



A Study of Singing Techniques and Performance Practices in the Role of “Giorgio Germont” in Verdi’s Opera La Traviata

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Abstract

This study aims (1) to study and analyze the singing techniques and performance of the role of Giorgio Germont in Giuseppe Verdi’s opera La Traviata, and (2) to examine practice guidelines for singing and performing this role. The interpretation of opera characters requires careful attention to arias, recitatives, and ensembles, which together shape both musical and dramatic identity. Singers must therefore analyze every vocal passage of a character while also exploring representations of the character across other artistic forms to deepen understanding of personality and imagery. Such a study not only strengthens artistic cultivation but also refines interpretative skills. Taking Germont as the research object, this study applies vocal pedagogy and dramatic theory to systematically analyze the baritone role’s dual demands in vocal technique and stage expression. Verdi’s writing requires complete mastery of breath control, tonal stability, and phrasing, while also demanding expressive nuance to convey the tension between Germont’s authority as an enforcer of patriarchal values and his vulnerability in moral dilemmas.

The findings provide a framework for linking vocal technique with character portrayal, offering practice guidelines that integrate musical precision with dramatic depth. This research contributes theoretical insight and practical value to vocal teaching, rehearsal strategies, and operatic stage performance.

Keywords

Singing Techniques, Performance skills Opera, La Traviata, George Germont

Statement and Significance of the Problems

Vocal art in China has undergone significant development in recent decades, supported by national competitions and institutional training. According to Zhao (2009), the China International Vocal Competition, held in three sessions, has established a recognizable brand for Chinese vocal performance. Nevertheless, severe limitations persist. Many competitors prioritize sound quality and technical aspects of singing at the expense of other dimensions of operatic performance, such as accurate pronunciation, nuanced emotional expression, and the portrayal of interpersonal relationships in drama. These weaknesses reveal that Chinese vocalists, while technically proficient, often struggle to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the essence of Western vocal art. Zhao (2009) further argues that the cultivation of vocal artists requires a rational knowledge structure. He likens this structure to a pyramid: the foundational layer consists of general knowledge of philosophy, social sciences, and natural sciences; the intermediate layer comprises professional fundamentals; and the apex represents specialized expertise. Only with a broad intellectual and cultural foundation can singers develop higher artistic literacy and contribute to the long-term advancement of vocal education.

From a pedagogical standpoint, Cai (2023) emphasizes that bel canto teaching in Chinese colleges and universities plays a crucial role in nurturing outstanding singers. However, the current approaches remain insufficient in addressing the needs of the new era. The challenges include rigid curricula, outdated teaching methods, limited teacher development, and inadequate international exchange opportunities. Cai (2023) proposes reform and innovation, urging institutions to establish a bel canto teaching model rooted in a global perspective. Such a model should strike a balance between theory and practice, emphasize student-centered approaches, foster interdisciplinary learning, and enhance the integration of moral cultivation with technical training. Furthermore, Cai underscores that effective bel canto pedagogy must improve students' artistic accomplishment, aesthetic literacy, and internal motivation, ultimately bridging the gap between cultural identity and global standards in vocal training. These observations correspond with broader scholarly insights. Stark (2003) notes that bel canto demands a synthesis of technical mastery, expressive subtlety, and dramatic authenticity an integration often overlooked in narrowly technical training. Similarly, Budden (2002) and Kerman (1989) stress that Verdi's operas, in particular, epitomize the fusion of vocal technique and dramatic realism, requiring performers to command both vocal and theatrical dimensions simultaneously.

Within this broader framework, the role of Giorgio Germont in Verdi's *La Traviata* provides a vibrant case study. As Alfredo's father, Germont embodies the authority of patriarchal tradition while

undergoing profound psychological transformations throughout the opera. His characterization evolves from harshness and anger to manipulation and hypocrisy, and finally to compassion, remorse, and reconciliation. Such complexity poses both technical and dramatic challenges. The singer must master Verdi's demanding baritone writing characterized by long legato lines, dynamic control, and tonal stability while also protecting the moral and emotional depth of a conflicted character (Budden, 2002). For audiences, a nuanced portrayal of Germont deepens understanding of the opera's dramatic conflicts and enhances appreciation of Verdi's art. For educators and students, analyzing this role offers a concrete opportunity to integrate vocal technique, dramatic interpretation, and cultural context.

