZO BELLINI, *Carteggi*, ed. by Graziella Seminara, Firenze, Olschki, pp. 139-140: «perciò chi ha voglia di giudicare senza malignità potrà osservare i bassi di tutte le opere». (English translation by the author).