The significance of this study rests on three points. First, it responds directly to the deficiencies in Chinese vocal performance and pedagogy identified by Zhao (2009) and Cai (2023). By focusing on an operatic role that exemplifies both technical and interpretive demands, the study addresses the gap between narrow technical training and holistic operatic artistry. Second, it contributes to the reform of bel canto pedagogy by providing a detailed case analysis that integrates international perspectives, aligning with calls for innovation and global integration. Third, it highlights the pedagogical value of character analysis, enabling educators to design practice guidelines that connect vocal skills with dramatic expression. In this way, the research contributes to both theoretical scholarship and practical application in vocal pedagogy. Therefore, the study of Giorgio Germont's role in Verdi's *La Traviata* is not only significant for advancing understanding of vocal technique and dramatic performance but also serves as a bridge between Western operatic tradition and the current needs of Chinese vocal pedagogy. By integrating theoretical analysis with practical application, this research enriches the appreciation of opera, enhances the cultivation of future vocal talents, and contributes to the ongoing reform and innovation of vocal education in China.

Research Objectives

1. To study and analyze the singing techniques and performance in the role of "Giorgio Germont" in the opera *La Traviata*.
2. To examine practice guidelines for singing and performing the role of "Giorgio Germont" in the opera *La Traviata*.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to gain in-depth insights into the singing techniques and performance practices of the role of Giorgio Germont in Verdi's *La Traviata*. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and literature analysis. The methodology consisted of four main components: selection of key interviewees, research tools, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

1. Key Informant: Purposive sampling was used to select four university professors as the key interviewees. These professors were chosen because of their:

- Rich experience in stage performance, particularly in operatic roles,
- Extensive teaching experience in vocal pedagogy, and
- Professional expertise in interpreting Western classical repertoire.

Their opinions and suggestions, grounded in years of professional practice, provided valuable and credible insights for this study. To ensure research ethics, pseudonyms were used, and all participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage.

2. Research Tools: The main research instruments included: In-depth interviews with a semi-structured interview form, designed to explore vocal techniques, dramatic interpretation, and teaching strategies. Observations of rehearsals and performances, recorded using structured observation forms and field notes. Literature analysis of books, articles, and documents related to vocal pedagogy and Verdi's operatic style. Audio and video recorders to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. The interview questions were validated by four experts using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index. The IOC values ranged from 0.50 to 1.00, which indicated acceptable validity for all items.

3. Data Collection: The process of data collection included the following steps: Preparation – A formal introduction letter was obtained from the Graduate School of Buriram Rajabhat University. The researcher then contacted the selected professors to confirm interview times and prepare interview questions, observation forms, and equipment. Literature review – Relevant scholarly works on vocal pedagogy, bel canto teaching, and Verdi's operas were collected and systematically organized.

Conducting interviews – Individual interviews were conducted with each professor, lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded, and field notes were taken. Observations were conducted in classes, rehearsals, and performances, where appropriate, with behaviors and practices systematically recorded. Organization of data – After the interviews and

observations, the researcher transcribed, summarized, and compiled all collected materials for further analysis.

4. Data Analysis: The data analysis was carried out in four stages: Analysis of literature materials Review and summarize theoretical foundations, pedagogical principles, and previous studies on opera performance and vocal training. Analysis of interview materials - Transcribe interviews and identify key themes related to vocal technique, dramatic portrayal, and practice strategies. Integration of observation results - Compare and contrast observed practices with interview findings to confirm or expand upon emerging themes. Synthesis into guidelines - Combine insights from literature, interviews, and observations to formulate practical teaching and performance guidelines for the role of Giorgio Germont. This step-by-step process ensured that the findings were both theoretically grounded and practically applicable.

Results

“The results of the investigation reveal significant insights into the vocal and dramatic demands of Giorgio Germont, while also offering structured guidelines that link technical mastery with interpretive depth for singers undertaking this role.”

Objective 1: Analysis of the Singing Techniques and Performance in the Role of Giorgio Germont

The findings reveal that the role of Giorgio Germont requires a combination of refined bel canto technique and deep dramatic interpretation. The vocal challenges include:

Breath Control and Support

The baritone must employ abdominal breathing and diaphragmatic elasticity to sustain Verdi's long legato phrases. For example, in the aria “Di Provenza il mar”, smooth breath flow ensures tonal consistency across phrases such as “Né cessi mai l'affanno”.

Resonance Balance and Tone Control

Germont's tessitura (F2–G4) demands careful balancing between chest resonance (for authority) and head resonance (for lyricism). Proper resonance blending avoids tension at higher pitches such as G4, maintaining both strength and expressive clarity.

Diction and Language Expression

Italian articulation plays a crucial role in dramatic portrayal. Explosive consonants (e.g., “pietà”, “dovere”) reinforce Germont's authority, while sustained vowels (e.g., “Ah, il tuo vecchio genitor”) highlight tenderness and emotional vulnerability.



Emotional and Dramatic Shifts

Germont is not a simple antagonist but a multidimensional character who undergoes psychological transformation—from stern and harsh, to hypocritical and manipulative, and finally to compassionate and remorseful. The singer must demonstrate this evolution vocally and dramatically, ensuring the moral and emotional depth of the role is convincingly communicated.

Stage Performance and Interpretation

Traditional interpretations emphasize Germont's patriarchal authority with formal gestures, rigid posture, and conservative attire. In contrast, modern interpretations often highlight his humanity by softening external authority and focusing on internal conflict. Both approaches confirm the dual nature of Germont as a figure of both social authority and personal fragility.

From a theoretical perspective, Germont's musical motives reinforce these tensions. Fixed rhythmic patterns symbolize social discipline, while freer melodic lines in Act III confession scenes suggest the loosening of moral rigidity. His role thus reflects both Verdi's musical genius and the ethical dilemmas of 19th-century bourgeois society.

Objective 2: Practice Guidelines for Singing and Performing Giorgio Germont

The second objective focused on establishing practical guidelines for singers preparing this role. The study proposes a "Three-Stage Character Modeling Method" to integrate technical, dramatic, and contextual elements:

Technical Foundation

Strengthen chest resonance stability through targeted vocal exercises.

Develop smooth legato, dynamic control, and controlled register transitions.

Use breathing drills (slow inhalation, sustained exhalation) to support Verdi's extended phrases.

Contextual Integration

Study Germont's character in relation to 19th-century social ethics, particularly patriarchal authority and bourgeois morality.

Interpret text and music together, noting how words and melodic lines reflect conflicting values.

Pay attention to historical reception, understanding how audiences of Verdi's time perceived Germont's actions as morally justified, yet emotionally conflicted.

Stage Integration

Employ "momentary silence" techniques (pausing, shifting eye contact) to convey sudden emotional transitions.



Balance authority with humanity through micro-expressions (evasive eyes, softened gestures) rather than exaggerating external symbols.

Adapt gestures and costumes to highlight either traditional authority or modern reinterpretation, depending on production context.

Additional Practice Insights

Breathing Techniques: Focus on diaphragmatic support to sustain long phrases.

Resonance Development: Explore balanced head–chest resonance for tonal richness.

Diction and Articulation: Practice Italian consonant strength and vowel continuity to convey both power and lyricism.

Emotional Expression: Rehearse Germont's psychological transitions, moving convincingly from stern authority to compassionate fatherhood.

The results demonstrate that the role of Giorgio Germont embodies both technical challenges and interpretive complexity. The first objective highlighted that mastering Verdi's baritone writing requires breath control, resonance management, precise diction, and the ability to express Germont's moral conflict through vocal nuance and stagecraft. The second objective established a structured guideline- the Three-Stage Character Modeling Method that links technical foundation, contextual analysis, and stage integration. Ultimately, this study offers a comprehensive framework for performers, demonstrating that Germont is not merely a supporting role but a pivotal figure whose portrayal necessitates technical mastery, dramatic insight, and cultural awareness. These results not only deepen appreciation of *La Traviata* but also serve as valuable resources for vocal pedagogy and performance practice in both traditional and modern operatic settings.

Conclusion

Giorgio Germon's singing and performance are characterized by a high degree of unity of vocal technique, dramatic tension, and social metaphor. His role not only tests the singer's range control and language ability, but also needs to reveal the alienation and awakening of human nature in moral discipline through the prism of history. This study provides an operational training framework for baritone teaching and, at the same time, calls on the academic community to re-examine the "villain" role in Verdi's opera and interpret it in a broader social and cultural network.

The study concludes that Giorgio Germont, one of the classic baritone roles in the operatic repertoire, demands technical vocal precision and a deep understanding of dramatic interpretation.

Mastery of bel canto vocal techniques is critical for delivering the role with emotional authenticity and dynamic control. Key aspects such as breath control, resonance, diction, and emotional expression are foundational to capturing Germont's authority, compassion, and inner conflict. By exploring arias such as "Di Provenza il mar", the study highlights the importance of vocal stability, smooth legato phrasing, and expressive shading to convey Germont's emotional complexity. The analysis demonstrates that the performer's ability to sustain long melodic lines with even breath support is crucial for maintaining vocal quality and dramatic intensity. Furthermore, Germont's vocal expressions mirror the character's psychological journey from stern moral authority to compassionate understanding through carefully controlled dynamics and articulation. Stage presence and character interpretation are vital in bringing Germont's moral and emotional journey to life. A well-structured understanding of character motivation allows the performer to project authority, empathy, and internal conflict with greater authenticity. The research emphasizes that Germont's transformation must be reflected through vocal expression, physicality, and stage movement, aligning the singer's portrayal with Verdi's artistic intentions.

Discussion

The analysis of Germont's vocal techniques underscores the necessity of integrating technical skill with dramatic expression. This finding aligns with Stark's (2003) discussion of bel canto pedagogy, which emphasizes that effective operatic performance requires more than mechanical accuracy; it demands an organic connection between vocal technique and emotional communication.

Integrated Breath Control and Resonance. The results indicate that seamless breath management supports extended vocal lines and enhances projection in emotionally intense scenes. This corresponds with Miller's (1996) assertion that breath is the "foundation of all vocal art," particularly in sustaining Verdi's long legato phrases. Practical exercises such as sustained phonation and controlled exhalation reinforce this foundation, echoing the pedagogical practices suggested in bel canto training (Cai, 2023).

Expressive Phrasing and Legato Techniques. The ability to maintain tonal consistency across registers reflects Verdi's stylistic demand for lyricism combined with dramatic weight. Budden (2002) argues that Verdi's vocal writing, especially in baritone arias like "Di Provenza il mar", requires singers to manage both vocal power and expressive nuance. The findings of this study confirm that techniques such as crescendo-decrescendo control and soft palate adjustment enable performers to embody Germont's evolving emotions with clarity.



Diction and Articulation Mastery. Italian diction is not only a linguistic requirement but also a dramatic device. Precise consonant placement and vowel shaping strengthen textual meaning and emotional intensity. This observation resonates with Kerman's (1989) claim that Verdi's operas rely heavily on textual intelligibility to drive dramatic realism. Zhao (2009) further notes that Chinese singers often overemphasize vocal sound at the expense of diction, a weakness this study highlights and seeks to address through practice guidelines.

Character-Driven Interpretation. The study reveals that portraying Germont convincingly requires an understanding of his moral authority and psychological evolution. This finding supports Cai's (2023) argument that character analysis should be integrated into vocal pedagogy to cultivate expressive singers who can embody complex roles. Role analysis, emotional memory exercises, and dramatic role-playing thus serve as effective methods for deepening interpretive credibility.

Integration of Verdi's Musical Language. Verdi's compositional style intentionally intertwines vocal lines with dramatic purpose. His harmonic shifts and orchestral textures magnify the intensity of Germont's arias, requiring singers to balance technical precision with interpretive depth. As Budden (2002) explains, Verdi's music "amplifies the conflict between social authority and personal feeling," a duality that performers must project vocally and dramatically.

Dramatic Interactions and Narrative Function. Finally, the findings highlight Germont's pivotal role in shaping the opera's dramatic arc through his interactions with Violetta and Alfredo. His transformation from stern authority to compassionate father reflects broader 19th century social values (Budden, 2002; Kerman, 1989). This supports Zhao's (2009) view that vocal education should include contextual analysis, ensuring that singers interpret roles not only musically but also historically and socially.

In summary, the study's results demonstrate that Germont's role is a nexus of vocal technique, textual clarity, and dramatic insight. These findings are consistent with prior scholarship in vocal pedagogy (Stark, 2003; Miller, 1996), opera analysis (Budden, 2002; Kerman, 1989), and Chinese vocal education reform (Zhao, 2009; Cai, 2023). Collectively, they affirm that integrating technical mastery with dramatic interpretation is essential for both artistic authenticity and pedagogical innovation.

Suggestions

1. Implications of Research Findings

The results of this study have practical and academic implications:

- 1) For singers and students: Provide concrete techniques and practice guidelines to improve vocal control, diction, and dramatic interpretation of Verdi's baritone roles.
- 2) For vocal instructors and coaches: Offer structured pedagogical tools to integrate character analysis with vocal training.
- 3) For stage directors and producers: Contribute insights into staging choices that balance Germont's authority and humanity.
- 4) For music education programs: Serve as a model for linking vocal pedagogy with operatic performance practice.

2. Recommendations for Further Studies

In light of the study's limitations (small sample size, focus on a single baritone role), the following areas are recommended:

- 1) Longitudinal research: Study the long-term effects of applying these practice guidelines on singers' development.
- 2) Comparative voice-type studies: Extend analysis to soprano (Violetta) and tenor (Alfredo) roles to broaden understanding of Verdi's pedagogy.
- 3) Cross-cultural perspectives: Explore how singers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interpret Germont, enriching global pedagogical practice.
- 4) Performance practice research: Examine how traditional versus modern stagings of Germont affect audience reception and teaching applications.



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